The WOMAN from OUTSIDE

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       [on Swan River]

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THE WOMAN
from "OUTSIDE"

[On Swan River]

By

HULBERT FOOTNER
Author of "The Fur Bringers" etc.

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THE WOMAN FROM OUTSIDE

CHAPTER I

THE WHITE MEDICINE MAN

On a January afternoon, as darkness was beginning to gather, the “gang” sat around the stove in the Company store at Fort Enterprise discussing that inexhaustible question, the probable arrival of the mail. The big lofty store, with its glass front, its electric lights, its stock of expensive goods set forth on varnished shelves, suggested a city emporium rather than the Company’s most north-westerly post, nearly a thousand miles from civilization; but human energy accomplishes seeming miracles in the North as elsewhere, and John Gaviller the trader was above all an energetic man. Throughout the entire North they point with pride to Gaviller’s flour mill, his big steamboat, his great yellow clap-boarded house—two storeys and attic, and a fence of palings around it! Why, at Fort Enterprise they even have a sidewalk, the only one north of fifty-five!

“I don’t see why Hairy Ben can’t come down,” said Doc Giddings—Doc was the grouch of the post—“the ice on the river has been fit for travelling for a month now.”

“Ben can’t start from the Crossing until the mail comes through from the Landing,” said Gaviller. “It can’t start from the Landing until the ice is secure on the Big River, the Little River, and across Caribou Lake.” Gaviller was a handsome man of middle life, who took exceeding good care of himself, and ruled his principality with an amiable relentlessness. They called him the “Czar,” and it did not displease him.

“Everybody knows Caribou Lake freezes over first,” grumbled the doctor.

“But the rivers down there are swift, and it’s six hundred miles south of here. Give them time.”

“The trouble is, they wait until the horse-road is made over the ice before starting the mail in. If the Government had the enterprise of a ground-hog they’d send in dogs ahead.”

“Nobody uses dogs down there any more.”

“Well, I say ’tain’t right to ask human beings to wait three months for their mail. Who knows what may have happened since the freeze-up last October?”

“What’s happened has happened,” said Father Goussard mildly, “and knowing about it can’t change it.”

The doctor ignored the proffered consolation. “What we need is a new mail-man,” he went on bitterly. “I know Hairy Ben! I’ll bet he’s had the mail at the Crossing for a week, and puts off starting every day for fear of snow.”

“Well, ’tain’t a job as I’d envy any man,” put in Captain Stinson of the steamboat *Spirit River*, now hauled out on the shore. “Breaking a road for three hundred and fifty mile, and not a stopping-house the whole way till he gets to the Beaver Indians at Carcajou Point.”

The doctor addressed himself to the policeman, who was mending a snowshoe in the background. “Stonor, you’ve got the best dogs in the post; why don’t you go up after him?”

The young sergeant raised his head with a grin. He was a good-looking, long-limbed youth with a notable blue eye, and a glance of mirthful sobriety. “No, thanks,” he drawled. The others gathered from his tone that a joke was coming, and pricked up their ears accordingly. “No, thanks. You forget that Sarge Lambert up at the Crossing is my senior. When I drove up he’d say: ‘What the hell are you doing up here?’ And when I told him he’d come back with his well-known embellishments of language: ‘Has the R.N.W.M.P. nothing better to do than tote Doc Giddings’ love-letters?’”

A great laugh greeted this sally: they are so grateful for the smallest of jokes on winter afternoons up North.

Doc Giddings subsided, but the discussion went on without him.

“Well, he’ll have easy going in from Carcajou; the Indians coming in and out have beaten a good trail.”

“Oh, when he gets to Carcajou he’s here.”

“If it don’t snow. That bit over the prairie drifts badly.”

“The barometer’s falling.”

And so on. And so on. They made the small change of conversation go far.

In the midst of it they were electrified by a shout from the land trail and the sound of bells.

“Here he is!” they cried, jumping up to a man, and making for the door.

Ben Causton, conscious of his importance, made a dramatic entrance with the mail-bags over his shoulder, and cast them magnificently on the counter. Even up north, where every man cultivates his own peculiarities unhindered, Ben was considered a “character.” He was a short, thick man of enormous physical strength, and he sported a beard like a quickset hedge, hence his nickname. He was clad in an entire suit of fur like an Eskimo, with a gaudy red worsted sash about his ample middle.

“Hello, Ben! Gee! but you’re slow!”

“Hello, fellows! Keep your hair on! If you want to send out for catalogues in the middle of winter you’re lucky if I get here at all. Next month, if the second class bag’s as heavy as this, I’ll drop it through an air-hole—I swear I will! So now you’re warned! I got somepin better to do than tote catalogues. When I die and go to hell, I only hope I meet the man who invented mail-order catalogues there, that’s all.”

“You’re getting feeble, Ben!”

“I got strength enough left to put your head in chancery!”

“What’s the news of the world, Ben?”

“Sarge Lambert’s got a bone felon. Ally Stiff lost a sow and a whole litter

through the ice up there. Mahooly of the French outfit at the Settlement's gone out to get him a set of chiny teeth. Says he's going to get blue ones to dazzle the Indians. Oh, and I almost forgot; down at Ottawa the Grits are out and the Tories in."

"Bully!"

"God help Canada!"

While Gaviller unlocked the bags, Ben went out to tie up his dogs and feed them. The trader handed out letters to the eager, extended hands, that trembled a little. Brightening eyes pounced on the superscriptions. Gaviller himself had a daughter outside being "finished," the apple of his eye: Captain Stinson had a wife, and Mathews the engineer, an elderly sweetheart. The dark-skinned Gordon Strange, Gaviller's clerk, carried on an extensive correspondence, the purport of which was unknown to the others, and Father Goussard was happy in the receipt of many letters from his confrères. Even young Stonor was excited, who had no one in the world to write to him but a married sister who sent him long, dutiful chronicles of small beer. But it was from "home."

The second-class bag with the papers was scarcely less exciting. To oblige Ben they only took one newspaper between them, and passed it around, but in this mail three months' numbers had accumulated. As the contents of the bag cascaded out on the counter, Stonor picked up an unfamiliar-looking magazine.

"Hello, what's this?" he cried, reading the label in surprise. "Doctor Ernest Imbrie. Who the deuce is he?"

"Must have come here by mistake," said Gaviller.

"Not a bit of it! Here's the whole story: Doctor Ernest Imbrie, Fort Enterprise, Spirit River, Athabasca."

It passed around from hand to hand. A new name was something to catch the attention at Fort Enterprise.

"Why, here's another!" cried Gaviller in excitement. "And another! Blest if half the bag isn't for him! And all addressed just so!"

They looked at each other a little blankly. All this evidence had the effect of creating an apparition there in their midst. There was an appreciable silence.

“Must be somebody who started in last year and never got through,” said Mathews. He spoke with an air of relief at discovering so reasonable an explanation.

“But we hear about everybody who comes north of the Landing,” objected Gaviller. “I would have been advised if he had a credit here.”

“Another doctor!” said Doc Giddings bitterly. “If he expects to share my practice he’s welcome!”

At another time they would have laughed at this, but the mystery teased them. They resented the fact that some rank outsider claimed Fort Enterprise for his post-office, without first having made himself known.

“If he went back outside, he’d stop all this stuff coming in, you’d think.”

“Maybe somebody’s just putting up a joke on us.”

“Funny kind of joke! Subscriptions to these magazines cost money.”

Stonor read off the titles of the magazines: “*The Medical Record*; *The American Medical Journal*; *The Physician’s and Surgeon’s Bulletin*.”

“Quite a scientific guy,” said Doctor Giddings, with curling lip.

“Strange, he gets so many papers and not a single letter!” remarked Father Goussard. “A friendless man!”

Gaviller picked up a round tin, one of several packed and addressed alike. He read the business card of a well-known tobacconist. “Smoking tobacco!” he said indignantly. “If the Company’s Dominion Mixture isn’t good enough for any man I’d like to know it! He has a cheek, if you ask me, bringing in tobacco under my very nose!”

“Tobacco!” cried Stonor. “It’s all very well about papers, but no man would waste good tobacco! It must be somebody who started in before Ben!”

Their own mail matter, that they had looked forward to so impatiently, was forgotten now.

When Ben Causton came back they bombarded him with questions. But this bag had come through locked all the way from Miwasa Landing, and Ben, even Ben, the great purveyor of gossip in the North, had heard nothing of any Doctor Imbrie on his way in. Ben was more excited and more indignant than any of them. Somebody had got ahead of him in spreading a sensation!

“It’s a hoe-axe,” said Ben. “It’s them fellows down at the Landing trying to get a rise out of me. Or if it ain’t that, it’s some guy comin’ in next spring, and sendin’ in his outfit piecemeal ahead of him. And me powerless to protect myself! Ain’t that an outrage! But when I meet him on the trail I’ll put it to him!”

“There are newspapers here, too,” Stonor pointed out. “No man coming in next spring would send himself last year’s papers.”

“Where is he, then?” they asked.

The question was unanswerable.

“Well, I’d like to see any lily-handed doctor guy from the outside face the river trail in the winter,” said Ben bitterly. “If he’ll do that, I’ll carry his outfit for him. But he’ll need more than his diploma to fit him for it.”

At any rate they had a brand-new subject for conversation at the post.

About a week later, when Hairy Ben had started back up the river, the routine at the post was broken by the arrival of a small party of Kakisa Indians from the Kakisa or Swan River, a large unexplored stream off to the north-west. The Kakisas, an uncivilized and shy race, rarely appeared at Enterprise, and in order to get their trade Gaviller had formerly sent out a half-breed clerk to the Swan River every winter. But this man had lately died, and now the trade threatened to lapse for the lack of an interpreter. None of the Kakisas could speak English, and there was no company employee who could speak their uncouth tongue except Gordon Strange the bookkeeper, who could not be spared from the post.

Wherefore Gaviller welcomed these six, in the hope that they might prove to be the vanguard of the main body. They were a wild and ragged lot, under the leadership of a withered elder called Mahtsonza. They were discovered by accident camping under cover of a poplar bluff across the river. No one knew how long they had been there, and Gordon Strange had a time persuading them to come the rest of the way. It was dusk when they entered the store, and Gaviller, by pre-arrangement with Mathews, clapped his hands and the electric lights went on. The effect surpassed his expectations. The Kakisas, with a gasp of terror, fled, and could not be tempted to return until daylight.

They brought a good little bundle of fur, including two silver fox skins, the finest seen at Enterprise that season. They laid their fur on the counter, and sidled about the store silent and abashed, like children in a strange house. With perfectly wooden faces they took in all the wonders out of the corners of their eyes; the scales, the stove, the pictures on the canned goods, the show-cases of jewellery and candy. Candy they recognized, and, again like children, they discussed the respective merits of the different varieties in their own tongue. Gaviller, warned by his first mistake, affected to take no notice of them.

The Kakisas had been in the store above an hour when Mahtsonza, without warning, produced a note from the inner folds of his dingy capote, and, handling it gingerly between thumb and forefinger, silently offered it to Gaviller. The trader’s eyes almost started out of his head.

“A letter!” he cried stupidly. “Where the hell did you get that?—Boys! Look here! A note from Swan River! Who in thunder at Swan River can write a white man’s hand?”

Stonor, Doc Giddings, Strange, and Mathews, who were in the store, hastened to him.

“Who’s it addressed to?” asked the policeman.

“Just to the Company. Whoever wrote it didn’t have the politeness to put my name down.”

“Maybe he doesn’t know you.”

“How could that be?” asked Gaviller, with raised eyebrows.

“Open it! Open it!” said Doc Giddings irritably.

Gaviller did so, and his face expressed a still greater degree of astonishment. “Ha! Here’s our man!” he cried.

“Imbrie!” they exclaimed in unison.

“Listen!” He read from the note.

> “GENTLEMEN—I am sending you two silver fox skins, for which please give me credit. I enclose an order for supplies, to be sent by bearer. Also be good enough to hand the bearer any mail matter which may be waiting for me.
>
> “Yours truly,
> “ERNEST IMBRIE.”

The silence of stupefaction descended on them. The only gateway to the Swan River lay through Enterprise. How could a man have got there without their knowing it? Stupefaction was succeeded by resentment.

“Will I be good enough to hand over his mail?” sneered Gaviller. “What kind of elegant language is this from Swan River?”

“Sounds like a regular Percy,” said Strange, who always echoed his chief.

“Funny place for a Percy to set up,” said Stonor drily.

“He orders flour, sugar, beans, rice, coffee, tea, baking-powder, salt, and dried fruit,” said Gaviller, as if that were a fresh cause of offence.

“He has an appetite, then,” said Stonor, “he’s no ghost.”

Suddenly they fell upon Mahtsonza with a bombardment of questions, forgetting that the Indian could speak no English. He shrank back affrighted.

“Wait a minute,” said Strange. “Let me talk to him.”

He conferred for awhile with Mahtsonza in the strange, clicking tongue of the Kakisas. Gaviller soon became impatient.

“Tell us as he goes along,” he said. “Never mind waiting for the end of the story.”

“They can’t tell you anything directly,” said Strange deprecatingly; “there’s nothing to do but let them tell a story in their own way. He’s telling me now that Etzooah, a man with much hair, who hunts down the Swan River near the beginning of the swift water, came up to the village at the end of the horse-track on snowshoes and dragging a little sled. Etzooah had the letter for Gaviller, but he was tired out, so he handed it to Mahtsonza, who had dogs, to bring it the rest of the way, and gave Mahtsonza a mink-skin for his trouble.”

“Never mind all that,” said Gaviller impatiently. “What about the white man?”

Strange conferred again with Mahtsonza, while Gaviller bit his nails.

“Mahtsonza says,” he reported, “that Imbrie is a great White Medicine Man who has done honour to the Kakisa people by coming among them to heal the sick and do good. Mahtsonza says he has not seen Imbrie himself, because when he came among the Indians last fall Mahtsonza was off hunting on the upper Swan, but all the people talk about him and what strong medicine he makes.”

“Conjure tricks!” muttered Doc Giddings.

“Where does he live?” demanded Gaviller.

Strange asked the question and reported the answer. “He has built himself a shack beside the Great Falls of the Swan River. Mahtsonza says that the people know his medicine is strong because he is not afraid to live with the voice of the Great Falls.”

Stonor asked the next question. “What sort of man is he?”

Strange, after putting the question, said: “Mahtsonza says he’s very good-looking, or, as he puts it, a pretty man. He says he looks young, but he may be as old as the world, because with such strong medicine he could make himself look

like anything he wanted. He says that the White Medicine Man talks much with dried words in covers—I suppose he means books."

"Ask him what proof he has given them that his medicine is strong," suggested Stonor.

Strange translated Mahtsonza's answer as follows: "Last year when the bush berries were ripe (that's August) all the Indians down the river got sick. Water came out of their eyes and nose; their skin got as red as sumach and burned like fire."

"Measles," said Gaviller. "The Beavers had it, too. They take it hard."

Strange continued: "Mahtsonza says many of them died. They just lay down and gave up hope. Etzooah was the only Kakisa who had seen the White Medicine Man up to that time, and he went to him and asked him to make medicine to cure the sick. So the White Medicine Man came back with Etzooah to the village down the river. He had good words and a soft hand to the sick. He made medicine, and, behold! the sick arose and were well!"

"Faith cure!" muttered Doc Giddings.

"How long has Imbrie been down there by the Falls?" asked Gaviller.

"Mahtsonza says he came last summer when the ground berries were ripe. That would be about July."

"Did he come down the river from the mountains?"

"Mahtsonza says no. Nobody on the river saw him go down."

"Where did he come from, then?"

"Mahtsonza says he doesn't know. Nobody knows. Some say he came from under the falls where the white bones lie. Some say it is the voice of the falls that comes among men in the shape of a man."

"Rubbish! A ghost doesn't subscribe to medical journals!" said Doc Giddings.

"He orders flour, sugar, beans," said Gaviller.

When this was explained to Mahtsonza the Indian shrugged. Strange said: “Mahtsonza says if he takes a man’s shape he’s got to feed it.”

“Pshaw!” said Gaviller impatiently. “He must have come up the river. It is known that the Swan River empties into Great Buffalo Lake. The Lake can’t be more than a hundred miles below the falls. No white man has ever been through that way, but somebody’s got to be the first.”

“But we know every white man who ever went down to Great Buffalo Lake,” said Doc Giddings. “Certainly there never was a doctor there except the police doctor who makes the round with the treaty outfit every summer.”

“Well, it’s got me beat!” said Gaviller, scratching his head.

“Maybe it’s someone wanted by the police outside,” suggested Gordon Strange, “who managed to sneak into the country without attracting notice.”

“He’s picked out a bad place to hide,” said Stonor grimly. “He’ll be well advertised up here.”

Stonor had a room in the “quarters,” a long, low barrack of logs on the side of the quadrangle facing the river. It had been the trader’s residence before the days of the big clap-boarded villa. Stonor, tiring of the conversation around the stove, frequently spent the evenings in front of his own fire, and here he sometimes had a visitor, to wit, Tole Grampierre, youngest son of Simon, the French half-breed farmer up the river. Tole came of good, self-respecting native stock, and was in his own person a comely, sensible youngster a few years younger than the trooper. Tole was the nearest thing to a young friend that Stonor possessed in the post. They were both young enough to have some illusions left. They talked of things they would have blushed to expose to the cynicism of the older men.

Stonor sat in his barrel chair that he had made himself, and Tole sat on the floor nursing his knees. Both were smoking Dominion mixture.

Said Tole: “Stonor, what you make of this Swan River mystery?”

“Oh, anything can be a mystery until you learn the answer. I don’t see why a

man shouldn’t settle out on Swan River if he has a mind to.”

“Why do all the white men talk against him?”

“Don’t ask me. I doubt if they could tell you themselves. When men talk in a crowd they get started on a certain line and go on from bad to worse without thinking what they mean by it.”

“Our people just the same that way, I guess,” said Tole.

“I’m no better,” said Stonor. “I don’t know how it is, but fellows in a crowd seem to be obliged to talk more foolishly than they think in private.”

“You don’t talk against him, Stonor.”

The policeman laughed. “No, I stick up for him. It gets the others going. As a matter of fact, I’d like to know this Imbrie. For one thing, he’s young like ourselves, Tole. And he must be a decent sort, to cure the Indians, and all that. They’re a filthy lot, what we’ve seen of them.”

“Gaviller says he’s going to send an outfit next spring to rout him out of his hole. Gaviller says he’s a cash trader.”

Stonor chuckled. “Gaviller hates a cash trader worse than a devil with horns. It’s nonsense anyway. What would the Kakisas do with cash? This talk of sending in an expedition will all blow over before spring.”

“Stonor, what for do you think he lives like that by himself?”

“I don’t know. Some yarn behind it, I suppose. Very likely a woman at the bottom of it. He’s young. Young men do foolish things. Perhaps he’d be thankful for a friend now.”

“White men got funny ideas about women, I think.”

“I suppose it seems so. But where did you get that idea?”

“Not from the talk at the store. I have read books. Love-stories. Pringle the missionary lend me a book call *Family Herald* with many love-stories in it. From that I see that white men always go crazy about women.”

Stonor laughed aloud.

“Stonor, were you ever real crazy about a woman?”

The trooper shook his head—almost regretfully, one might have said. “The right one never came my way, Tole.”

“You don’t like the girls around here.”

“Yes, I do. Nice girls. Pretty, too. But well, you see, they’re not the same colour as me.”

“Just the same, they are crazy about you.”

“Nonsense!”

“Yes, they are. Call you ‘Gold-piece.’ Us fellows got no chance if you want them.”

“Tell me about the stories you read, Tole.”

Tole refused to be diverted from his subject. “Stonor, I think you would like to be real crazy about a woman.”

“Maybe,” said the other dreamily. “Perhaps life would seem less empty then.”

“Would you go bury yourself among the Indians for a woman?”

“I hardly think so,” said Stonor, smiling. “Though you never can tell what you might do. But if I got turned down, I suppose I’d want to be as busy as possible to help forget it.”

“Well, I think that Imbrie is crazy for sure.”

“It takes all kinds to make a world. If I can get permission I’m going out to see him next summer.”

CHAPTER II

HOOLIAM

When the spring days came around, Stonor, whose business it was to keep watch on such things, began to perceive an undercurrent of waywardness among the Indians and breeds of the post. Teachers know how an epidemic of naughtiness will sweep a class; this was much the same thing. There was no actual outbreak; it was chiefly evinced in defiant looks and an impudent swagger. It was difficult to trace back, for the red people hang together solidly; a man with even a trace of red blood will rarely admit a white man into the secrets of the race. Under questioning they maintain a bland front that it is almost impossible to break down. Stonor had long ago learned the folly of trying to get at what he wanted by direct questioning.

He finally, as he thought, succeeded in locating the source of the infection at Carcajou Point. Parties from the post rode up there with suspicious frequency, and came back with a noticeably lowered moral tone, licking their lips, so to speak. All the signs pointed to whisky.

At dawn of a morning in May, Stonor, without having advertised his intention, set off for Carcajou on horseback. The land trail cut across a wide sweep of the river, and on horseback one could make it in a day, whereas it was a three days' paddle up-stream. Unfortunately he couldn't take them by surprise, for Carcajou was on the other side of the river from Enterprise, and Stonor must wait on the shore until they came over after him.

As soon as he left the buildings of the post behind him Stonor's heart was greatly lifted up. It was his first long ride of the season. The trail led him through the poplar bush back to the bench, thence in a bee-line across the prairie. The

sun rose as he climbed the bench. The prairie was not the “bald-headed” so dear to those who know it, but was diversified with poplar bluffs, clumps of willow, and wild-rose-scrub in the hollows. The crocuses were in bloom, the poplar trees hanging out millions of emerald pendants, and the sky showed that exquisite, tender luminousness that only the northern sky knows when the sun travels towards the north. Only singing-birds were lacking to complete the idyl of spring. Stonor, all alone in a beautiful world, lifted up his voice to supply the missing praise.

Towards sunset he approached the shore of the river opposite Carcajou Point, but as he didn’t wish to arrive at night, he camped within shelter of the woods. In the morning he signalled for a boat. They came after him in a dug-out, and he swam his horse across.

A preliminary survey of the place revealed nothing out of the way. The people who called themselves Beaver Indians were in reality the scourings of half the tribes in the country, and it is doubtful if there was an individual of pure red race among them. Physically they were a sad lot, for Nature revenges herself swiftly on the offspring of hybrids. Quaint ethnological differences were exhibited in the same family; one brother would have a French physiognomy, another a Scottish cast of feature, and a third the thick lips and flattened nose of a negro. Their village was no less nondescript than its inhabitants, merely a straggling row of shacks, thrown together anyhow, and roofed with sods, now putting forth a brave growth of weeds. These houses were intended for a winter residence only. In summer they “pitched around.” At present they were putting their dug-outs and canoes in order for a migration.

Stonor was received on the beach by Shose (Joseph) Cardinal, a fine, up-standing ancient of better physique than his sons and grandsons. In a community of hairless men he was further distinguished by a straggling grey beard. His wits were beginning to fail, but not yet his cunning. He was extremely anxious to learn the reason for the policeman’s coming. For Stonor to tell him would have been to defeat his object; to lie would have been to lower himself in their eyes; so Stonor took refuge in an inscrutability as polite as the old man’s own.

Stonor made a house-to-house canvass of the village, inquiring as to the health

and well-being of each household, as is the custom of his service, and keeping his eyes open on his own account. He satisfied himself that if there had been whisky there, it was drunk up by now. Some of the men showed the sullen depressed air that follows on a prolonged spree, but all were sober at present.

He was in one of the last houses of the village, when, out of the tail of his eye, he saw a man quietly issue from the house next in order, and, covered by the crowd around the door, make his way back to a house already visited. Stonor, without saying anything, went back to that house and found himself face to face with a young white man, a stranger, who greeted him with an insolent grin.

“Who are you?” demanded the policeman.

“Hooliam.”

“You have a white man’s name. What is it?”

“Smith”—this with inimitable insolence, and a look around that bid for the applause of the natives.

Stonor’s lip curled at the spectacle of a white man’s thus lowering himself. “Come outside,” he said sternly. “I want to talk to you.”

He led the way to a place apart on the river bank, and the other, not daring to defy him openly, followed with a swagger. With a stern glance Stonor kept the tatterdemalion crowd at bay. Stonor coolly surveyed his man in the sunlight and saw that he was not white, as he had supposed, but a quarter or eighth breed. He was an uncommonly good-looking young fellow in the hey-day of his youth, say, twenty-six. With his clear olive skin, straight features and curly dark hair he looked not so much like a breed as a man of one of the darker peoples of the Caucasian race, an Italian or a Greek. There was a falcon-like quality in the poise of his head, in his gaze, but the effect was marred by the consciousness of evil, the irreconcilable look in the fine eyes.

“Bad clear through!” was Stonor’s instinctive verdict.

“Where did you come from?” he demanded.

“Up river,” was the casual reply. The man’s English was as good as Stonor’s own.

“Answer me fully.”

“From Sah-ko-da-tah prairie, if you know where that is. I came into that country by way of Grande Prairie. I came from Winnipeg.”

Stonor didn’t believe a word of this, but had no means of confuting the man on the spot. “How long have you been here?” he asked.

“A week or so. I didn’t keep track.”

“What is your business here?”

“I’m looking for a job.”

“Among the Beavers? Why didn’t you come to the trading-post?”

“I was coming, but they tell me John Gaviller’s a hard man to work fer. Thought I better keep clear of him.”

“Gaviller’s the only employer of labour hereabouts. If you don’t like him you’ll have to look elsewhere.”

“I can take up land, can’t I?”

“Not here. This is treaty land. Plenty of good surveyed homesteads around the post.”

“Thanks. I prefer to pick my own location.”

“I’ll give you your choice. You can either come down to the post where I can keep an eye on your doings, or go back up the river where you came from.”

“Do you call this a free country?”

“Never mind that. You’re getting off easy. If you’d rather, I’ll put you under arrest and carry you down to the post for trial.”

“On what charge?”

“Furnishing whisky to the Indians.”

“It’s a lie!” cried the man, hoping to provoke Stonor into revealing the extent of his information.

But the policeman shrugged, and remained mum.

The other suddenly changed his front. “All right, I’ll go if I have to,” he said, with a conciliatory air. “To-morrow.”

“You’ll leave within an hour,” said Stonor, consulting his watch. “I’ll see you off. Better get your things together.”

The man still lingered, and Stonor saw an unspoken question in his eye, a desire to ingratiate himself. Now Stonor, under his stern port as an officer of the law, was intensely curious about the fellow. With his good looks, his impudent assurance, his command of English, he was a notable figure in that remote district. The policeman permitted himself to unbend a little.

“What are you travelling in?” he asked.

“Dug-out.” Encouraged by the policeman’s altered manner, the self-styled Hooliam went on, with an air of taking Stonor into his confidence: “These niggers here are a funny lot, aren’t they? Still believe in magic.”

“In what way?”

“Why, they’re always talking about a White Medicine Man who lives beside a river off to the north-west. Ernest Imbrie they call him. Do you know him?”

“No.”

“He’s been to the post, hasn’t he?”

“No.”

“Well, how did he get into the country?”

“I don’t know.”

“These people say he works magic.”

“Well, if anyone wants to believe that—!”

“What do they say about him down at the post?”

“Plenty of foolishness.”

“But what?”

“You don’t expect me to repeat foolish gossip, do you?”

“No, but what do you think about him?”

“I don’t think.”

“They say that Gaviller’s lodged a complaint against him, and you’re going out there to arrest him as soon as it’s fit to travel.”

“That’s a lie. There’s no complaint against the man.”

“But you are going out there, aren’t you?”

“I can’t discuss my movements with you.”

“That means you are going. Is it true he sent in a whole bale of silver foxes to the post?”

“Say, what’s your interest in this man, anyway?” said Stonor, losing patience.

“Nothing at all,” said the breed carelessly. “These Indians are always talking about him. It roused my curiosity, that’s all.”

“Suppose you satisfy my curiosity about yourself,” suggested Stonor meaningly.

The old light of impudent mockery returned to the comely dark face. “Me? Oh, I’m only a no-account hobo,” he said. “I’ll have to be getting ready now.”

And so Stonor’s curiosity remained unsatisfied. To have questioned the man further would only have been to lower his dignity. True, he might have arrested

him, and forced him to give an account of himself, but the processes of justice are difficult and expensive so far north, and the policemen are instructed not to make arrests except when unavoidable. At the moment it did not occur to Stonor but that the man's questions about Imbrie were actuated by an idle curiosity.

When the hour was up, the entire population of Carcajou Point gathered on the shore to witness Hooliam's departure. Stonor was there, too, of course, standing grimly apart from the rabble. Of what they thought of this summary deportation he could not be sure, but he suspected that if the whisky were all gone, they would not care much one way or the other. Hooliam was throwing his belongings in a dug-out of a different style from that used by the Beavers. It was ornamented with a curved prow and stern, such as Stonor had not before seen.

"Where did you get that boat?" he asked.

"I didn't steal it," answered Hooliam impudently. "Traded my horse for it and some grub at Fort Cardigan."

Cardigan was a Company post on the Spirit a hundred miles or so above the Crossing. Stonor saw that Hooliam was well provided with blankets, grub, ammunition, etc., and that it was not Company goods.

When Hooliam was ready to embark, he addressed the crowd in an Indian tongue which strongly resembled Beaver, which Stonor spoke, but had different inflections. Freely translated, his words were:

"I go, men. The moose-berry (*i. e.*, red-coat) wills it. I don't like moose-berries. Little juice and much stone. To eat moose-berries draws a man's mouth up like a tobacco-bag when the string is pulled."

They laughed, with deprecatory side-glances at the policeman. They were not aware that he spoke their tongue. Stonor had no intention of letting them know it, and kept an inscrutable face. They pushed off the dug-out, and Hooliam, with a derisive wave of the hand, headed up river. All remained on the shore, and Stonor, seeing that they expected something more of Hooliam, remained also.

He had gone about a third of a mile when Stonor saw him bring the dug-out around and ground her on the beach. He made no move to get out, but a woman

appeared from out of the shrubbery and got in. She was too far away for Stonor to distinguish anything of her features; her figure looked matronly.

“Who is that?” he asked sharply.

Several voices answered. “Hooliam’s woman. Hooliam got old woman for his woman”—with scornful laughter. Now that Hooliam was gone, they were prepared to curry favour with the policeman.

Stonor was careful not to show the uneasiness he felt. This was his first intimation that Hooliam had a companion. He considered following him in another dug-out, but finally decided against it. The fact that he had taken the woman aboard in plain sight smacked merely of bravado. A long experience of the red race had taught Stonor that they love to shroud their movements in mystery from the whites, and that in their most mysterious acts there is not necessarily any significance.

Hooliam, with a wave of his paddle, resumed his journey, and presently disappeared around a bend. Stonor turned on his heel and left the beach, followed by the people. They awaited his next move somewhat apprehensively, displaying an anxiety to please which suggested bad consciences. Stonor, however, contented himself with offering some private admonitions to Shose Cardinal, who seemed to take them in good part. He then prepared to return to the post. The people speeded his departure with relieved faces.

That night Stonor camped on the prairie half-way home. As he lay wooing sleep under the stars, his horse cropping companionably near by, a new thought caused him to sit up suddenly in his blankets.

“He mentioned the name Ernest Imbrie. The Indians never call him anything but the White Medicine Man. And even if they had picked up the name Imbrie at the post, they never speak of a man by his Christian name. If they had heard the name Ernest I doubt if they could pronounce it. Sounds as if he knew the name beforehand. Queer if there should be any connection there. I wish I hadn’t let him go so easily.—Oh, well, it’s too late to worry about it now. The steamboat will get to the Crossing before he does. I’ll drop a line to Lambert to keep an eye on him.”

CHAPTER III

THE UNEXPECTED VISITOR

At Fort Enterprise a busy time followed. The big steamboat (“big” of course only for lack of anything bigger than a launch to compare with) had to be put in the water and outfitted, and the season’s catch of fur inventoried, baled and put aboard. By Victoria Day all was ready. They took the day off to celebrate with games and oratory (chiefly for the benefit of the helpless natives) followed by a big bonfire and dance at Simon Grampierre’s up the river.

Next morning the steamboat departed up-stream, taking Captain Stinson, Mathews, and most of the native employees of the post in her crew. Doc Giddings and Stonor watched her go, each with a little pain at the breast; she was bound towards the great busy world, world of infinite delight, of white women, lights, music, laughter and delicate feasting; in short, to them the world of romance. They envied the very bales of fur aboard that were bound for the world’s great market-places. On the other hand, John Gaviller watched the steamboat go with high satisfaction. To him she represented Profit. He never knew homesickness, because he was at home. For him the world revolved around Fort Enterprise. As for Gordon Strange, the remaining member of the quartette who watched her go, no one ever really knew what he thought.

The days that followed were the dullest in the whole year. The natives had departed for their summer camps, and there was no one left around the post but the few breed farmers. To Stonor, who was twenty-seven years old, these days were filled with a strange unrest; for the coming of summer with its universal blossoming was answered by a surge in his own youthful blood—and he had no safety-valve. A healthy instinct urged him to a ceaseless activity; he made a garden behind his quarters; he built a canoe (none of your clumsy dug-outs, but a

well-turned Peterboro' model sheathed with bass-wood); he broke the colts of the year. Each day he tired himself out and knew no satisfaction in his work, and each morning he faced the shining world with a kind of groan. Just now he had not even Tole Grampierre to talk to, for Tole, following the universal law, was sitting up with Berta Thomas.

The steamboat's itinerary took her first to Spirit River Crossing, the point of departure for "outside" where she discharged her fur and took on supplies for the posts further up-stream. Proceeding up to Cardigan and Fort Cheever, she got their fur and brought it back to the Crossing. Then, putting on supplies for Fort Enterprise, she hustled down home with the current. It took her twelve days to mount the stream and six to return. Gaviller was immensely proud of the fact that she was the only thing in the North that ran on a pre-arranged schedule. He even sent out a timetable to the city for the benefit of intending tourists. She was due back at Enterprise on June 15th.

When the morning of that day broke a delightful excitement filled the breasts of those left at the post. As in most Company establishments, on the most prominent point of the river-bank stood a tall flagstaff, with a little brass cannon at its foot. The flag was run up and the cannon loaded, and every five minutes during the day some one would be running out to gaze up the river. Only Gaviller affected to be calm.

"You're wasting your time," he would say. "Stinson tied up at Tar Island last night. If he comes right down he'll be here at three forty-five; and if he has to land at Carcajou for wood it will be near supper-time."

The coming of the steamboat always held the potentialities of a dramatic surprise, for they had no telegraph to warn them of whom or what she was bringing. This year they expected quite a crowd. In addition to their regular visitors, Duncan Seton, the Company inspector, and Bishop Trudeau on his rounds, the government was sending in a party of surveyors to lay off homesteads across the river, and Mr. Pringle, the Episcopal missionary, was returning to resume his duties. An added spice of anticipation was lent by the fact that the latter was expected to bring his sister to keep house for him. There had been no white woman at Fort Enterprise since the death of Mrs. Gaviller

many years before. But, as Miss Pringle was known to be forty years old, the excitement on her account was not undue. Her mark would be Gaviller, the younger men said, affecting not to notice the trader's annoyance.

Gaviller had put a big boat's whistle on his darling *Spirit River*, and the mellow boom of it brought them on a run out of the store before she hove in sight around the islands in front of Grampierre's. Gaviller had his binoculars. He could no longer keep up his pretence of calmness.

"Three twenty-eight!" he cried, excitedly. "Didn't I tell you! Who says we can't keep time up here! She'll run her plank ashore at three forty-five to the dot!"

"There she is!" they cried, as she poked her nose around the islands.

"Good old tub!"

"By God! she's a pretty sight—white as a swan!"

"And floats like one!"

"Some class to that craft, sir!"

Meanwhile Gaviller was nervously focussing his binoculars. "By Golly! there's a big crowd on deck!" he cried. "Must be ten or twelve beside the crew!"

"Can you see the petticoat?" asked Doc Giddings. "Gee! I hope she can cook!"

"Wait a minute! Yes—there she is!—Hello! By God, boys, there's two of them!"

"Two!"

"Go on, you're stringing us!"

"The other must be a breed."

"No, sir, she's got a white woman's hat on, a stylish hat. And now I can see her white face!"

“John, for the lova Mike let me look!”

But the trader held him off obdurately. “I believe she’s young. She’s a little woman beside the other. I believe she’s good-looking! All the men are crowding around her.”

Stonor’s heart set up an unaccountable beating. “Ah, it’ll be the wife of one of the surveyors,” he said, with the instinct of guarding against a disappointment.

“No, sir! If her husband was aboard the other men wouldn’t be crowding around like that.”

“No single woman under forty would dare venture up here. She’d be mobbed.”

“Might be a pleasant sort of experience for her.”

Doc Giddings had at last secured possession of the glasses. “She *is* good-looking!” he cried. “Glory be, she’s a peach! I can see her smile!”

The boat was soon close enough for the binoculars to be dispensed with. To Stonor the whole picture was blurred, save for the one slender, fragile figure clad in the well-considered dress of a lady, perfect in detail. Of her features he was aware at first only of a beaming, wistful smile that plucked at his heartstrings with a strange sharpness. Even at that distance she gave out something that changed him for ever, and he knew it. He gazed, entirely self-forgetful, with rapt eyes and parted lips that would have caused the other men to shout with laughter —had they not been gazing, too. The man who dwells in a world full of charming women never knows what they may mean to a man. Let him be exiled, and he’ll find out. In that moment the smouldering uneasiness which had made Stonor a burden to himself of late burst into flame, and he knew what was the matter. He beheld his desire.

As the steamboat swept by below them, Stonor automatically dipped the flag, and Gaviller touched off the old muzzle-loader, which vented a magnificent roar for its size. The whistle replied. The *Spirit River* waltzed gracefully around in the stream, and, coming back against the current, pushed her nose softly into the mud of the strand. They ran down to meet her. Hawsers were passed ashore and

made fast, and the plank run out.

Gaviller and the others went aboard, and first greetings were exchanged on the forward deck of the steamboat. Stonor, afflicted with a sudden diffidence, hung in the background. He wished to approach her by degrees. Meanwhile he was taking her in. He scarcely dared look at her directly, but his gaze thirstily drank in her outlying details, so to speak. Her small, well-shod feet were marvellous to him; likewise her exquisite silken ankles. He observed that she walked with stiff, short, delicate steps, like a high-bred filly. He was enchanted with the slight, graceful gesticulation of her gloved hand. When he finally brought himself to look at her eyes he was not disappointed; deep blue were they, steady, benignant, and of a heart-disquieting wistfulness. Other items, by the way, were a little straight nose, absurd and lovable, and lips fresh and bright as a child's. All the men were standing about her with deferential bared heads, and the finest thing (in Stonor's mind) was that she displayed no self-consciousness in this trying situation; none of the cooings, the gurglings, the flirtatious flutterings that bring the sex into disrepute. Her back was as straight as a plucky boy's and her chin up like the same.

When Stonor saw that his turn was approaching to be introduced, he was seized outright with panic. He slipped inside the vessel and made his way back to where the engineer was wiping his rods. He greeted Mathews with a solicitude that surprised the dour Scotchman. He stood there making conversation until he heard everybody in the bow go ashore. Afterwards he was seized with fresh panic upon realizing that delaying the inevitable introduction could not but have the effect of singling him out and making him more conspicuous when it came about.

John Gaviller carried Miss Pringle and the charming unknown up to the clap-boarded villa until the humble shack attached to the English mission could be made fit to receive them. Stonor went for a long walk to cool his fevered blood. He was thoroughly disgusted with himself. By his timidity, not to use a stronger word, he had lost precious hours; indeed, now that he had missed his first opportunity, he might be overlooked altogether. The other men would not be likely to help him out at all. A cold chill struck to his breast at the thought. He

resolved to march right up to the guns of her eyes on his return. But he made a score of conflicting resolutions in the course of his walk. Meanwhile he didn't yet know whether she were Miss or Mrs., or what was her errand at Fort Enterprise. True, he could have gone back and asked any of the men who came on the boat, but nothing in the world could have induced him to speak of her to anyone just then.

When he got back, it was to find the post in a fever of preparation. John Gaviller had asked every white man to his house to dinner to meet the ladies. It was to be a real "outside" dinner party, and there was a sudden, frantic demand for collars, cravats and presentable foot-wear. Nobody at the post had a dress-suit but Gaviller himself.

Of them all only Stonor had no sartorial problems; his new uniform and his Strathcona boots polished according to regulations were all he had and all he needed. He surveyed the finished product in his little mirror with strong dissatisfaction. "Ornery-looking cuss," he thought. But a man is no judge of his own looks. A disinterested observer might have given a different verdict. A young man less well favoured by nature would have gazed at Stonor's long-limbed ease with helpless envy. He had that rare type of figure that never becomes encumbered with fat. The grace of youth and the strength of maturity met there. He would make a pattern colonel if he lived. Under the simple lines of his uniform one apprehended the ripple and play of unclogged muscles. If all men were like Stonor the tailor's task would be a sinecure.

As to his face, mention has already been made of the sober gaze lightened by a suggestion of sly mirthfulness. In a company where sprightliness was the great desideratum, Stonor, no doubt, would have been considered slow. Men with strong reserves are necessarily a little slow in coming into action; they are apt, too, as a decent cover for their feelings, to affect more slowness than they feel. A woman can rarely look at that kind of man without feeling a secret desire to rouse him; there is so clearly something to rouse. It was Stonor's hair which had given rise to the quaint name the native maidens had applied to him, the "Gold-piece." It was not yellow hair, as we call it, but a shiny light brown, and under the savage attack of his brushes the shine was accentuated.

The guests were received in the drawing-room of Enterprise House, which was rarely opened nowadays. It had a charming air of slightly old-fashioned gentility, just as its dead mistress had left it, and the rough Northerners came in with an abashed air. John Gaviller, resplendent in the dress-suit, stood by the piano, with the little lady on one hand and the large lady on the other, and one after another the men marched up and made their obeisances. The actual introduction proved to be not so terrible an ordeal as Stonor had feared—or perhaps it is more proper to say, that it was so terrible he was numbed and felt nothing. It was all over in a minute. “Miss Starling!” the name rang through his consciousness like the sound of silver bells.

Face to face Stonor saw her but dimly through the mist of too much feeling. She treated him exactly the same as the others, that is to say, she was kind, smiling, interested, and personally inscrutable. Stonor was glad that there was another man pressing close at his heels, for he felt that he could stand no more just then. He was passed on to Miss Pringle. Of this lady it need only be said that she was a large-size clergyman’s sister, a good soul, pious and kindly. She has little to do with this tale.

In Stonor’s eyes she proved to have a great merit, for she was disposed to talk exclusively about Miss Starling. Stonor’s ears were long for that. From her talk he gathered three main facts: (a) that Miss Starling’s given name was Clare (enchanting syllable!); (b) that the two ladies had become acquainted for the first time on the way into the country; (c) that Miss Starling was going back with the steamboat. “Of course!” thought Stonor, with his heart sinking slowly like a water-logged branch.

“Isn’t she plucky!” said Miss Pringle enthusiastically.

“She looks it,” said Stonor, with a sidelong glance at the object of her encomium.

“To make this trip, I mean, all by herself.”

“Is it just to see the country?” asked Stonor diffidently.

“Oh, don’t you know? She’s on the staff of the *Winnipeg News-Herald*, and is

writing up the trip for her paper."

Stonor instantly made up his mind to spend his next leave in Winnipeg. His relief was due in October.

John Gaviller could do things in good style when he was moved to it. The table was gay with silver under candle-light. Down the centre were placed great bowls of painter's brush, the rose of the prairies. And with the smiling ladies to grace the head of the board, it was like a glimpse of a fairer world to the men of the North. Miss Pringle was on Gaviller's right, Miss Starling on his left. Stonor was about half-way down the table, and fortunately on the side opposite the younger lady, where he could gaze his fill.

She was wearing a pink evening dress trimmed with silver, that to Stonor's unaccustomed eyes seemed like gossamer and moonshine. He was entranced by her throat and by the appealing loveliness of her thin arms. "How could I ever have thought a fat woman beautiful!" he asked himself. She talked with her arms and her delightfully restless shoulders. Stonor had heard somewhere that this was a sign of a warm heart. For the first time he had a view of her hair; it was dark and warm and plentiful, and most cunningly arranged.

Stonor was totally unaware of what he was eating. From others, later, he learned of the triumph of the kitchen—and all at three hours' notice. Fortunately for him, everybody down the table was hanging on the talk at the head, so that no efforts in that direction were required of him. He was free to listen and dream.

"Somewhere in the world there is a man who will be privileged some day to sit across the table from her at every meal! Not in a crowd like this, but at their own table in their own house. Probably quite an ordinary fellow, too, certainly not worthy of his luck. With her eyes for him alone, and her lovely white arms! —While other men are batching it alone. Things are not evenly divided in this world, for sure! If that man went to hell afterwards it wouldn't any more than square things."

In answer to a question he heard her say: "Oh, don't ask me about Winnipeg! All cities are so ordinary and usual! I want to hear about your country. Tell me stories about the fascinating silent places."

“Well, as it happens,” said Gaviller, speaking slowly to give his words a proper effect, “we have a first-class mystery on hand just at present.”

“Oh, tell me all about it!” she said, as he meant her to.

“A fellow, a white man, has appeared from nowhere at all, and set himself up beside the Swan River, an unexplored stream away to the north-west of here. There he is, and no one knows how he got there. We’ve never laid eyes on him, but the Indians bring us marvellous tales of his ‘strong medicine,’ meaning magic, you know. They say he first appeared from under the great falls of the Swan River. They describe him as a sort of embodiment of the voice of the Falls, but we suspect there is a more natural explanation, because he sends into the post for the food of common humans, and gets a bundle of magazines and papers by every mail. They come addressed to Doctor Ernest Imbrie. Our poor Doc here is as jealous as a cat of his reputation as a healer!”

Gaviller was rewarded with a general laugh, in which her silvery tones were heard.

“Oh, tell me more about him!” she cried.

Of all the men who were watching her there was not one who observed any change in her face. Afterwards they remembered this with wonder. Yet there was something in her voice, her manner, the way she kept her chin up perhaps, that caused each man to think as her essential quality:

“She’s game!”

The whole story of Imbrie as they knew it was told, with all the embroidery that had been unconsciously added during the past months.

CHAPTER IV

MORE ABOUT CLARE

Determined to make the most of their rare feminine visitation at Fort Enterprise, on the following day the fellows got up a chicken hunt on the river bottom east of the post, to be followed by an *al fresco* supper at which broiled chicken was to be the *pièce de resistance*. The ladies didn't shoot any prairie chicken, but they stimulated the hunters with their presence, and afterwards condescended to partake of the delicate flesh.

Stonor, though he was largely instrumental in getting the thing up, and though he worked like a Trojan to make the affair go, still kept himself personally in the background. He consorted with Captain Stinson and Mathews, middle-aged individuals who were considered out of the running. It was not so much shyness now, as an instinct of self-preservation. "She'll be gone in a week," he told himself. "You mustn't let this thing get too strong a hold on you, or life here after she has gone will be hellish. You've got to put her out of your mind, my son—or just keep her as a lovely dream not to be taken in earnest. Hardly likely, after seeing the world, that she'd look twice at a sergeant of police!"

In his innocence Stonor adopted the best possible way of attracting her attention to himself. More than once, when he was not looking, her eyes sought him out curiously. In answer to her questions of the other men it appeared that it was Stonor who had sent the natives out in advance to drive the game past them: it was Stonor who surprised them with a cloth already spread under a poplar tree: it was Stonor who cooked the birds so deliciously. She was neither vain nor silly, but at the same time in a company where every man lay down at her feet, so to speak, and begged her to tread on him, it could not but seem peculiar to her that the best-looking man of them all should so studiously avoid her.

Next day they all crossed the river and rode up to Simon Grampierre's place, where the half-breeds repeated the Victoria Day games for the amusement of the visitors. (These days are still talked of at Fort Enterprise.) Stonor was finally induced to give an exhibition of high-school riding as taught to the police recruits, and thereby threw all the other events in the shade. But their plaudits overwhelmed him. He disappeared and was seen no more that day.

Sunday followed. Mr. Pringle and his sister had got the little church in order, and services were held there for the first time in many months. The mission was half a mile east of the Company buildings, and after church they walked home beside the fields of sprouting grain, in a comfortable Sabbath peace that was much the same at Enterprise as elsewhere in the world.

The procession travelled in the following order: First, four surveyors marching with their heads over their shoulders, at imminent risk of an undignified stumble in the trail; next, Clare Starling, flanked on one side by Gaviller, on the other by Doc Giddings, with two more surveyors on the outlying wings, peering forward to get a glimpse of her; then Captain Stinson, Mathews, and Sergeant Stonor in a line, talking about the state of the crops, and making believe to pay no attention to what was going on ahead; lastly, Mr. Pringle and his sister hurrying to catch up.

Half-way home Miss Starling, *à propos* of nothing, suddenly stopped and turned her head. "Sergeant Stonor," she said. He stepped to her side. Since she clearly showed in her manner that she intended holding converse with the policeman, there was nothing for Gaviller *et al.* to do but proceed, which they did with none too good a grace. This left Stonor and the girl walking together in the middle of the procession. Stinson and Mathews, who were supposed to be out of it anyway, winked at each other portentously.

"I wanted to ask you about that horse you rode yesterday, a beautiful animal. What do you call him?"

"Miles Aroon," said Stonor, like a wooden man. He dreaded that she meant to go on and enlarge on his riding tricks. In his modesty he now regarded that he had made an awful ass of himself the day before. But she stuck to horse-flesh.

“He’s a beauty! Would he let me ride him?”

“Oh, yes! He has no bad tricks. I broke him myself. But of course he knows nothing of side-saddles.”

“I ride astride.”

“I believe we’re all going for a twilight ride to-night. I’ll bring him for you.”

As a result of this Stonor’s praiseworthy resolutions to keep out of harm’s way were much weakened. Indeed, late that night in his little room in quarters he gave himself up to the most outrageous dreams of a possible future happiness. Stonor was quite unversed in the ways of modern ladies; all his information on the subject had been gleaned from romances, which, as everybody knows, are always behind the times in such matters, and it is possible that he banked too much on the simple fact of her singling him out on the walk home.

There was a great obstacle in his way; the force sets its face against matrimony during the term of service. Stonor in his single-mindedness never thought that there were other careers. “I shall have to get a commission,” he thought. “An inspectorship is little enough to offer her. But what an ornament she’d be to a post! And she’d love the life; she loves horses. But Lord! it’s difficult nowadays, with nothing going on. If an Indian war would only break out!”—He was quite ready to sacrifice the unfortunate red race.

On Monday night he was again bidden to dine at Enterprise House. As Gaviller since the day before had been no more than decently polite, Stonor ventured to hope that the invitation might have been instigated by her. At any rate he was placed by her side this time, where he sat a little dizzy with happiness, and totally oblivious to food. At the same time it should be understood that the young lady had no veiled glances or hidden meanings for him alone; she treated him, as she did all the others, to perfect candour.

After dinner they had music in the drawing-room. The piano was grotesquely out of tune, but what cared they for that? She touched it and their souls were drawn out of their bodies. Probably the performer suffered, but she played on with a smile. They listened entranced until darkness fell, and when it is dark at

Enterprise in June it is high time to go to bed.

They all accompanied Stonor to the door. The long-drawn summer dusk of the North is an ever fresh wonder to newcomers. At sight of the exquisite half-light and the stars an exclamation of pleasure broke from Clare.

“Much too fine a night to go to bed!” she cried. “Sergeant Stonor, take me out to the bench beside the flagstaff for a few minutes.”

As they sat down she said: “Don’t you want to smoke?”

“Don’t feel the need of it,” he said. His voice was husky with feeling. Would a man want to smoke in Paradise?

By glancing down and sideways he could take her in as far up as her neck without appearing to stare rudely. She was sitting with her feet crossed and her hands in her lap like a well-bred little girl. When he dared glance at her eyes he saw that there was no consciousness of him there. They were regarding something very far away. In the dusk the wistfulness which hid behind a smile in daylight looked forth fully and broodingly.

Yet when she spoke the matter was ordinary enough. “All the men here tell me about the mysterious stranger who lives on the Swan River. They can’t keep away from the subject. And the funny part of it is, they all seem to be angry at him. Yet they know nothing of him. Why is that?”

“It means nothing,” said Stonor, smiling. “You see, all the men pride themselves on knowing every little thing that happens in the country. It’s all they have to talk about. In a way the whole country is like a village. Well, it’s only because this man has succeeded in defying their curiosity that they’re sore. It’s a joke!”

“They tell me that you stand up for him,” she said, with a peculiar warmth in her voice.

“Oh, just to make the argument interesting,” said Stonor lightly.

“Is that all?” she said, chilled.

“No, to tell the truth, I was attracted to the man from the first,” he said more honestly. “By what the Indians said about his healing the sick and so on. And they said he was young. I have no friend of my own age up here—I mean no real friend. So I thought—well, I would like to know him.”

“I like that,” she said simply.

There was a silence.

“Why don’t you—sometime—go to him?” she said, with what seemed almost like a breathless air.

“I am going,” said Stonor simply. “I received permission in the last mail. The government wants me to look over the Kakisa Indians to see if they are ready for a treaty. The policy is to leave the Indians alone as long as they are able to maintain themselves under natural conditions. But as soon as they need help the government takes charge; limits them to a reservation; pays an annuity, furnishes medical attention, and so on. This is called taking treaty. The Kakisas are one of the last wild tribes left.”

She seemed scarcely to hear him. “When are you going?” she asked with the same air of breathlessness.

“As soon as the steamboat goes back.”

“How far is it to Swan River?”

“Something under a hundred and fifty miles. Three days’ hard riding or four days’ easy.”

“And how far down to the great falls?”

“Accounts differ. From the known features of the map I should say about two hundred miles. They say the river’s as crooked as a ram’s horn.”

There was another silence. She was busy with her own thoughts, and Stonor was content not to talk if he might look at her.

With her next speech she seemed to strike off at a tangent. She spoke with a

lightness that appeared to conceal a hint of pain. “They say the mounted police are the guides, philosophers and friends of the people up North. They say you have to do everything, from feeding babies to reading the burial service.”

“I’m afraid there’s a good bit of romancing about the police,” said Stonor modestly.

“But they do make good friends, don’t they?” she insisted.

“I hope so.”

She gave him the full of her deep, starry eyes. It was not an intoxicating glance, but one that moved him to the depths. “Will you be my friend?” she asked simply.

Poor Stonor! With too great a need for speech, speech itself was foundered. No words ever coined seemed strong enough to carry the weight of his desire to assure her. He could only look at her, imploring her to believe in him. In the end only two little words came; to him wretchedly inadequate; but it is doubtful if they could have been bettered.

“Try me!”

His look satisfied her. She lowered her eyes. The height of emotion was too great to be maintained. She cast round in her mind for something to let them down. “How far to the north the sunset glow is now.”

Stonor understood. He answered in the same tone: “At this season it doesn’t fade out all night. The sun is such a little way below the rim there, that the light just travels around the northern horizon, and becomes the dawn in a little while.”

For a while they talked of indifferent matters.

By and by she said casually: “When you go out to Swan River, take me with you.”

He thought she was joking. “I say, that would be a lark!”

She laughed a little nervously.

He tried to keep it up, though his heart set up a furious beating at the bare idea of such a trip. “Can you bake bannock?”

“I can make good biscuits.”

“What would we do for a chaperon?”

“Nobody has chaperons nowadays.”

“You don’t know what a moral community this is!”

“I meant it,” she said suddenly, in a tone there was no mistaking.

All his jokes deserted him, and left him trembling a little. Indeed he was scandalized, too, being less advanced, probably, in his ideas than she. “It’s—it’s impossible!” he stammered at last.

“Why?” she asked calmly.

He could not give the real reason, of course. “To take the trail, you! To ride all day and sleep on the hard ground! And the river trip, an unknown river with Heaven knows what rapids and other difficulties! A fragile little thing like you!”

Opposition stimulated her. “What you call my fragility is more apparent than real,” she said with spirit. “As a matter of fact I have more endurance than most big women. I have less to carry. I am accustomed to living and travelling in the open. I can ride all day—or walk if need be.”

“It’s impossible!” he repeated. It was the policeman who spoke. The man’s blood was leaping, and his imagination painting the most alluring pictures. How often on his lonely journeys had he not dreamed of the wild delights of such companionship!

“What is your real reason?” she asked.

“Well, how could you go—with me, you know?” he said, blushing into the dusk.

“I’m not afraid,” she answered instantly. “Anyway, that’s my look-out, isn’t it?”

“No,” he said, “I have to think of it. The responsibility would be mine.” Here the man broke through—“Oh, I talk like a prig!” he cried. “But don’t you see, I’m not up here on my own. I can’t do what I would like. A policeman has got to be proper, hasn’t he?”

She smiled at his *naïveté*. “But if I have business out there?”

This sounded heartless to Stonor. It was the first and last time that he ventured to criticize her. “Oh,” he objected, “I don’t know what reasons the poor fellow has for burying himself—they must be good reasons, for it’s no joke to live alone! It doesn’t seem quite fair, does it, to dig him out and write him up in the papers?”

“Oh, what must you think of me!” she murmured in a quick, hurt tone.

He saw that he had made a mistake. “I—I beg your pardon,” he stammered contritely. “I thought that was what you meant by business.”

“I’m not a reporter,” she said.

“But they told me——”

“Yes, I know, I lied. I’m not apologizing for that. It was necessary to lie to protect myself from vulgar curiosity.”

He looked his question.

She was not quite ready to answer it yet. “Suppose I had the best of reasons for going,” she said, hurriedly, “a reason that Mrs. Grundy would approve of; it would be your duty as a policeman, wouldn’t it, to help me?”

“Yes—but——?”

She turned imploring eyes on him, and unconsciously clasped her hands. “I’m sure you’re generous and steadfast,” she said quickly. “I can trust you, can’t I, not to give me away? The gossip, the curious stares—it would be more than I could bear! Promise me, whatever you may think of it all, to respect my secret.”

“I promise,” he said a little stiffly. It hurt him that he was required to protest

his good faith. “The first thing we learn in the force is to keep our mouths shut.”

“Ah, now you’re offended with me because I made you promise!”

“It doesn’t matter. It’s over now. What is your reason for wanting to go out to Swan River?”

She answered low: “I am Ernest Imbrie’s wife.”

“Oh!” said Stonor in a flat tone. A sick disappointment filled him—yet in the back of his mind he had expected something of the kind. An inner voice whispered to him: “Not for you! It was too much to hope for!”

Presently she went on: “I injured him cruelly. That’s why he buried himself so far away.”

Stonor turned horror-stricken eyes on her.

“Oh, not that,” she said proudly and indifferently. “The injury I did him was to his spirit; that is worse.” Stonor turned hot for his momentary suspicion.

“I can repair it by going to him,” she went on. “I *must* go to him. I can never know peace until I have tried to make up to him a little of what I have made him suffer.”

She paused to give Stonor a chance to speak—but he was dumb.

Naturally she misunderstood. “Isn’t that enough?” she cried painfully. “I have told you the essential truth. Must I go into particulars? I can’t bear to speak of these things!”

“No! No!” he said, horrified. “It’s not that. I don’t want to hear any more.”

“Then you’ll help me?”

“I will take you to him.”

She began to cry in a pitiful shaken way.

“Ah, don’t!” murmured Stonor. “I can’t stand seeing you.”

“It’s—just from relief,” she whispered.… “I’ve been under a strain.… I think I should have gone out of my mind—if I had been prevented from expiating the wrong I did.… I wish I could tell you—he’s the bravest man in the world, I think—and the most unhappy!… And I heaped unhappiness on his head!”

This was hard for Stonor to listen to, but it was so obviously a relief to her to speak, that he made no attempt to stop her.

She soon quieted down. “I shan’t try to thank you,” she said. “I’ll show you.”

Stonor foresaw that the proposed journey would be attended with difficulties.

“Would it be possible,” she asked meekly, “for you to plan to leave a day in advance of the steamboat, and say nothing about taking me?”

“You mean for us to leave the post secretly?” he said, a little aghast.

“When the truth came out it would be all right,” she urged. “And it would save me from becoming the object of general talk and commiseration here. Why, if Mr. Gaviller knew in advance, he’d probably insist on sending a regular expedition.”

“Perhaps he would.”

“And they’d all try to dissuade me. I’d have to talk them over one by one—I haven’t the strength of mind left for that. They’d say I ought to wait here and send for him——”

“Well, wouldn’t that be better?”

“No! No! Not the same thing at all. I doubt if he’d come. And what would I be doing here—waiting—without news. I couldn’t endure it. I must go to him.”

Stonor thought hard. Youth was pulling him one way, and his sense of responsibility the other. Moreover, this kind of case was not provided for in regulations. Finally he said:

“Couldn’t you announce your intention of remaining over for one trip of the steamboat? Miss Pringle would be glad to have you, I’m sure.”

“I could do that. But you’re not going to delay the start?”

“We can leave the day after the boat goes, as planned. But if we were missed before the boat left she’d carry out some great scandalous tale that we might never be able to correct. For if scandal gets a big enough start you can never overtake it.”

“You are right, of course. I never thought of that.”

“Then I see no objection to leaving the post secretly, provided you are willing to tell one reliable person in advance—say Pringle or his sister, of our intention. You see we must leave someone behind us to still the storm of gossip that will be let loose.”

“You think of everything!”

CHAPTER V

THE FIRST STAGE

For two days Stonor went about his preparations with an air of dogged determination. It seemed to him that all the light had gone out of his life, and hope was dead. He told himself that the proposed trip could not be otherwise than the stiffest kind of an ordeal to a man in his position, an ordeal calling for well-nigh superhuman self-control. How gladly would he have given it up, had he not given his word.

And then on the third day his spirits unaccountably began to rise. As a matter of fact youthful spirits must seek their natural level no less surely than water, but Stonor was angry with himself, accusing himself of lightheadedness, inconstancy and what not. His spirits continued to rise just the same. There was a delight in providing everything possible for her comfort. The mere thought of going away with her, under any circumstances whatsoever, made his heart sing.

John Gaviller was astonished by the size and variety of his requisition for supplies. Besides the customary rations Stonor included all the luxuries the store afforded: viz., tinned fish, vegetables and fruit; condensed milk, marmalade and cocoa. And in quantities double what he would ordinarily have taken.

“Getting luxurious in your old age, aren’t you?” said the trader.

“Oh, I’m tired of an unrelieved diet of bannock and beans,” said Stonor, with a carelessness so apparent, they ought to have been warned; but of course they never dreamed of anything so preposterous as the truth.

Stonor had two horses of his own. He engaged three more from Simon Grampierre, horses that he knew, and from Tole Grampierre purchased a fine

rabbit-skin robe for Clare's bed on the trail. Tole, who had secretly hoped to be taken on this expedition, was much disappointed when no invitation was forthcoming. Stonor arranged with Tole to ride to meet him with additional supplies on the date when he might expect to be returning. Tole was to leave Enterprise on July 12th.

From Father Goussard Stonor borrowed a mosquito tent on the plea that his own was torn. He smuggled a folding camp-cot into his outfit. Clare fortunately had brought suitable clothes for the most part. How well Stonor was to know that little suit cut like a boy's with Norfolk jacket and divided skirt! What additional articles she needed Miss Pringle bought at the store for a mythical destitute Indian boy. They had soon found it necessary to take Miss Pringle into their confidence. She went about charged with the secret like a soda-water-bottle with the cork wired down.

Beside Gordon Strange, the only person around the post who could speak the Kakisa tongue was a woman, Mary Moosa, herself a Kakisa who had married a Cree. Her husband was a deck-hand on the steamboat. Stonor had already engaged Mary Moosa to take this trip with him as interpreter, and Mary, who had her own notions of propriety, had stipulated that her oldest boy be taken along. Mary herself promised to be a godsend on the trip; for she was just the comfortable dependable soul to look after Clare, but the boy now became a problem, for the dug-out that Stonor designed to use on the Swan River would only carry three persons comfortably, with the necessary outfit. Yet Stonor could not speak to Mary in advance about leaving the boy at home.

Such was Stonor's assiduity that everything was ready for the start two days ahead of time—an unheard-of thing up North. Everybody at the post gave up a morning to seeing the steamboat off. She carried with her a report from Stonor to his inspector, telling of the proposed trip. Clare was among those who waved to her from the shore. No surprise had been occasioned by the announcement of her decision to remain over a trip. Gaviller was already planning further entertainments. She had by this time moved down to the Mission with the Pringles.

On the afternoon of that day Stonor transported his goods and swam his

horses across the river, to be ready for the start from the other side. Mary Moosa and her son met him there, and camped beside the outfit for the night. Stonor returned to Enterprise House for dinner. He had tried to get out of it, knowing that the fact of this dinner would rankle in the trader's breast afterwards, but Gaviller had insisted on giving him a send-off. It was not a happy affair, for three of the guests were wretchedly nervous. They could not help but see in their mind's eye Gaviller's expression of indignant astonishment when the news should be brought him next day.

Gaviller further insisted on taking everybody down to the shore to see Stonor off, thus obliging the trooper to make an extra trip across the river and back in order to maintain the fiction. Stonor slept in his own camp for an hour, and then rowed down-stream and across, to land in front of the Mission.

It is never perfectly dark at this season, and already day was beginning to break. Stonor climbed the bank, and showed himself at the top, knowing that they would be on the watch from within. The little grey log mission-house crouched in its neglected garden behind a fence of broken palings. But a touch of regeneration was already visible in Miss Pringle's geranium slips in the windows, and her bits of white curtain.

The door was silently opened, and the two women kissed in the entry. Stonor was never to forget that picture in the still grey light. Clare, clad in the little Norfolk suit and the boy's stout boots and hat, crossed the yard with the little mincing steps so characteristic of her, and therefore so charming to the man who waited. Her face was pale, her eyes bright. Miss Pringle stood in the doorway, massive and tearful, a hand pressed to her mouth.

Stonor's breast received a surprising wrench. "It's like an elopement!" he thought. "Ah, if she *were* coming to me!"

She smiled at him without speaking, and handed over her bag. Stonor closed the gate softly, and they made their way down the bank, and got in the boat.

It was a good, stiff pull back against the current. They spoke little. Clare studied his grim face with some concern.

“Regrets?” she asked.

He rested on his oars for a moment and his face softened. He smiled at her frankly—and ruefully. “No regrets,” he said, “but a certain amount of anxiety.”

His glance conveyed a good deal more than that—in spite of him. “I love you with all my heart. Of course I clearly understand that you have nothing for me. I am prepared to see this thing through, no matter what the end means to me.—But be merciful!” All this was in his look. Whether she got it or not, no man could have told. She looked away and dabbled her hand in the water.

Mary Moosa was a self-respecting squaw who lived in a house with tables and chairs and went to church and washed her children with soap. In her plain black cotton dress, the skirt cut very full to allow her to ride astride, her new moccasins and her black straw hat she made a figure of matronly tidiness if not of beauty. She was cooking when they arrived. Her inward astonishment, at beholding Stonor returning with the white girl who had created such a sensation at the post, can be guessed; but, true to her traditions, she betrayed nothing of it to the whites. After a single glance in their direction her gaze returned to the frying-pan.

It was Stonor who was put out of countenance, “Miss Starling is going with us,” he said, with a heavy scowl.

Mary made no comment on the situation, but continued gravely frying the flap-jacks to a delicate golden shade. Her son, aged about fourteen, who had less command over his countenance, stood in the background staring, with open eyes and mouth. It was a trying moment for Stonor and Clare. They discussed the prospects of a good day for the journey in rather strained voices.

However, it proved that Mary’s silence had neither an unfriendly nor a censorious intention. She merely required time to get her breath, so to speak. She transferred the flap-jacks from the pan to a plate, and, putting them in the ashes to keep hot, arose and came to Clare with extended hand.

“How,” she said, as she had been taught was manners to all.

Clare took her hand with a right good will.

It suddenly occurred to Mary that there was now no occasion for the boy to accompany them. Mary was a woman of few words. “You go home,” she said calmly.

The boy broke into a howl of grief, proving that the delights of the road are much the same to boys, red or white.

“Poor little fellow!” said Clare.

“Too young for travel,” said Mary, impassively. “More trouble than help.”

Clare wished to intercede for him with Stonor, but the trooper shook his head.

“No room in the dug-out,” he said.

Toma Moosa departed along the shore with his arm over his eyes.

Mary was as good as a man on a trip. While Stonor and Clare ate she packed the horses, and Stonor had only to throw the hitch and draw it taut. Clare watched this operation with interest.

“They swell up just like babies when you’re putting their bands on,” she remarked.

They were on the move shortly after sunrise, that is to say half-past three. As they rode away over the flat, each took a last look at the buildings of the post across the river, gilded by the horizontal rays, each wondering privately what fortune had in store for them before they should see the spot again.

They passed the last little shack and the last patch of grain before anybody was astir. When they rode out into the open country everybody’s spirits rose. There is nothing like taking the trail to lift up the heart—and on a June morning in the north! Troubles, heart-aches and anxieties were left behind with the houses. Even Mary Moosa beamed in her inscrutable way.

Stonor experienced a fresh access of confidence, and proceeded to deceive himself all over again. “I’m cured!” he thought. “There’s nothing to mope about. She’s my friend. Anything else is out of the question, and I will not think of it

again. We'll just be good pals like two fellows. You can be a pal with the right kind of girl, and she is that.—But better than any fellow, she's so damn good to look at!"

It was a lovely park-like country with graceful, white-stemmed poplars standing about on the sward, and dark spruces in the hollows. The grass was starred with flowers. When Nature sets out to make a park her style has a charming abandon that no landscape-gardener can ever hope to capture. After they mounted the low bench the country rolled shallowly, flat in the prospect, with a single, long, low eminence, blue athwart the horizon ahead.

"That's the divide between the Spirit and the Swan," said Stonor. "We'll cross it to-morrow. From here it looks like quite a mountain, but the ascent is so gradual we won't know we're over it until we see the water flowing the other way."

Clare rode Miles Aroon, Stonor's sorrel gelding, and Stonor rode the other police horse, a fine dark bay. These two animals fretted a good deal at the necessity of accommodating their pace to the humble pack animals. These latter had a stolid inscrutable look like their native masters. One in particular looked so respectable and matter-of-fact that Clare promptly christened her Lizzie.

Lizzie proved to be a horse of a strong, bourgeois character. If her pack was not adjusted exactly to her liking, she calmly sat on her haunches in the trail until it was fixed. Furthermore, she insisted on bringing up the rear of the cavalcade. If she was put in the middle, she simply fell out until the others had passed. In her chosen place she proceeded to fall asleep, with her head hanging ever lower and feet dragging, while the others went on. Stonor, who knew the horse, let her have her way. There was no danger of losing her. When she awoke and found herself alone, she would come tearing down the trail, screaming for her beloved companions.

Stonor rode at the head of his little company with a leg athwart his saddle, so he could hold converse with Clare behind.

Pointing to the trail stretching ahead of them like an endless brown ribbon over prairie and through bush, he said: "I suppose trails are the oldest things in

America. Once thoroughly made they can never be effaced—except by the plough. You see, they never can run quite straight, though the country may be as flat as your hand, but the width never varies; three and a half hands."

Travelling with horses is not all picnicking. Three times a day they have to be unpacked and turned out to *graze*, and three times *caught* and *packed again*; this in addition to the regular camp routine of pitching tents, rustling wood, cooking, etc. Clare announced her intention of taking over the cooking, but she found that baking biscuits over an open fire in a drizzle of rain, offered a new set of problems to the civilized cook, and Mary had to come to her rescue.

During this, their first spell by the trail, Stonor was highly amused to watch Clare's way with Mary. She simply ignored Mary's discouraging red-skin stolidity, and assumed that they were sisters under their skins. She pretended that it was necessary for them to take sides against Stonor in order to keep the man in his place. It was not long before Mary was grinning broadly. Finally at some low-voiced sally of Clare's she laughed outright. Stonor had never heard her laugh before. Thereafter she was Clare's. Realizing that the wonderful white girl really wished to make friends, Mary offered her a doglike devotion that never faltered throughout the difficult days that followed.

They slept throughout the middle part of the day, and later, the sky clearing, they rode until near sun-down in order to make a good water-hole that Mary knew of. When they had supped and made all snug for the night, Stonor let fall the piece of information that Mary was well known as a teller of tales at the Post. Clare gave her no peace then till she consented to tell a story. They sat in a row behind Stonor's little mosquito-bar, for the insects were abroad, with the fire burning before them, and Mary began.

"I tell you now how the people got the first medicine-pipe. This story is about Thunder. Thunder is everywhere. He roar in the mountains, he shout far out on the prairie. He strike the high rocks and they fall. He hit a tree and split it like with a big axe. He strike people and they die. He is bad. He like to strike down the tall things that stand. He is ver' powerful. He is the most strong one. Sometimes he steals women.

“Long tam ago, almost in the beginning, a man and his wife sit in their lodge when Thunder come and strike them. The man was not killed. At first he is lak dead, but bam-bye he rise up again and look around him. His wife not there. He say: ‘Oh well, she gone to get wood or water,’ and he sit awhile. But when the sun had gone under, he go out and ask the people where she go. Nobody see her. He look all over camp, but not find her. Then he know Thunder steal her, and he go out alone on the hills and mak’ sorrow.

“When morning come he get up and go far away, and he ask all the animals he meet where Thunder live. They laugh and not tell him. Wolf say: ‘W’at you think! We want go look for the one we fear? He is our danger. From others we can run away. From him there is no running. He strike and there we lie! Turn back! Go home! Do not look for the place of the feared one.’

“But the man travel on. Travel very far. Now he come to a lodge, a funny lodge, all made of stone. Here live the raven chief. The man go in.

“Raven chief say: ‘Welcome, friend. Sit down. Sit down.’ And food was put before him.

“When he finish eating, Raven say: ‘Why you come here?’

“Man say: ‘Thunder steal my wife away. I want find his place so I get her back.’

“Raven say: ‘I think you be too scare to go in the lodge of that feared one. It is close by here. His lodge is made of stone like this, and hanging up inside are eyes—all the eyes of those he kill or steal away. He take out their eyes and hang them in his lodge. Now, will you enter?’

“Man say: ‘No. I am afraid. What man could look on such things of fear and live?’

“Raven say: ‘No common man can. There is only one old Thunder fears. There is only one he cannot kill. It is I, the Raven. Now I will give you medicine and he can’t harm you. You go enter there, and look among those eyes for your wife’s eyes, and if you find them, tell that Thunder why you come, and make him give them to you. Here now is a raven’s wing. You point it to him, and he

jomp back quick. But if that is not strong enough, take this. It is an arrow, and the stick is made of elk-horn. Take it, I say, and shoot it through his lodge.'

"Man say: 'Why make a fool of me? My heart is sad. I am crying.' And he cover up his head with his blanket and cry.

"Raven say: 'Wah! You do not believe me! Come out, come out, and I make you believe!' When they stand outside Raven ask: 'Is the home of your people far?'

"Man say: 'Very far!'

"'How many days' journey?'

"Man say: 'My heart is sad. I not count the days. The berries grow and get ripe since I leave my lodge.'

"Raven say: 'Can you see your camp from here?'

"Man think that is foolish question and say nothing.

"Then the Raven rub some medicine on his eyes and say: 'Look!' The man look and see his own camp. It was close. He see the people. He see the smoke rising from the lodges. And at that wonderful thing the man believe in the Raven's medicine.

"Then Raven say: 'Now take the wing and the arrow and go get your wife.'

"So the man take those things and go to Thunder's lodge. He go in and sit down by the door. Thunder sit inside and look at him with eyes of lightning. But the man look up and see those many pairs of eyes hanging up. And the eyes of his wife look at him, and he know them among all those others.

"Thunder ask in a voice that shake the ground: 'Why you come here?'

"Man say: 'I looking for my wife that you steal from me. There hang her eyes!'

"Thunder say: 'No man can enter my lodge and live!' He get up to strike him. But the man point the raven's wing at him, and Thunder fall back on his bed and

shiver. But soon he is better, and get up again. Then the man put the elk-horn arrow to his bow, and shoot it through the lodge of rock. Right through that lodge of rock it make a crooked hole and let the sunlight in.

“Thunder cry out: ‘Stop! You are stronger! You have the great medicine. You can have your wife. Take down her eyes.’ So the man cut the string that held them, and right away his wife stand beside him.

“Thunder say: ‘Now you know me. I have great power. I live here in summer, but when winter come I go far south where there is no winter. Here is my pipe. It is medicine. Take it and keep it. When I come in spring you fill and light this pipe, and you pray to me, you and all the people. Because I bring the rain which make the berries big and ripe. I bring the rain which make all things grow. So you must pray to me, you and all the people.’

“That is how the people got the first medicine-pipe. It was long ago.”

Mary went to her own little tent, and presently they heard her peaceful snoring. The sound had the effect of giving body to the immensity of stillness that surrounded them and held them. Sitting beside Clare, looking out at the fire through the netting, Stonor felt his safeguards slipping fast. There they were, the two of them, to all intents alone in the world! How natural for them to draw close, and, while her head dropped on his shoulder, for his arm to slip around her slender form and hold her tight! He trembled a little, and his mouth went dry. If he had been visiting her he could have got out, but he couldn’t put her out. There was nothing to do but sit tight and fight the thing. Moistening his lips, he said:

“It’s been a good day on the whole.”

“Ah, splendid!” she said. “If one could only hit the trail for ever without being obliged to arrive at a destination, and take up the burdens of a stationary life!”

Stonor pondered on this answer. It sounded almost as if she dreaded coming to the end of her journey.

Out of the breathless dusk came a long-drawn and inexpressibly mournful ululation. Clare involuntarily drew a little closer to Stonor. Ah, but it was hard to

keep from seizing her then!

“Wolves?” she asked in an awe-struck tone.

He shook his head. “Only the wolf’s little mongrel brother, coyote,” he said.

“All my travelling has been done in the mountains,” she explained. She shivered delicately. “The first night out is always a little terrible, isn’t it?”

“You’re not afraid?” he asked anxiously.

“Not exactly afraid. Just a little quivery.”

She got up, and he held up the mosquito-netting for her to pass. Outside they instinctively lifted up their faces to the pale stars.

“It’s safer and cleaner than a city,” said Stonor simply.

“I know.” She still lingered for a moment. “What’s your name?” she asked abruptly.

“Martin.”

“Good-night, Martin.”

“Good-night!”

Later, rolling on his hard bed, he thought: “She might have given me her hand when she said it.—No, you fool! She did right not to! You’ve got to get a grip on yourself. This is only the first day! If you begin like this——!”

CHAPTER VI

THE KAKISAS

On the afternoon of the fourth day they suddenly issued out of big timber to find themselves at the edge of a plateau overlooking a shallow green valley, bare of trees in this place, and bisected by a smoothly-flowing brown river bordered with willows. The flat contained an Indian village.

“Here we are!” said Stonor, reining up.

“The unexplored river!” cried Clare. “How exciting! But how pretty and peaceful it looks, just like an ordinary river. I suppose it doesn’t realize it’s unexplored.”

On the other side there was a bold point with a picturesque clump of pines shading a number of the odd little gabled structures with which the Indians cover the graves of their dead. On the nearer side from off to left appeared a smaller stream which wound across the meadow and emptied into the Swan. At intervals during the day their trail had bordered this little river, which Clare had christened the Meander.

The tepees of the Indian village were strung along its banks, and the stream itself was filled with canoes. On a grassy mound to the right stood a little log shack which had a curiously impertinent look there in the midst of Nature untouched. On the other hand the tepees sprang from the ground as naturally as trees.

Their coming naturally had the effect of a thunderclap on the village. They had scarcely shown themselves from among the trees when their presence was discovered. A chorus of sharp cries was raised, and there was much aimless

running about like ants when the hill is disturbed. The cries did not suggest a welcome, but excitement purely. Men, women, and children gathered in a dense little crowd beside the trail where they must pass. None wished to put themselves forward. Those who lived on the other side of the little stream paddled frantically across to be in time for a close view.

As they approached, absolute silence fell on the Indians, the silence of breathless excitement. The red-coat they had heard of, and in a general way they knew what he signified; but a white woman to them was as fabulous a creature as a mermaid or a hamadryad. Their eyes were saved for Clare. They fixed on her as hard, bright, and unwinking as jet buttons. They conveyed nothing but an animal curiosity. Clare nodded and smiled to them in her own way, but no muscle of any face relaxed.

“Their manners will bear improving,” muttered Stonor.

“Oh, give them a chance,” said Clare. “We’ve dropped on them out of a clear sky.”

Some of the tepees were still made of tanned skins decorated with rude pictures; they saw bows and arrows and bark-canoes, things which have almost passed from America. The dress of the inhabitants was less picturesque; some of the older men still wore their picturesque blanket capotes, but the younger were clad in machine-made shirts and pants from the store, and the women in cotton dresses. They were a pure race, and as such presented for the most part fine, characteristic faces; but in body they were undersized and weedy, showing that their stock was running out.

Stonor led the way across the flat and up a grassy rise to the little shack that has been mentioned. It had been built for the Company clerk who had formerly traded with the Kakisas, and Stonor designed it to accommodate Clare for the night. They dismounted at the door. The Indians followed them to within a distance of ten paces, where they squatted on their heels or stood still, staring immovably. Stonor resented their curiosity. Good manners are much the same the world over, and a self-respecting people would not have acted so, he told himself. None offered to stir hand or foot to assist them to unpack.

Stonor somewhat haughtily desired the head man to show himself. When one stepped forward, he received him sitting in magisterial state on a box at the door. Personally the most modest of men, he felt for the moment that Authority had to be upheld in him. So the Indian was required to stand.

His name was Ahchoogah (as near as a white man could get it) and he was about forty years old. Though small and slight like all the Kakisas, he had a comely face that somehow suggested race. He was better dressed than the majority, in expensive “moleskin” trousers from the store, a clean blue gingham shirt, a gaudy red sash, and an antique gold-embroidered waistcoat that had originated Heaven knows where. On his feet were fine white moccasins lavishly embroidered in coloured silks.

“How,” he said, the one universal English word. He added a more elaborate greeting in his own tongue.

Mary translated. “Ahchoogah say he glad to see the red-coat, like he glad to see the river run again after the winter. Where the red-coats come there is peace and good feeling among all. No man does bad to another man. Ahchoogah hope the red-coat come often to Swan River.”

Stonor watched the man’s face while he was speaking, and apprehended hostility behind the smooth words. He was at a loss to account for it, for the police are accustomed to being well received. “There’s been some bad influence at work here,” he thought.

He said grimly to Mary: “Tell him that I hear his good words, but I do not see from the faces of his people that we are welcome here.”

This was repeated to Ahchoogah, who turned and objurgated his people with every appearance of anger.

“What’s he saying to them?” Stonor quietly asked Mary.

“Call bad names,” said Mary. “Swear Kakisa swears. Tell them go back to the tepees and not look like they never saw nothing before.”

And sure enough the surrounding circle broke up and slunk away.

Ahchoogah turned a bland face back to the policeman, and through Mary politely enquired what had brought him to Swan River.

“I will tell you,” said Stonor. “I come bearing a message from the mighty White Father across the great water to his Kakisa children. The White Father sends a greeting and desires to know if it is the wish of the Kakisas to take treaty like the Crees, the Beavers, and other peoples to the East. If it is so, I will send word, and my officers and the doctor will come next summer with the papers to be signed.”

Ahchoogah replied in diplomatic language that so far as his particular Kakisas were concerned they thought themselves better off as they were. They had plenty to eat most years, and they didn’t want to give up the right to come and go as they chose. No bad white men coveted their lands as yet, and they needed no protection from them. However, he would send messengers to his brothers up and down the river, and all would be guided by the wishes of the greatest number.

At the beginning of this talk Clare had gone inside to escape the piercing stares. While he talked, Ahchoogah was continually trying to peer around Stonor to get a glimpse of her. When the diplomatic formalities were over, he said (according to Mary):

“I not know you got white wife. Nobody tell me that. She is very pretty.”

“Tell him she is not my wife,” said Stonor, with a portentous scowl to hide his blushes. “Tell him—Oh, the devil! he wouldn’t understand. Tell him her name is Miss Clare Starling.”

“What she come for?” Ahchoogah coolly asked.

“Tell him she travels to please herself,” said Stonor, letting him make what he would of that.

“Ahchoogah say he want shake her by the hand.”

Stonor was in a quandary. The thought of the grimy hand touching Clare’s was detestable yet, if the request had been made in innocence it seemed churlish to

object. Clare, who overheard, settled the question for him, by coming out and offering her hand to the Indian with a smile.

To Mary she said: “Tell him to tell the women of his people that the white woman wishes to be their sister.”

Ahchoogah stared at her with a queer mixture of feelings. He was much taken aback by her outspoken, unafraid air. He had expected to despise her, as he had been taught to despise all women, but somehow she struck respect into his soul. He resented it: he had taken pleasure in the prospect of despising something white.

Clare went back into the shack. Ahchoogah, with a shrug, dismissed her from his mind. He spoke again with his courteous air; meanwhile (or at any rate so Stonor thought) his black eyes glittered with hostility.

Mary translated: “Ahchoogah say all very glad you come. He say to-morrow night he going to give big tea-dance. He send for the Swan Lake people to come. A man will ride all night to bring them in time. He say it will be a big time.”

“Say we thank him for the big time just as if we had had it,” said Stonor, not to be outdone in politeness. “But we must go on down the river to-morrow morning.”

When this was translated to Ahchoogah, he lost his self-possession for a moment, and scowled blackly at Stonor. Quickly recovering himself, he began suavely to protest.

“Ahchoogah say the messenger of the Great White Father mustn’t go up and down the river to the Kakisas and ask like a poor man for them to take treaty. Let him stay here, and let the poor Kakisas come to him and make respect.”

“My instructions are to visit the people where they live,” said Stonor curtly. “I shall want the dug-out that the Company man left here last Spring.”

Ahchoogah scowled again. Mary translated: “Ahchoogah say, why you want heavy dug-out when he got plenty nice light bark-canoes.”

“I can’t use bark-canoes in the rapids.”

A startled look shot out of the Indian’s eyes. Mary translated: “What for you want go down rapids? No Kakisas live below the rapids.”

“I’m going to visit the white man at the Great Falls.”

When Ahchoogah got this he bent the look of a pure savage on Stonor, walled and inscrutable. He sullenly muttered something that Mary repeated as: “No can go.”

“Why not?”

“Nobody ever go down there.”

“Well, somebody’s got to be the first to go.”

“Rapids down there no boat can pass.”

“The white man came up to the Indians when they were sick last fall. If he can come up I can go down.”

“He got plenty strong medicine.”

Stonor laughed. “Well, I venture to say that my medicine is as strong as his—in the rapids.”

Ahchoogah raised a whole cloud of objections. “Plenty white-face bear down there. Big as a horse. Kill man while he sleeps. Wolf down there. Run in packs as many as all the Kakisas. Him starving this year.”

“Women’s talk!” said Stonor contemptuously.

“You get carry over those falls. Behind those falls is a great pile of white bones. It is the bones of all the men and beasts that were carried over in the past. Those falls have no voice to warn you above. The water slip over so smooth and soft you not know there is any falls till you go over.”

“Tell Ahchoogah he cannot scare white men with such tales. Tell him to bring me the dug-out to the river-shore below here.”

Ahchoogah muttered sulkily. Mary translated: “Ahchoogah say got no dug-out. Man take it up to Swan Lake.”

“Very well, then; I’ll take two bark-canoes and carry around the rapids.”

He still objected. “If you take our canoes, how we going to hunt and fish for our families?”

“You offered me the canoes!” cried Stonor wrathfully.

“I forget then that every man got only one canoe.”

Stonor stood up in his majesty; Ahchoogah was like a pigmy before him. “Tell him to go!” cried the policeman. “His mouth is full of lies and bad talk. Tell him to have the dug-out or the two canoes here by to-morrow morning or I’ll come and take them!”

The Indian now changed his tone, and endeavoured to soften the policeman’s anger, but Stonor turned on his heel and entered the shack. Ahchoogah went away down-hill with a crestfallen air.

“What do you make of it all?” Clare asked anxiously.

Stonor spoke lightly. “Well, it’s clear they don’t want us to go down the river, but what their reasons are I couldn’t pretend to say. They may have some sort of idea that for us to explode the mystery of the river and the white medicine man whom they regard as their own would be to lower their prestige as a tribe. It’s hard to say. It’s almost impossible to get at their real reasons, and when you do, they generally seem childish to us. I don’t think it’s anything we need bother our heads about.”

“I was watching him,” said Clare. “He didn’t seem to me like a bad man so much as like a child who’s got some wrong idea in his head.”

“That’s my idea too,” said Stonor. “One feels somehow that there’s been a bad influence at work lately. But what influence could reach away out here? It beats me! Their White Medicine Man ought to have done them good.”

“He couldn’t do them otherwise than good—so far as they would listen to

him," she said quickly.

They hastily steered away from this uncomfortable subject.

"Maybe Mary can help us," said Stonor. "Mary, go among your people and talk to them. Give them good talk. Let them understand that we have no object but to be their friends. If there is a good reason why we shouldn't go down the river let them speak it plainly. But this talk of danger and magic simply makes white men laugh."

Mary dutifully took her way down to the tepees. She returned in time to get supper—but threw no further light on the mystery.

"What about it, Mary?" asked Stonor.

"Don't go down the river," she said earnestly. "Plenty bad trip, I think. I 'fraid for her. She can't paddle a canoe in the rapids nor track up-stream. What if we capsize and lose our grub? Don't go!"

"Didn't the Kakisas give you any better reasons than that?"

Mary was doggedly silent.

"Ah, have they won you away from us too?"

This touched the red woman. Her face worked painfully. She did her best to explain. "Kakisas my people," she said. "Maybe you think they foolish people. All right. Maybe they are not a wise and strong people like the old days. But they my people just the same. I can't tell white men their things."

"She's right," put in Clare quickly. "Don't ask her any more."

"Well, what do you think?" he asked. "Do you not wish to go any further?"

"Yes! Yes!" she cried. "I must go on!"

"Very good," he said grimly. "We'll start to-morrow."

"I not go," said Mary stolidly. "My people mad at me if I go."

Here was a difficulty! Stonor and Clare looked at each other blankly.

“What the devil——!” began the policeman.

“Hush! leave her to me,” said Clare, urging him out of the shack.

By and by she rejoined him outside. “She’ll come,” she said briefly.

“What magic did you use?”

“No magic. Just woman talk.”

CHAPTER VII

ON THE RIVER

Next morning they saw the dug-out pulled up on the shore below their camp.

“The difference between a red man and a white man,” said Stonor grimly, “is that a red man doesn’t mind being caught in a lie after the occasion for it has passed, but a white man will spend half the rest of his life trying to justify himself.”

He regarded the craft dubiously. It was an antique affair, grey as an old badger, warped and seamed by the sun and rotten in the bottom. But it had a thin skin of sound wood on the outside, and on the whole it seemed better suited to their purpose than the bark-canoes used by the Kakisas.

As they carried their goods down and made ready to start the Indians gathered around and watched with glum faces. None offered to help. It must have been a trying situation for Mary Moosa. When Stonor was out of hearing they did not spare her. She bore it with her customary stoicism. Ahchoogah, less honest than the rank and file, sought to commend himself to the policeman by a pretence of friendliness. Stonor, beyond telling him that he would hold him responsible for the safety of the horses during his absence, ignored him.

Having stowed their outfit, they gingerly got in. Their boat, though over twenty feet long, was only about fifteen inches beam, and of the log out of which she had been fashioned she still retained the tendency to roll over. Mary took the bow paddle, and Stonor the stern; Clare sat amidships facing the policeman.

“If we can only keep on top until we get around the first bend we’ll save our dignity, anyhow,” said Stonor.

They pushed off without farewells. When they rounded the first point of willows and passed out of sight of the crowd of lowering, dark faces, they felt relieved. Stonor was able to drop the port of august policeman.

Said he: “I’m going to call this craft the Serpent. She’s got a fair twist on her. Her head is pointed to port and her tail to starboard. It takes a mathematical deduction to figure out which way she’s going.”

Clare was less ready than usual to answer his jokes. She was pale, and there was a hint of strain in her eyes.

“You’re not bothered about Ahchoogah’s imaginary terrors, are you?” he asked.

She shook her head. “Not that.”

He wondered what it was then, but did not like to ask directly. It suddenly struck him that she had been steadily losing tone since the first day on the trail.

Her next words showed the direction her thoughts were taking. “You said it was two hundred miles down the river. How long do you think it will take us to make it?”

“Three days and a bit, if my guess as to the distance is right. We have the current to help us, and now we don’t have to stop for the horses to graze.”

“They will be hard days to put in,” she said simply.

Stonor pondered for a long time on what she meant by this. Was she so consumed by impatience to arrive that the dragging hours were a torture to her? or was it simply the uncertainty of what awaited her, and a longing to have it over with? That she had been eager for the journey was clear, but it had not seemed like a joyful eagerness. He was aware that there was something here he did not understand. Women had unfathomable souls anyway.

As far as he was concerned he frankly dreaded the outcome of the journey. How was he to bear himself at the meeting of this divided couple? He could not avoid being a witness of it. He must hand her over with a smile, he supposed,

and make a graceful get-away. But suppose he were prevented from leaving immediately. Or suppose, as was quite likely, that they wished to return with him! He ground his teeth at the thought of such an ordeal. Would he be able to carry it off? He must!

“What’s the matter?” Clare asked suddenly. She had been studying his face.

“Why did you ask?”

“You looked as if you had a sudden pain.”

“I had,” he said, with a rueful smile. “My knees. It’s so long since I paddled that they’re not limbered up yet.”

She appeared not altogether satisfied with this explanation.

This part of the river showed a succession of long smooth reaches with low banks of a uniform height bordered with picturesque ragged jack-pines, tall, thin, and sharply pointed. Here and there, where the composition seemed to require it, a perfect island was planted in the brown flood. At the foot of the pines along the edge of each bank grew rows of berry bushes as regularly as if set out by a gardener. Already the water was receding as a result of the summer drouth, but, as fast as it fell, the muddy beach left at the foot of each bank was mantled with the tender green of goose-grass, a diminutive cousin of the tropical bamboo. Mile after mile the character of the stream showed no variance. It was like a noble corridor through the pines.

At intervals during the day they met a few Kakisas, singly or in pairs, in their beautifully-made little birch-bark canoes. These individuals, when they came upon them suddenly, almost capsized in their astonishment at beholding pale-faces on their river. No doubt, in the tepees behind the willows, the coming of the whites had long been foretold as a portent of dreadful things.

They displayed their feelings according to their various natures. The first they met, a solitary youth, was frankly terrified. He hastened ashore, the water fairly cascading from his paddle, and, squatting behind the bushes, peered through at them like an animal. The next pair stood their ground, clinging to an overhanging willow—too startled to escape perhaps—where they stared with

goggling eyes, and visibly trembled. It gave Stonor and Clare a queer sense of power thus to have their mere appearance create so great an excitement. Nothing could be got out of these two; they would not even answer questions from Mary in their own tongue.

The fourth Kakisa, however, an incredibly ragged and dirty old man with a dingy cotton fillet around his snaky locks, hailed them with wild shouts of laughter, paddled to meet them, and clung to the dug-out, fondly stroking Stonor's sleeve. The sight of Clare caused him to go off into fresh shrieks of good-natured merriment. His name, he informed them, was Lookoovar, or so they understood it. He had a stomach-ache, he said, and wished for some of the white man's wonderful stomach-warming medicine of which he had heard.

"It seems that our principal claim to fame up here is whisky," said Stonor.

He gave the old man a pill. Lookoovar swallowed it eagerly, but looked disappointed at the absence of immediate results.

All these men were hunting their dinners. Close to the shore they paddled softly against the current, or drifted silently down, searching the bushes with their keen flat eyes for the least stir. Since everything had to come down to the river sooner or later to drink, they could have had no better point of vantage. Every man had a gun in his canoe, but ammunition is expensive on the Swan River, and for small fry, musk-rat, duck, fool-hen, or rabbit, they still used the prehistoric bow and arrow.

"The Swan River is like the Kakisas' Main Street," said Stonor. "All day they mosey up and down looking in the shop-windows for bargains in feathers and furs."

They camped for the night on a cleared point occupied by the bare poles of several tepees. The Indians left these poles standing at all the best sites along the river, ready to use the next time they should spell that way. They frequently left their caches too, that is to say, spare gear, food and what-not, trustfully hanging from near-by branches in birch-bark containers. The Kakisas even tote water in bark pails.

Next day the character of the river changed. It now eddied around innumerable short bends right and left with an invariable regularity, each bend so like the last they lost all track of the distance they had come. Its course was as regularly crooked as a crimping-iron. On each bend it ate under the bank on the outside, and deposited a bar on the inside. On one side the pines toppled into the water as their footing was undermined, while poplars sprang up on the other side in the newly-made ground.

On the afternoon of this day they suddenly came upon the village of which they had been told. It fronted on a little lagoon behind one of the sand-bars. This was the village where Imbrie was said to have cured the Kakisas of measles. At present most of the inhabitants were pitching off up and down the river, and there were only half a dozen covered tepees in sight, but the bare poles of many others showed the normal extent of the village.

The usual furore of excitement was caused by their unheralded appearance around the bend. For a moment the Indians completely lost their heads, and there was a mad scurry for the tepees. Some mothers dragged their screaming offspring into the bush for better shelter. Only one or two of the bravest among the men dared show themselves. But with true savage volatility they recovered from their panic as suddenly as they had been seized. One by one they stole to the edge of the bank, where they stood staring down at the travellers, with their shoe-button eyes empty of all human expression.

Stonor had no intention of landing here. He waited with the nose of the Serpent resting in the mud until the excitement died down. Then, through Mary, he requested speech with the head man.

A bent old man tottered down the bank with the aid of a staff. He wore a dirty blanket capote—and a bicycle cap! He faced them, his head wagging with incipient palsy, and his dim eyes looking out bleared, indifferent, and jaded. Sparse grey hairs decorated his chin. It was a picture of age without reverence.

“How dreadful to grow old in a tepee!” murmured Clare.

The old man was accompanied by a comely youth with bold eyes, his grandson, according to Mary. The elder’s name was Ahcunazie, the boy’s Ahteeah.

Stonor, in the name of the Great White Father, harangued the chief in a style similar to that he had used with Ahchoogah. Ahcunazie appeared dazed and incapable of replying, so Stonor said:

“Talk with your people and find out what all desire. I will return in a week for your answer.”

When this was translated the young man spoke up sharply. Mary said: “Ahteeah say, What for you want go down the river?”

Stonor said: “To see the white man,” and watched close to see how they would take it.

The scene in the other village was almost exactly repeated. Ahteeah brought up all the reasons he could think of that would be likely to dissuade Stonor. Other men, hearing what was going forward, came down to support the boy. Stonor’s boat was rotten, they pointed out, and the waves in the rapids ran as high as a man. With vivid gestures they illustrated what would happen to the dug-out in the rapids. If he escaped the rapids he would surely be carried over the Falls; and if he wasn’t, how did he expect to get back up the rapids? And so on.

Old Ahcunazie stood through it all uncomprehending and indifferent. He was too old even to betray any interest in the phenomenon of the white woman.

One thing new the whites marked: “White Medicine Man don’ like white men. He say if white men come he goin’ away.” This suggested a possible reason for the Indian’s opposition.

Stonor still remaining unmoved, Ahteeah brought out as a clincher: “White Medicine Man not home now.”

Stonor and Clare looked at each other startled. This would be a calamity after having travelled all that way. “Where is he?” Stonor demanded.

The young Indian, delighted at his apparent success, answered glibly: “He say he goin’ down to Great Buffalo Lake this summer.”

An instant’s reflection satisfied Stonor that if this were true it would have been brought out first instead of last. “Oh, well, since we’ve come as far as this we’ll go the rest of the way to make sure,” he said calmly.

Ahteeah looked disappointed. They pushed off. The Indians watched them go in sullen silence.

“Certainly we are not popular in this neighbourhood,” said Stonor lightly. “One can’t get rid of the feeling that their minds have been poisoned against us. Mary, can’t you tell me why they give me such black looks?”

She shook her head. “I think there is something,” she said. “But they not tell me because I with you.”

“Maybe it has something to do with me?” said Clare.

“How could that be? They never heard of you.”

“I think it is Stonor,” said Mary.

Clare was harder to rouse out of herself to-day. Stonor did his best not to show that he perceived anything amiss, and strove to cheer her with chaff and foolishness—likewise to keep his own heart up, but not altogether with success.

On one occasion Clare sought to reassure him by saying, *à propos* of nothing that had gone before: “The worst of having an imagination is, that when you have anything to go through with, it keeps presenting the most horrible alternatives in advance until you are almost incapable of facing the thing. And after all it is never so bad as your imagination pictures.”

“I understand that,” said Stonor, “though I don’t suppose anybody would accuse me of being imaginative.”

“‘Something to go through with!’” he thought. “‘Horrible alternatives!’ ‘Never so bad as your imagination pictures!’ What strange phrases for a woman to use who is going to rejoin her husband!”

When they embarked after the second spell Clare asked if she might sit facing forward in the dug-out, so she could see better where they were going. But Stonor guessed this was merely an excuse to escape from having his solicitous eyes on her face.

Next morning they overtook the last Kakisa that they were to see on the way down. He was drifting along close to the shore, and behind him in his canoe sat his little boy as still as a mouse, receiving his education in hunter’s lore. This man was a more intelligent specimen than they had met hitherto. He was a comely little fellow with an extraordinary head of hair cut *à la* Buster Brown, and his name, he said, was Etzooah. Stonor remembered having heard of him and his hair as far away as Fort Enterprise. His manners were good. While naturally astonished at their appearance, he did not on that account lose his self-possession. They conversed politely while drifting down side by side.

Etzooah, in sharp contrast to all the other Kakisas, appeared to see nothing out of the way in their wish to visit the White Medicine Man, nor did he try to dissuade them.

“How far is it to the Great Falls?” asked Stonor.

“One sleep.”

“Are the rapids too bad for a boat?”

“Rapids bad, but not too bad. I go down in my bark-canoe, I guess you go all right in dug-out. Long tam ago my fat’er tell me all the Kakisa people go to the Big Falls ev’ry year at the time when the berries ripe. By the Big Falls they meet the people from Great Buffalo Lake and make big talk there and make dance to do honour to the Old Man under the falls. And this people trade leather for fur with the people from Great Buffalo Lake. But now this people is scare to go there. But I am not scare. I go there. Three times I go there. Each time I leave a little present of tobacco for the Old Man so he know my heart is good towards him. I guess Old Man like a brave man better than a woman. No harm come to me since I go. My wife, my children got plenty to eat; I catch good fur. Bam-bye I take my boy there too. Some men say I crazy for that, but I say no. It is a fine sight. It make a man’s heart big to see that sight.”

This was a man after Stonor’s own heart. “Tell him those are good words,” he said heartily.

When they asked him about the White Man who lived beside the falls, Etzooah’s eyes sparkled. “He say he my friend, and I proud. Since he say that I think more of myself. I walk straight. I am not afraid. He is good. He make the sick well. He give the people good talk. He tell how to live clean and all, so there is no more sickness. He moch like children. He good to my boy. Give him little face that say ‘Ticky-ticky’ and follow the sun.”

Etzooah issued a command to his small son, and the boy shyly exhibited a large cheap nickel watch.

“No other Kakisa man or boy got that,” said the parent proudly.

“Is it true that this white man hates other white men?” asked Stonor.

Etzooah made an emphatic negative. “He got no hate. He say red man white man all the same man.”

“Then he’ll be glad to see us?”

“I think he glad. Got good heart to all.”

“Is he at home now?”

“He is at home. I see him go down the river three sleeps ago.”

Those in the dug-out exchanged looks of astonishment. “Ask him if he is sure?” said Stonor.

Etzooah persisted in his statement. “I not speak him for cause I hiding in bush watchin’ bear. And he is across the river. But I see good. See white face. I know him because he not paddle like Kakisa one side other side; him paddle all time same side and turn the paddle so to make go straight.”

“Where had he been?”

“Up to Horse Track, I guess.”

Horse Track, of course, was the trail from the river to Fort Enterprise. The village at the end of the trail received the same designation. If the tale of this visit was true it might have something to do with the hostility they had met with above.

“But we have just come from the Horse Track,” said Stonor, to feel the man out. “Nobody told us he had been there.”

Etzooah shrugged. “Maybe they scare. Not know what to say to white man.”

But Stonor thought, if anything, they had known too well what to say. “How long had he been up there?” he asked.

“I not know. I not know him gone up river till see him come back.”

“Maybe he only went a little way up.”

Etzooah shook his head vigorously. “His canoe was loaded heavy.”

Etzooah accompanied them to the point where the current began to increase its pace preparatory to the first rapid.

“This the end my hunting-ground,” he said. “Too much work to come back up the rapids.” He saluted them courteously, and caused the little boy to do likewise. His parting remark was: “Tell the White Medicine Man Etzooah never forget he call him friend.”

“Well, we’ve found one gentleman among the Kakisas,” Stonor said to Clare, as they paddled on.

The first rapid was no great affair. There was plenty of water, and they were carried racing smoothly down between low rocky banks. Stonor named the place the Grumbler from the deep throaty sound it gave forth.

In quiet water below they discussed what they had heard.

“It gets thicker and thicker,” said Stonor. “It seems to me that Imbrie’s having been at the Horse Track lately must have had something to do with the chilly reception we received.”

“Why should it?” said Clare. “He has nothing to fear from the coming of anybody.”

“Then why did they say nothing about his visit?”

She shook her head. “You know I cannot fathom these people.”

“Neither can I, for that matter. But it does seem as if he must have told them not to tell anybody they had seen him.”

“It is not like him.”

“Ahteeah said Imbrie hated white men; Etzooah said his heart was kind to all men: which is the truer description?”

“Etzooah’s,” she said instantly. “He has a simple, kind heart. He lives up to the rule ‘Love thy neighbour’ better than any man I ever knew.”

“Well, we’ll know to-morrow,” said Stonor, making haste to drop the disconcerting subject. Privately he asked himself: “Why, if Imbrie is such a good man, does she seem to dread meeting him?” There was no answer forthcoming.

The rapids became progressively wilder and rougher as they went on down, and Stonor was not without anxiety as to the coming back. Sometimes they came on white water unexpectedly around a bend, but the river was not so crooked now, and more often far ahead they saw the white rabbits dancing in the

sunshine, causing their breasts to constrict with a foretaste of fear. As the current bore them inexorably closer, and they picked out the rocks and the great white combers awaiting them, there was always a moment when they longed to turn aside from their fate. But once having plunged into the welter, fear vanished, and a great exhilaration took its place. They shouted madly to each other—even stolid Mary, and were sorry when they came to the bottom. Between rapids the smooth stretches seemed insufferably tedious to pass.

Stonor's endeavour was to steer a middle course between the great billows in the middle of the channel, which he feared might swamp the Serpent or break her in half, and the rocks at each side which would have smashed her to pieces. Luckily he had had a couple of days in which to learn the vagaries of his craft. In descending a swift current one has to bear in mind that any boat begins to answer her helm some yards ahead of the spot where the impulse is applied.

As the day wore on he bethought himself that "one sleep" was an elastic term of distance, and in order to avoid the possibility of being carried over the falls he adopted the rule of landing at the head of each rapid, and walking down the shore to pick his channel, and to make sure that there was smooth water below. They had been told that there was no rapid immediately above the falls, that the water slipped over without giving warning, but Stonor dismissed this into the limbo of red-skin romancing. He did not believe it possible for a river to go over a fall without some preliminary disturbance.

As it happened, dusk descended on them in the middle of a smooth reach, and they made camp for the last time on the descent, pitching the three tents under the pines in the form of a little square open on the river side. Clare was very silent during the meal, and Stonor's gaiety sounded hollow in his own ears. They turned in immediately after eating.

Stonor awoke in the middle of the night without being able to tell what had awakened him. He had a sense that something was wrong. It was a breathless cool night. Under the pines it was very dark, but outside of their shadow the river gleamed wanly. Such sounds as he heard, the murmur of a far-off rapid, and a whisper in the topmost boughs of the pines, conveyed a suggestion of empty immeasurable distances. The fire had burned down to its last embers.

Suddenly he became aware of what was the matter; Clare was weeping. It was the merest hint of a sound, softer than falling leaves, just a catch of the breath that escaped her now and then. Stonor lay listening with bated breath, as if terrified of losing that which tore his heartstrings to hear. He was afflicted with a ghastly sense of impotence. He had no right to intrude on her grief. Yet how could he lie supine when she was in trouble, and make believe not to hear? He could not lie still. He got up, taking no care to be quiet, and built up the fire. She could not know, of course, that he had heard that broken breath. Perhaps she would speak to him. Or, if she could not speak, perhaps she would take comfort from the mere fact of his waking presence outside.

He heard no further sound from her tent.

After a while, because it was impossible for him not to say it, he softly asked: “Are you asleep?”

There was no answer.

He sat down by the fire listening and brooding—humming a little tune meanwhile to assure her of the blitheness of his spirits.

By and by a small voice issued from under her tent: “Please go back to bed,”—and he knew at once that she saw through his poor shift to deceive her.

“Honest, I don’t feel like sleeping,” he said cheerfully.

“Did I wake you?”

“No,” he lied. “Were you up?”

“You were worrying about me,” she said.

“Nothing to speak of. I thought perhaps the silence and the solitude had got on your nerves a little. It’s that kind of a night.”

“I don’t mind it,” she said; “with you near—and Mary,” she quickly added. “Please go back to bed.”

He crept to her tent. It was purely an involuntary act. He was on his knees, but

he did not think of that. “Ah, Clare, if I could only take your trouble from you!” he murmured.

“Hush!” she whispered. “Put me and my troubles out of your head. It is nothing. It is like the rapids; one loses one’s nerve when they loom up ahead. I shall be all right when I am in them.”

“Clare, let me sit here on the ground beside you—not touching you.”

“No—please! Go back to your tent. It will be easier for me.”

In the morning they arose heavily, and set about the business of breakfasting and breaking camp with little speech. Indeed, there was nothing to say. Neither Stonor nor Clare could make believe now to be otherwise than full of dread of what the day had in store. Embarking, Clare took a paddle too, and all three laboured doggedly, careless alike of rough water and smooth.

In the middle of the day they heard, for some minutes before the place itself hove in view, the roar of a rapid greater than any they had passed.

“This will be something!” said Stonor.

But as they swept around the bend above they never saw the rapid, for among the trees on the bank at the beginning of the swift water there stood a little new log shack. That sight struck them like a blow. There was no one visible outside the shack, but the door stood open.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LOG SHACK

It struck them as odd that no one appeared out of the shack. For a man living beside a river generally has his eye unconsciously on the stream, just as a man who dwells by a lonely road lets few pass by unseen. Stonor sent him a hail, as is the custom of the country—but no surprised glad face showed itself.

“He is away,” said Stonor, merely to break the racking silence between him and Clare.

“Would he leave the door open?” she said.

They landed. On the beach lay two birch-bark canoes, Kakisa-made. One had freshly-cut willow-branches lying in the bottom. Stonor happened to notice that the bow-thwart of this canoe was notched in a peculiar way. He was to remember it later. Ordinarily the Kakisa canoes are as like as peas out of the same pod.

From the beach the shack was invisible by reason of the low bank between. Stonor accompanied Clare half-way up the bank. “Mary and I will wait here,” he said.

She looked at him deeply without speaking. It had the effect of a farewell. Stonor saw that she was breathing fast, and that her lips were continually closing and parting again. Leaving him, she walked slowly and stiffly to the door of the shack. Her little hands were clenched. He waited, suffering torments of anxiety for her.

She knocked on the door-frame, and waited. She pushed the door further open, and looked in. She went in, and was gone for a few seconds. Reappearing, she shook her head at Stonor. He went up and joined her. Mary, who, in spite of her

stolidity, was as inquisitive as the next woman, followed him without being bid.

They all entered the shack. Stonor sniffed.

“What is that smell?” asked Clare. “I noticed it at once.”

“Kinni-kinnick.”

She looked at him enquiringly.

“Native substitute for tobacco. It’s made from the inner bark of the red willow. He must have run out of white man’s tobacco.”

She pointed to a can standing on the table. Stonor, lifting it, found it nearly full.

“Funny he should smoke kinni-kinnick when he has Kemble’s mixture. He must be saving that for a last resort.”

Stonor looked around him with a strong curiosity. The room had a grace that was astonishing to find in that far-removed spot; moreover, everything had been contrived out of the rough materials at hand. Two superb black bear-skins lay on the floor. The bed which stood against the back wall was hidden under a beautiful robe made out of scores of little skins cunningly sewed together, lynx-paws with a border of marten. There were two workmanlike chairs fashioned out of willow; one with a straight back at the desk, the other, comfortable and capacious, before the fire. The principal piece of furniture was a birch desk or table, put together with infinite patience with no other tools but an axe and a knife, and rubbed with oil to a satiny finish. On it stood a pair of carved wooden candlesticks holding candles of bears’ tallow, a wooden inkwell, and a carved frame displaying a little photograph—of Clare!

Seeing it, her eyes filled with tears. “I’m glad I came,” she murmured.

Stonor turned away.

A pen lay on the desk where it had been dropped, and beside it was a red leather note-book or diary, of which Clare possessed herself. More than anything else, what lent the room its air of amenity was a little shelf of books and

magazines above the table. There was no glass in the window, of course, but a piece of gauze had been stretched over the opening to keep out the insects at night. For cold weather there was a heavy shutter swung on wooden hinges. The fireplace, built of stones and clay, was in the corner. The arch was cunningly contrived out of thin slabs of stone standing on edge. Stonor immediately noticed that the ashes were still giving out heat.

The room they were in comprised only half the shack. There was a door communicating with the other half. Opening it, they saw that this part evidently served the owner as a work-room and store-room. Cut wood was neatly piled against one wall. Snowshoes, roughly-fashioned fur garments, steel traps and other winter gear were hanging from pegs. There was a window facing the river, this one uncovered, and under it was a work-bench on which lay the remains of a meal and unwashed dishes—humble testimony to the near presence of another fellow-creature in the wilderness. On the floor at one side was a heap of supplies; that is to say, store-grub; evidently what Imbrie had lately brought down, and had not yet put away. There was a door in the back wall of this room, the side of the shack away from the river.

Stonor, looking around, said: “I suppose he used this as a sort of vestibule in the winter, to keep the wind and the snow out of his living-room.”

“Where can he be?” said Clare nervously.

They both spoke instinctively in subdued tones, like intruders fearful of being overheard.

“He can’t have been gone long. He was smoking here just now. The fireplace is still warm.”

“He can’t have intended to stay long, for he left everything open.”

“Well, he would hardly expect to be disturbed up here.”

“But animals?”

“No wild thing would venture close to the fresh man smell. Still, it’s natural to close up when you go away.”

“What do you think?” she asked tremulously.

The sight of her wide, strained eyes, and the little teeth pressed into her lower lip, were inexpressibly painful to him. Clearly it was too much to ask of the high-strung woman, after she had nerved herself up to the ordeal, to go on waiting indefinitely in suspense.

“There are dozens of natural explanations,” he said quickly. “Very likely he’s just gone into the bush to hunt for his dinner.”

Her hand involuntarily went to her breast. “I feel,” she whispered, “as if there were something dreadfully—dreadfully wrong.”

Stonor went outside and lustily holloaed. He received no answer.

It was impossible for them to sit still while they waited. Having seen everything in the house, they walked about outside. Off to the left Imbrie had painstakingly cleared a little garden. Strange it was to see the familiar potato, onion, turnip and cabbage sprouting in orderly rows beside the unexplored river.

Time passed. From a sense of duty they prepared a meal on the shore, and made a pretence of eating it, each for the other’s benefit. Stonor did his best to keep up Clare’s spirits, while at the same time his own mystification was growing. For in circling the shack he could find no fresh track anywhere into the bush. Tracks there were in plenty, where the man had gone for wood, or to hunt perhaps, but all more than twenty-four hours old. To be sure, there was the river, but it was not likely he had still a third canoe: and if he had gone up the river, how could they have missed him? As for going down, no canoe could live in that rapid, Stonor was sure; moreover, he supposed the falls were at the foot of it.

Another thing; both his shot-gun and his rifle were leaning against the fireplace. He might have another gun, but it was not likely. As the hours passed, and the man neither returned nor answered Stonor’s frequent shouts, the policeman began to wonder if an accident could have occurred to him. But he had certainly been alive and well within a half-hour of their arrival, and it seemed too fortuitous a circumstance that anything should have happened just at that juncture. A more probable explanation was that the man had seen them

coming, and had reasons of his own for wishing to keep out of the way. After all, Stonor had no precise knowledge of the situation existing between Imbrie and Clare. But if he had hidden himself, where had he hidden himself?

While it was still full day Stonor persuaded Clare and Mary to remain in the shack for a time, while he made a more careful search for Imbrie's tracks. This time he thoroughly satisfied himself that that day no one had struck into the bush surrounding the shack. He came upon the end of the old carry trail around the falls, and followed it away. But it would have been clear to even a tyro in the bush that no one had used it lately. There remained the beach. It was possible to walk along the stony beach without leaving a visible track. Stonor searched the beach for half a mile in either direction without being able to find a single track in any wet or muddy place, and without discovering any place where one had struck up the bank into the bush. On the down-river side he was halted by a low, sheer wall of rock washed by the current. He made sure that no one had tried to climb around this miniature precipice. From this point the rapids still swept on down out of sight.

He returned to the shack completely baffled, and hoping against hope to find Imbrie returned. But Clare still sat huddled in the chair where he had left her, and looked to him eagerly for news. He could only shake his head.

Finally the sun went down.

"If he is not here by dark," said Clare with a kind of desperate calmness, "we will know something is the matter. His hat, his ammunition-belt, his hunting-knife are all here. He could not have intended to remain away."

Darkness slowly gathered. Nothing happened. At intervals Stonor shouted—only to be mocked by the silence. Just to be doing something he built a great fire outside the shack. If Imbrie should be on the way back it would at least warn him of the presence of visitors.

Stonor was suddenly struck by the fact that Mary had not expressed herself as to the situation. It was impossible to tell from the smooth copper mask of her face of what she was thinking.

“Mary, what do you make of it?” he asked.

She shrugged, declining to commit herself. “All the people say Eembrie got ver’ strong medicine,” she said. “Say he make himself look like anything he want.”

Stonor and Clare exchanged a rueful smile. “I’m afraid that doesn’t help much,” said the former.

Mosquitoes drove them indoors. Stonor closed the door of the shack, and built up the fire in the fireplace. Stonor no longer expected the man to return, but Clare was still tremulously on the *qui vive* for the slightest sound. Mary went off to bed in the store-room. The others remained sitting before the fire in Imbrie’s two chairs. For them sleep was out of the question. Each had privately determined to sit up all night.

For a long time they remained there without speaking.

Stonor had said nothing to Clare about the conclusions he had arrived at concerning Imbrie, but she gathered from his attitude that he was passing judgment against the man they had come in search of, and she said at last:

“Did you notice that little book that I picked up off the desk?”

Stonor nodded.

“It was his diary. Shall I read you from it?”

“If you think it is right.”

“Yes. Just an extract or two. To show you the kind of man he is.”

The book was in the side pocket of her coat. Opening it, and leaning forward to get the light of the fire, she read:

“April 29th: The ice is preparing to go out. Great booming cracks have been issuing from the river all day at intervals. When the jam at the head of the rapids goes it will be a great sight. To-morrow I’ll take a bite to eat with me, and go down to the falls to watch what happens. Thank God for the coming of Spring!

I’m pretty nearly at the end of my resources. I’ve read and re-read my few books and papers until I can almost repeat the contents by heart. I’ve finished my desk, and the candlesticks, and the frame for Clare’s picture. But now I’ll be able to make my garden. And I can sod a little lawn in front of the house with buffalo-grass.”

Clare looked at Stonor for an expression of opinion.

The policeman murmured diffidently: “A real good sort.”

“Wait!” she said. “Listen to this. One of the first entries.” She read in a moved voice:

“They say that a man who lives cut off from his kind is bound to degenerate swiftly, but, by God! I won’t have it so in my case. I’ll be on my guard against the first symptoms. I shave every day and will continue to do so. Shaving is a symbol. I will keep my person and my house as trim as if I expected her to visit me hourly. Half of each day I’ll spend in useful manual labour of some kind, and half in reading and contemplation. The power is mine to build or destroy myself with my thoughts. Well, I choose to build!”

Clare looked at Stonor again.

“That is fine!” he said simply.

“So you see—why I had to come,” she murmured.

He did not see why the one followed necessarily on the other, nor did he understand why she felt impelled to explain it just then. But it seemed better to hold his peace. This revealing of Imbrie’s worthy nature greatly perplexed Stonor. It had been so easy to believe that the two must have been parted as a result of something evil in Imbrie. He could not believe that it had been Clare’s fault, however she might accuse herself. He was not yet experienced enough to conceive of a situation where two honest souls might come to a parting of the ways without either being especially to blame.

For another long period they sat in silence. The influence of the night made itself felt even through the log walls of the shack. They were aware of solitude as

of a physical presence. The fire had burned down to still embers, and down the chimney floated the inexpressibly mournful breath of the pines. The rapids made a hoarser note beyond. Clare shivered, and leaned closer over the fire. Stonor made a move to put on more wood, but she stopped him.

“Don’t!” she said, with queer inconsistency. “It makes too much noise.”

Suddenly the awful stillness was broken by a heavy thudding sound on the ground outside. A gasping cry was forced from Clare. Stonor sprang up, knocking over his chair, and made for the door. Getting it opened, he ran outside. Off to his right he saw, or thought he saw, a suspicious shadow, and he instantly made for it. Whereupon a sudden crashing into the underbrush persuaded him it was no apparition.

Clare’s voice, sharp with terror, arrested him. “Martin, don’t leave me!”

He went back to her, suddenly realizing that to chase an unknown thing bare-handed through the bush at night was scarcely the part of prudence. He got his gun, and flung himself down across the sill of the open door, looking out. Nothing further was to be seen or heard. Beyond the little clearing the river gleamed in the faint dusk. The canoes on the beach were invisible from the door, being under the bank.

“What do you think it was?” whispered Clare.

“Something fell or jumped out of that big spruce nearest the back of the house.” To himself he added: “A natural place to hide. What a fool I was not to think of that before!”

“But what?” said Clare.

Stonor said grimly: “There are only two tree-climbing animals in this country heavy enough to make the sound we heard—bears and men.”

“A bear?”

“Maybe. But I never heard of a bear climbing a tree beside a house, and at night, too. Don’t know what he went up for.”

“Oh, it couldn’t be——” Clare began. She never finished.

Stonor kept his vigil at the open door. He bade Clare throw ashes on the embers, that no light from behind might show him up. When she had done it she crept across the floor and sat close beside him. Mary, apparently, had not been awakened.

Minutes passed, and they heard no sounds except the rapids and the pines. Clare was perfectly quiet, and Stonor could not tell how she was bearing the strain. He bethought himself that he had perhaps spoken his mind too clearly. To reassure her he said:

“It must have been a bear.”

“You do not think so really,” she said. A despairing little wail escaped her. “I don’t understand! Oh, I don’t understand! Why should he hide from us?”

Stonor could find little of comfort to say. “Morning will make everything clear, I expect. We shall be laughing at our fears then.”

The minutes grew into hours, and they remained in the same positions. Nature is merciful to humans, and little by little the strain was eased. The sharpness of their anxiety was dulled. They were conscious only of a dogged longing for the dawn. At intervals Stonor suggested to Clare that she go lie down on the bed, but when she begged to remain beside him, he had not the heart to insist. In all that time they heard nothing beyond the natural sounds of the night; the stirrings of little furry footfalls among the leaves; the distant bark of a fox.

And then without the slightest warning the night was shattered by a blood-curdling shriek of terror from Mary Moosa in the room adjoining. Stonor’s first thought was for the effect on Clare’s nerves. He jumped up, savagely cursing the Indian woman. He ran to the communicating door. Clare was close at his heels.

Mary was lying on the floor, covering her head with her arms, moaning in an extremity of terror, and gibbering in her own tongue. For a while she could not tell them what was the matter. Stonor thought she was dreaming. Then she began to cry in English: “Door! Door!” and to point to it. Stonor made for the door, but Clare with a cry clung to him, and Mary herself, scrambling on all fours,

clutched him around the knees. Stonor felt exquisitely foolish.

“Well, let me secure it,” he said gruffly.

This door was fitted with a bar, which he swung into place. At the window across the room, he swung the shutter in, and fastened that also.

“You see,” he said. “No one can get in here now.”

They took the shaking Mary into the next room. To give them a better sense of security, Stonor tore the cotton out of the window and fastened this shutter also. There was no bar on this door. He preferred to leave it open, and to mount guard in the doorway.

Gradually Mary calmed down sufficiently to tell them what had happened. “Little noise wake me. I not know what it is. I listen. Hear it again. Come from door. I watch. Bam-bye I see the door open so slow, so slow. I so scare can’t cry. My tongue is froze. I see a hand pushin’ the door. I see a head stick in and listen. Then I get my tongue again. I cry out. Door close. I hear somebody runnin’ outside.”

Stonor and Clare looked at each other. “Not much doubt about the kind of animal now,” said the former deprecatingly.

Clare spread out her hands. “He must be mad,” she whispered.

Mary and Clare clung to each other like sisters. Stonor remained at the door watching the clear space between the shack and the river. Nothing stirred there. Stonor heard no more untoward sounds.

Fortunately for the nerves of the women the nights were short. While they watched and prayed for the dawn, and told themselves it would never come, it was suddenly there. It came, and they could not see it come. The light stole between the trees; the leaves dressed themselves with colour. A little breeze came from the river, and seemed to blow the last of the murk away. By half-past three it was full day.

“I must go out and look around,” said Stonor.

Clare implored him not to leave them.

“It is necessary,” he said firmly.

“Your red coat is so conspicuous,” she faltered.

“It is my safeguard,” he said; “that is, against humans. As for animals, I can protect myself.” He showed them his service revolver.

He left them weeping. He went first to the big spruce-tree behind the house. He immediately saw, as he had expected, that a man had leaped out of the lower branches. There were the two deep prints of moccasined feet; two hand-prints also where he had fallen forward. He had no doubt come down faster than he had intended. It was child’s play after that to follow his headlong course through the bush. Soon Stonor saw that he had slackened his pace—no doubt at the moment when Stonor turned back to the shack. Still the track was written clear. It made a wide detour through the bush, and came back to the door of the room where Mary had been sleeping. The man had taken a couple of hours to make perhaps three hundred yards. He had evidently wormed himself along an inch at a time, to avoid giving an alarm.

When Mary cried out he had taken back to the bush on the other side of the shack. Stonor, following the tracks, circled through the bush on this side, and was finally led to the edge of the river-bank. The instant that he pushed through the bushes he saw that one of the bark-canoes was missing. Running to the place where they lay, he saw that it was the one with the willow-bushes that was gone. No need to look any further. There was nothing in view for the short distance that he could see up-river.

CHAPTER IX

THE FOOT

Stonor, returning to the shack, was hailed with joy as one who might have come back from Hades unscathed. He told Clare just what he had found.

“What do you think?” she asked anxiously.

“Isn’t it clear? He saw us coming and took to the tree. There were so many tracks around the base of the tree that I was put off. He must have been hidden there all the time we were looking for him and shouting. As soon as it got dark he tried to make his get-away, but his calculations were somewhat upset by his falling. Even after we had taken warning, he had to risk getting into his store-room, because all his food was there. No doubt he thought we would all be in the other room, and he could sneak in and take what he could carry. When he was scared off by Mary’s scream he started his journey without it, that’s all.”

“But why *should* he run from us—from me?”

Stonor shrugged helplessly.

She produced the little red book again. “Read something here,” she said, turning the pages.

Under her directing finger, while she looked aside, he read: “The hardest thing I have to contend against is my hunger for her. Discipline is of little avail against that. I spend whole days wrestling with myself, trying to get the better of it, and think I have conquered, only to be awakened at night by wanting her worse than ever.”

“Does that sound as if he wished to escape me?” she murmured.

In her distress of mind it did not occur to her, of course, that this was rather a cruel situation for Stonor. He did not answer for a moment; then said in a low tone: “I am afraid his mind is unhinged. You suggested it.”

“I know,” she said quickly. “But I have been thinking it over. It can’t be. Listen to this.” She hastily turned the pages of the little book. “What day is this?”

“The third of July.”

“This was written June 30th, only four days ago. It is the last entry in the book. Listen!” She read, while the tears started to her eyes:

“I must try to get in some good books on natural history. If I could make better friends with the little wild things around me I need never be lonely. There is a young rabbit who seems disposed to hit it off with me. I toss him a bit of biscuit after breakfast every morning. He comes and waits for it now. He eats it daintily in my sight; then, with a flirt of his absurd tail for ‘thank you,’ scampers down to the river to wash it down.”

“Those are not the thoughts of a man out of his mind.”

“No,” he admitted, “but everything you have read shows him to be of a sensitive, high-strung nature. On such a man the sudden shock of our coming ____”

“Oh, then I have waited too long!” she cried despairingly. “And now I can never repay!”

“Not necessarily,” said Stonor with a dogged patience. “Such cases are common in the North. But I never knew one to be incurable.”

She took this in, and it comforted her partly; but her thoughts were still busy with matters remote from Stonor. After a while she asked abruptly: “What do you think we ought to do?”

“Start up the river at once,” he said. “We’ll hear news of him on the way. We’ll overtake him in the end.”

She stared at him with troubled eyes, pondering this suggestion. At last she slowly shook her head. “I don’t think we ought to go,” she murmured.

“What!” he cried, astonished. “You wish to stay here—after last night! Why?”

“I don’t know,” she said helplessly.

“But if the man is really not right, he needs looking after. We ought to hurry after him.”

“It seems so,” she said, still with the air of those who speak what is strange to themselves; “but I have an intuition, a premonition—I don’t know what to call it! Something tells me that we do not yet know the truth.”

Stonor turned away helplessly. He could not argue against a woman’s reason like this.

“Ah, don’t be impatient with me,” she said appealingly. “Just wait to-day. If nothing happens during the day to throw any light on what puzzles us, I will make no more objections. I’ll be willing to start this afternoon, and camp up the river.”

“It will give him twelve hours’ start of us.”

Her surprising answer was: “I don’t think he’s gone.”

Stonor made his way over the old portage trail. He wished to have a look at the Great Falls before returning up-river. Clare, waiting for what she could not have told, had chosen to remain at the shack, and Mary Moosa was not afraid to stay with her by daylight. Like Stonor, Mary believed that the man had undoubtedly left the neighbourhood, and that no further danger was to be apprehended from that quarter.

Stonor went along abstractedly, climbing over the obstructions or cutting a way through, almost oblivious to his surroundings. His heart was jealous and sore. His instinct told him that the man who had prowled around the shack the night before was an evil-doer; yet Clare persisted in exalting him to the skies. In

his present temper it seemed to Stonor as if Clare purposely made his task as hard as possible for him. In fact, the trooper had a grievance against the whole world.

Suddenly he realized that his brain was simply chasing itself in circles. Stopping short, he shook himself much like a dog on issuing from the water. His will was to shake off the horrors of the past night and his dread of the future. Better sense told him that only weakness lay in dwelling on these things. Let things fall as they would, he would meet them like a man, he hoped, and no more could be asked of him. In the meantime he would not worry himself into a stew. He went on with a lighter breast.

From the cutting in the trail Stonor saw that someone had travelled that way a while before, probably during the previous season, for the cuts on green wood were half-healed. It was clear, from the amount of cutting he had been obliged to do, that this traveller was the first that way in many years. Stonor further saw from the style of his axe-work that he was a white man; a white man chops a sapling with one stroke clean through: a red man makes two chops, half-way through on each side. This was pretty conclusive evidence that Imbrie had first come from down-river.

This trail had not been used since, and Stonor, remembering the suggestion in Imbrie’s diary that he frequently visited the falls, supposed that he had some other way of reaching there. He determined to see if it was practicable to make his way along the beach on the way back.

The trail did not take him directly to the falls, but in a certain place he saw signs of an old side-path striking off towards the river, and, following this, he was brought out on a plateau of rock immediately above the spot where the river stepped off into space. Here he stood for a moment to prepare himself for the sight before looking over. His eye was caught by some ends of string fluttering from the branches of a bush beside him. He was at a loss to account for their presence until he remembered Etzooah and his humble offerings to the Old Man. Here Etzooah had tied his tobacco-bags.

Approaching the brink, the river smoothed itself a little as if gathering its

forces for the leap, and over the edge itself it slipped smoothly. It was true to a certain extent that the cataract muffled its own voice, but the earth trembled. The gorge below offered a superb prospect. After the invariable flatness and tameness of the shores above, the sudden cleft in the world impressed the beholder stunningly.

Then Stonor went to the extreme edge and looked over. A deep, dull roar smote upon his ears; he was bewildered and satisfied. Knowing the Indian propensity to exaggerate, he had half expected to find merely a cascade wilder than anything above; or perhaps a wide straggling series of falls. It was neither. The entire river gathered itself up, and plunged sheer into deep water below. The river narrowed down at the brink, and the volume of water was stupendous. The drop was over one hundred feet. The water was of the colour of strong tea, and as it fell it drew over its brown sheen a lovely, creamy fleece of foam. Tight little curls of spray puffed out of the falling water like jets of smoke, and, spreading and descending, merged into the white cloud that rolled about the foot of the falls. This cloud itself billowed up in successive undulations like full draperies, only to spread out and vanish in the sunshine.

Stonor had the solemn feeling that comes to the man who knows himself to be among the first of his race to gaze on a great natural wonder. He and Imbrie alone had seen this sight. What of the riddle of Imbrie? Doctor, magician, skulker in the night, madman perhaps—and Clare’s husband! Must he be haunted by him all his life? But the noble spectacle before Stonor’s eyes calmed his nerves. All will be clear in the end, he told himself. And nothing could destroy his thought of Clare.

He would liked to have remained for hours, but everything drew him back to the shack. He started back along the beach. On the whole it was easier going than by the encumbered trail. There were no obstacles except the low precipice that has been mentioned, and that proved to be no great matter to climb around. Meanwhile every foot of the rapid offered a fascinating study to the river-man. This rapid seemed to go against all the customary rules for rapids. Nowhere in all its torn expanse could Stonor pick a channel; the rocks stuck up everywhere.

He noticed that one could have returned in a canoe in safety from the very brink of the falls by means of the back-waters that crept up the shore.

His attention was caught by a log-jam out in the rapid. He had scarcely noticed it the day before while searching for tracks. Two great rocks, that stuck out of the water close together where the current ran swiftest, had at some time caught an immense fallen tree squarely on their shoulders, and the pressure of the current held it there. Another tree had caught on the obstruction, and another, and now the fantastic pile reared itself high out of the water.

At the moment Stonor had no weightier matter on his mind than to puzzle how this had come about. Suddenly his blood ran cold to perceive what looked like a human foot sticking out of the water at the bottom of the pile. He violently rubbed his eyes, thinking that they deceived him. But there was no mistake. It *was* a foot, clad in a moccasin of the ordinary style of the country. While Stonor looked it was agitated back and forth as in a final struggle. With a sickened breast, he instinctively looked around for some means of rescue. But he immediately realized that the owner of the foot was long past aid. The movement was due simply to the action of the current.

His brain whirled dizzily. A foot? Whose foot? Imbrie's? There was no other man anywhere near. But Imbrie knew the place so well he could not have been carried down, unless he had chosen to end his life that way. And his anxiety to obtain food the night before did not suggest that he had any intention of putting himself out of the way. Perhaps it was an Indian drowned up-river and carried down. But they would surely have heard of the accident on the way. More likely Imbrie. If his brain was unhinged, who could say what wild impulse might seize him? Was this the reason for Clare's premonition? If it was Imbrie, how could he tell her?

Stonor forced down the mounting horror that constricted his throat, and soberly bethought himself of what he must do. Useless to speculate on whose the body might be; he had to find out. He examined the place up and down with fresh care. The log-jam was about half-a-mile above the falls, and a slightly lesser distance below Imbrie's shack. It was nearer his side of the river than the other; say, fifty yards of torn white water lay between the drift-pile and the

beach. To wade or swim out was out of the question. On the other hand, the strongest flow of water, the channel such as it was, set directly for the obstruction, and it might be possible to drop down on it from above—if one provided some means for getting back again. Stonor marked the position of every rock, every reef above, and little by little made his plan.

He returned to the shack. In her present state of nerves he dared not tell Clare of what he had found. In any case he might be mistaken in his supposition as to the identity of the body. In that case she need never be told. He was careful to present himself with a smooth face.

“Any news?” cried Clare eagerly. “You’ve been gone so long!”

He shook his head. “Anything here?”

“Nothing. I am ready to go now as soon as we have eaten.”

Stonor, faced with the necessity of suddenly discovering some reason for delaying their start, stroked his chin. “Have you slept?” he asked.

“How could I sleep?”

“I don’t think you ought to start until you’ve had some sleep.”

“I can sleep later.”

“I need sleep too. And Mary.”

“Of course! How selfish of me! We can start towards evening, then.”

While Clare was setting the biscuits to the fire in the shack, and Stonor was chopping wood outside, Mary came out for an armful of wood. The opportunity of speaking to her privately was too good to be missed.

“Mary,” said Stonor. “There’s a dead body caught in the rapids below here.”

“Wah!” she cried, letting the wood fall. “You teenk it is *him*?”

“I don’t know. I suppose so. I’ve got to find out.”

“Find out? In the rapids? How you goin’ find out? You get carry over the falls!”

“Not so loud! I’ve got it all doped out. I’m taking no unnecessary chances. But I’ll need you to help me.”

“I not help you,” said Mary rebelliously. “I not help you drown yourself—for a dead man. He’s dead anyhow. If you go over the falls what we do? What we do?”

“Easy! I told you I had a good plan. Wait and see what it is. Get her to sleep this afternoon, and we’ll try to pull it off before she wakes. Now run on in, or she’ll wonder what we’re talking about. Don’t show anything in your face.”

Mary’s prime accomplishment lay in hiding her feelings. She picked up her wood, and went stolidly into the shack.

Stonor, searching among Imbrie’s things, was much reassured to find a tracking-line. This, added to his own line, would give him six hundred feet of rope, which he judged ample for his purpose. He spliced the two while the meal was preparing.

“What’s that for?” Clare asked.

“To help us up-stream.”

As soon as he had eaten he went back to the beach. His movements here were invisible to those in the shack. He carried the remaining bark-canoe on his back down the beach to a point about a hundred and fifty yards above the log-jam. This was to be his point of departure. He took a fresh survey of the rapids, and went over and over in his mind the course he meant to take.

After cutting off several short lengths that he required for various purposes, Stonor fastened the end of the line to a tree on the edge of the bank; the other end he made fast to the stern of the canoe—not to the point of the stern, but to the stern-thwart where it joined the gunwale. This was designed to hold the canoe at an angle against the current that would keep her out in the stream. The slack of the line was coiled neatly on the beach.

With one of the short lengths Stonor then made an offset from this line near where it was fastened to the thwart, and passed it around his own body under the arms. Thus, if the canoe smashed on the rocks or swamped, by cutting the line at the thwart the strain would be transferred to Stonor's body, and the canoe could be left to its fate. Another short length with a loop at the end was made fast at the other end of the thwart. This was for the purpose of making fast to the log-jam while Stonor worked to free the body. A third piece of line he carried around his neck. This was to secure the body.

During the course of these preparations Mary joined him. She reported that Clare was fast asleep. Stonor made a little prayer that she might not awaken till this business was over.

He explained to Mary what he was about, and showed her her part. She listened sullenly, but, seeing that his mind was made up, shrugged at the uselessness of opposing his will. Mary was to pay out the rope according to certain instructions, and afterwards to haul him in.

Finally, after reassuring himself of the security of all his knots, he divested himself of hat, tunic, and boots and stepped into the canoe. He shook hands with Mary, took his knife between his teeth, and pushed off. He made as much as he could out of the back-water alongshore, and then, heading diagonally up-stream, shot out into the turmoil, paddling like a man possessed in order to make sure of getting far enough out before the current swept him abreast of his destination. Mary, according to instructions, paid out the rope freely. Before starting he had marked every rock in his course, and he avoided them now by instinct. His thinking had been done beforehand. He worked like a machine.

He saw that he was going to make it, with something to spare. When he had the log-jam safely under his quarter, he stopped paddling, and, bringing the canoe around, drifted down on it. There was plenty of water out here. He held up a hand to Mary, and according to pre-arrangement she gradually took up the strain on the line. The canoe slowed up, and the current began to race past.

So far so good. The line held the canoe slightly broached to the current, thus the pressure of the current itself kept him from edging ashore. The log-pile

loomed up squarely ahead of him. Mary let him down on it hand over hand. He manœuvred himself abreast an immense log pointing up and down river, alongside of which the current slipped silkily. Casting his loop over the stump of a branch, he was held fast and the strain was taken off Mary's arms.

The moccasined foot protruded from the water at the bow of his canoe. He soon saw the impossibility of attempting to work from the frail canoe, so he untied the rope which bound him to it, and pulled himself out on the logs. The rope from the shore was still around his body in case of a slip. He was taking no unnecessary chances.

The body was caught in some way under the same great log that his canoe was fastened to. The current tore at the projecting foot with a snarl. The foot oscillated continually under the pull, and sometimes disappeared altogether, only to spring back into sight with a ghastly life-like motion. Stonor cautiously straddled the log, and groped beneath it. His principal anxiety was that log and all might come away from the jam and be carried down, but there was little danger that his insignificant weight would disturb so great a bulk.

The body was caught in the fork of a branch underneath. He succeeded in freeing the other foot. He guessed that a smart pull up-stream would liberate the whole, but in that case the current would almost surely snatch it from his grasp. He saw that it would be an impossible task from his insecure perch to drag the body out on the log, and in turn load it into the fragile canoe. His only chance lay in towing it ashore.

So, with the piece of line he had brought for the purpose, he lashed the feet together, and made the other end fast to the bow-thwart of the canoe. Then he got in and adjusted his stern-line as before—it became the bow-line for the return journey. In case it should become necessary to cut adrift from the canoe, he took the precaution of passing a line direct from his body to that which he meant to tow. When all was ready he signalled to Mary to haul in.

Now began the most difficult half of his journey. On the strength of Mary's arms depended the freeing of the body. It came away slowly. Stonor had an instant's glimpse of the ghastly tow bobbing astern, before settling down to the

business in hand. For awhile all went well, though the added pull of the submerged body put a terrific strain on Mary. Fortunately she was as strong as a man. Stonor aided her all he could with his paddle, but that was little. He was kept busy fending his egg-shell craft off the rocks. He had instructed Mary, as the slack accumulated, to walk gradually up the beach. This was to avoid the danger of the canoe's broaching too far to the current. But Mary could not do it under the increased load. The best she could manage was to brace her body against the stones, and pull in hand over hand.

As the line shortened Stonor saw that he was going to have trouble. Instead of working in-shore, the canoe was edging further into the stream, and ever presenting a more dangerous angle to the tearing current. Mary had pulled in about a third of the line, when suddenly the canoe, getting the current under her dead rise, darted out into mid-stream like a fish at the end of a line, and hung there canting dangerously. The current snarled along the gunwale like an animal preparing to crush its prey.

The strain on Mary was frightful. She was extended at full length with her legs braced against an outcrop of rock. Stonor could see her agonized expression. He shouted to her to slack off the line, but of course the roar of the water drowned his puny voice. In dumb-play he tried desperately to show her what to do, but Mary was possessed of but one idea, to hang on until her arms were pulled out.

The canoe tipped inch by inch, and the boiling water crept up its freeboard. Finally it swept in, and Stonor saw that all was over with the canoe. With a single stroke of his knife he severed the rope at the thwart behind him; with another stroke the rope in front. When the tug came on his body he was jerked clean out of the canoe. It passed out of his reckoning. By the drag behind him, he knew he still had the dead body safe.

He instinctively struck out, but the tearing water, mocking his feeble efforts, buffeted him this way and that as with the swing of giant arms. Sometimes he was spun helplessly on the end of his line like a trolling-spoon. He was flung sideways around a boulder and pressed there by the hands of the current until it seemed the breath was slowly leaving his body. Dazed, blinded, gasping, he

somehow managed to struggle over it, and was cast further in-shore. The tendency of the current was to sweep him in now. If he could only keep alive! The stones were thicker in-shore. He was beaten first on one side, then the other. All his conscious efforts were reduced to protecting his head from the rocks with his arms.

The water may have been but a foot or two deep, but of course he could gain no footing. He still dragged his leaden burden. All the breath was knocked out of him under the continual blows, but he was conscious of no pain. The last few moments were a blank. He found himself in the back-water, and expended his last ounce of strength in crawling out on hands and knees on the beach. He cast himself flat, sobbing for breath.

Mary came running to his aid. He was able to nod to her reassuringly, and in the ecstasy of her relief, she sat down suddenly, and wept like a white woman. Stonor gathered himself together and sat up groaning. The onset of pain was well-nigh unendurable. He felt literally as if his flesh all over had been pounded to a jelly. But all his limbs, fortunately, responded to their functions.

“Lie still,” Mary begged of him.

He shook his head. “I must keep moving, or I’ll become as helpless as a log.”

The nameless thing was floating in the back-water. Together they dragged it out on the stones. It was Stonor’s first sight of that which had cost him such pains to secure. He nerved himself to bear it. Mary was no fine lady, but she turned her head away. The man’s face was totally unrecognizable by reason of the battering it had received on the rocks; his clothes were partly in ribbons; there was a gaping wound in the breast.

For the rest, as far as Stonor could judge, it was the body of a young man, and a comely one. His skin was dark like that of an Italian, or a white man with a quarter or eighth strain of Indian blood in his veins. Stonor was astonished by this fact; nothing that he had heard had suggested that Imbrie was not as white as himself. This put a new look on affairs. For an instant Stonor doubted. But the man’s hand was well-formed and well-kept; and in what remained of his clothes one could still see the good materials and the neatness. In fact, it could be none

other than Imbrie.

He was roused from his contemplation of the gruesome object by a sharp exclamation from Mary. Looking up, he saw Clare a quarter of a mile away, hastening to them along the beach. His heart sank.

“Go to her,” he said quickly. “Keep her from coming here.”

Mary hastened away. Stonor followed more slowly, disguising his soreness as best he could. For him it was cruel going over the stones—yet all the way he was oddly conscious of the beauty of the wild cascade, sweeping down between its green shores.

As he had feared, Clare refused to be halted by Mary. Thrusting the Indian woman aside, she came on to Stonor.

“What’s the matter?” she cried stormily. “Why did you both leave me? Why does she try to stop me?—Why! you’re all wet! Where’s your tunic, your boots? You’re in pain!”

“Come to the house,” he said. “I’ll tell you.”

She would not be put off. “What has happened? I insist on knowing now! What is there down there I mustn’t see?”

“Be guided by me,” he pleaded. “Come away, and I’ll tell you everything.”

“I *will* see!” she cried. “Do you wish to put me out of my mind with suspense?”

He saw that it was perhaps kinder not to oppose her. “I have found a body in the river,” he said. “Do not look at it. Let me tell you.”

She broke away from him. “I must know the worst,” she muttered.

He let her go. She ran on down the beach, and he hobbled after. She stopped beside the body, and looked down with wide, wild eyes. One dreadful low cry escaped her.

“Ernest!”

She collapsed. Stonor caught her sagging body. Her head fell limply back over his arm.

CHAPTER X

THE START HOME

Stonor, refusing aid from Mary, painfully carried his burden all the way back to the shack. He laid her on the bed. There was no sign of returning animation. Mary loosened her clothing, chafed her hands, and did what other offices her experience suggested. After what seemed like an age to the watchers, she stirred and sighed. Stonor dreaded then what recollection would bring to her awakening. But there was neither grief nor terror in the quiet look she bent first on one then the other; only a kind of annoyed perplexity. She closed her eyes again without speaking, and presently her deepened breathing told them that she slept.

"Thank God!" whispered Stonor. "It's the best thing for her."

Mary followed him out of the shack. "Watch her close," he charged her. "If you want me for anything come down to the beach and hail."

Stonor procured another knife and returned to the body. In the light of Clare's identification he could have no further doubt that this was indeed the remains of the unhappy Imbrie. She had her own means of identification, he supposed. The man, undoubtedly deranged, must have pushed off in his canoe and let the current carry him to his death. Stonor, however, thinking of the report he must make to his commanding officer, knew that his speculations were not sufficient. Much as he disliked the necessity, it was incumbent on him to perform an autopsy.

This developed three surprising facts in this order: (a) there was no water in the dead man's lungs, proving that he was already dead when his body entered the water: (b) there was a bullet-hole through his heart: (c) the bullet itself was

lodged in his spine.

For a moment Stonor thought of murder—but only for a moment. A glance showed him that the bullet was of thirty-eight calibre, a revolver-bullet. Revolvers are unknown to the Indians. Stonor knew that there were no revolvers in all the country round except his own, Gaviller's forty-four, and one that the dead man himself might have possessed. Consequently he saw no reason to change his original theory of suicide. Imbrie, faced by that terrible drop, had merely hastened the end by putting a bullet through his heart.

Stonor kept the bullet as possible evidence. He then looked about for a suitable burial-place. His instinct was to provide the poor fellow with a fair spot for his last long rest. Up on top of the low precipice of rock that has been mentioned, there was a fine point of vantage visible up-river beyond the head of the rapids. At no small pains Stonor dragged the body up here, and with his knife dug him a shallow grave between the roots of a conspicuous pine. It was a long, hard task. He covered him with brush in lieu of a coffin, and, throwing the earth back, heaped a cairn of stones on top. Placing a flat stone in the centre, he scratched the man's name on it and the date. He spoke no articulate prayer, but thought one perhaps.

"Sleep well, old fellow. It seems I was never to know you, though you haunted me—and may perhaps haunt me still."

Dragging himself wearily back to the shack, Stonor found that Clare still slept.

"Fine!" he said with clearing face. "There's no doctor like sleep!"

His secret dread was that she might become seriously ill. What would he do in that case, so far away from help?

He sat himself down to watch beside Clare while Mary prepared the evening meal. There were still some three hours more of daylight, and he decided to be guided as to their start up-river by Clare's condition when she awoke. If she had a horror of the place they could start at once, provided she were able to travel, and sleep under canvas. Otherwise it would be well to wait until morning, for he was pretty nearly all in himself. Indeed, while he waited with the keenest anxiety

for Clare’s eyes to open, his own closed. He slept with his head fallen forward on his breast.

He awoke to find Clare’s wide-open eyes wonderingly fixed on him.

“Who are you?” she asked.

It struck a chill to his breast. Was she mad? This was a more dreadful horror than he had foreseen. Yet there was nothing distraught in her gaze, merely that same look of perplexed annoyance. It was an appreciable moment before he could collect his wits sufficiently to answer.

“Your friend,” he said, forcing himself to smile.

“Yes, I think you are,” she said slowly. “But it’s funny I don’t quite know you.”

“You soon will.”

“What is your name?”

“Martin Stonor.”

“And that uniform you are wearing?”

“Mounted police.”

She raised herself a little, and looked around. The puzzled expression deepened. “What a strange-looking room! What am I doing in such a place?”

To Stonor it was like a conversation in a dream. It struck awe to his breast. Yet he forced himself to answer lightly and cheerfully. “This is a shack in the woods where we are camping temporarily. We’ll start for home as soon as you are able.”

“Home? Where is that?” she cried like a lost child.

A great hard lump rose in Stonor’s throat. He could not speak.

After a while she said: “I feel all right. I could eat.”

“That’s fine!” he cried from the heart. “That’s the main thing. Supper will soon be ready.”

The next question was asked with visible embarrassment. “You are not my brother, are you, or any relation?”

“No, only your friend,” he said, smiling.

She was troubled like a child, biting her lip, and turning her face from him to hide the threatening tears. There was evidently some question she could not bring herself to ask. He could not guess what it was. Certainly not the one she did ask.

“What time is it?”

“Past seven o’clock.”

“That means nothing to me,” she burst out bitterly. “It’s like the first hour to me. It’s so foolish to be asking such questions! I don’t know what’s the matter with me! I don’t even know my own name!”

That was it! “Your name is Clare Starling,” he said steadily.

“What am I doing in a shack in the woods?”

He hesitated before answering this. His first fright had passed. He had heard of people losing their memories, and knew that it was not necessarily a dangerous state. Indeed, now, this wiping-out of recollection seemed like a merciful dispensation, and he dreaded the word that would bring the agony back.

“Don’t ask any more questions now,” he begged her. “Just rest up for the moment, and take things as they come.”

“Something terrible has happened!” she said agitatedly. “That is why I am like this. You’re afraid to tell me what it is. But I must know. Nothing could be so bad as not knowing anything. It is unendurable not to have any identity. Don’t you understand? I am empty inside here. The me is gone!”

He arose and stood beside her bed. “I ask you to trust me,” he said gravely. “I

am the only doctor available. If you excite yourself like this only harm can come of it. Everything is all right now. You have nothing to fear. People who lose their memories always get them back again. If you do not remember of yourself I promise to tell you everything that has happened."

"I will try to be patient," she said dutifully.

Presently she asked: "Is there no one here but us? I thought I remembered a woman—or did I dream it?"

Stonor called Mary in and introduced her. Clare's eyes widened. "An Indian woman!" their expression said.

Stonor said, as if speaking of the most everyday matter: "Mary, Miss Starling's memory is gone. It will soon return, of course, and in the meantime plenty of food and sleep are the best things for her. She has promised me not to ask any more questions for the present."

Mary paled slightly. To her, loss of memory smacked of insanity of which she was terribly in awe—like all her race. However, under Stonor's stern eye she kept her face pretty well.

Clare said: "I'd like to get up now," and Stonor left the shack.

Nothing further happened that night. Clare ate a good supper, and a bit of colour returned to her cheeks. Stonor had no reason to be anxious concerning her physical condition. She asked no more questions. Immediately after eating he sent her and Mary to bed. Shortly afterwards Mary reported that Clare had fallen asleep again.

Stonor slept in the store-room. He was up at dawn, and by sunrise he had everything ready for the start up-river.

It was an entirely self-possessed Clare that issued from the shack after breakfast, yet there was something inaccessible about her. Though she was anxious to be friends with Stonor and Mary, she was cut off from them. They had to begin all over again with her. There was something piteous in the sight of the little figure so alone even among her friends; but she was bearing it pluckily.

She looked around her eagerly. The river was very lovely, with the sun drinking up the light mist from its surface.

“What river is this?” she asked.

Stonor told her.

“It is not altogether strange to me,” she said. “I feel as if I might have known it in a previous existence. There is a fall below, isn’t there?”

“Yes.”

“How do you suppose I knew that?”

He shrugged, smiling.

“And the—the catastrophe happened down there,” she said diffidently. He nodded.

“I feel it like a numb place inside me. But I don’t want to go down there. I feel differently from yesterday. Some day soon, of course, I must turn back the dreadful pages, but not quite yet. I want a little sunshine and laziness and sleep first; a little vacation from trouble.”

“That’s just as it should be,” said Stonor, much relieved.

“Isn’t it funny, I can’t remember anything that ever happened to me, yet I haven’t forgotten everything I knew. I know the meaning of things. I still seem to talk like a grown-up person. Words come to me when I need them. How do you explain that?”

“Well, I suppose it’s because just one little department of your brain has stopped working for a while.”

“Well, I’m not going to worry. The world is beautiful.”

The journey up-stream was a toilsome affair. Though the current between the rapids was not especially swift, it made a great difference when what had been added to their rate of paddling on the way down, was deducted on the way back.

Stonor foresaw that it would take them close on ten days to make the Horse-Track. He and Mary took turns tracking the canoe from the bank, while the other rested. Clare steered. Ascending the rapids presented no new problems to a river-man, but it was downright hard work. All hands joined in pulling and pushing, careless of how they got wet.

The passing days brought no change in Clare's mental state, and in Stonor the momentary dread of some thought or word that might bring recollection crashing back, was gradually lulled. Physically she showed an astonishing improvement, rejoicing in the hard work in the rapids, eating and sleeping like a growing boy. To Stonor it was enchanting to see the rosy blood mantle her pale cheeks and the sparkle of bodily well-being enhance her eyes. With this new tide of health came a stouter resistance to imaginative terrors. Away with doubts and questionings! For the moment the physical side of her was uppermost. It was Nature's own way of effecting a cure. Towards Stonor, in this new character of hers, she displayed a hint of laughing boldness that enraptured him.

At first he would not let himself believe what he read in her new gaze; that the natural woman who had sloughed off the burdens of an unhappy past was disposed to love him. But of course he could not really resist so sweet a suggestion. Let him tell himself all he liked that he was living in a fool's paradise; that when recollection returned, as it must in the end, she would think no more of him; nevertheless, when she looked at him like that, he could not help being happy. The journey took on a thousand new delights for him; such delights as his solitary youth had never known. At least, he told himself, there was no sin in it, for the only man who had a better claim on her was dead and buried.

One night they were camped beside some bare tepee poles on a point of the bank. Mary had gone off to set a night-line in an eddy; Stonor lay on his back in the grass smoking, and Clare sat near, nursing her knees.

"You've forbidden me to ask questions about myself," said she; "but how about you?"

"Oh, there's nothing to tell about me."

She affected to study him with a disinterested air. “I don’t believe you have a wife,” she said wickedly. “You haven’t a married look.”

“What kind of a look is that?”

“Oh, a sort of apologetic look.”

“Well, as a matter of fact, I’m not married,” he said, grinning.

“Have you a sweetheart?” she asked in her abrupt way, so like a boy’s.

Stonor regarded his pipe-bowl attentively, but did not thereby succeed in masking his blushes.

“Aha! You have!” she cried. “No need to answer.”

“That depends on what you mean,” he said, determined not to let her outface him. “If you mean a regular cut and dried affair, no.”

“But you’re in love.”

“Some might say so.”

“Don’t you say so?”

“I don’t know. I’ve had no instruction on the subject.”

“Pshaw! It’s a poor kind of man that needs instruction!”

“I daresay.”

“Tell me, and maybe I can instruct you.”

“How can you tell the untellable?”

“Well, for instance, do you like to be with her?”

Stonor affected to study the matter. “No,” he said.

She gave him so comical a look of rebuke that he laughed outright. “I mean I’m uncomfortable whether I’m with her or away from her,” he explained.

“There may be something in that,” she admitted. “Have you ever told her?”

“No.”

“Why don’t you tell her like a man?”

“Things are not as simple as all that.”

“Obstacles, eh?”

“Rather!”

A close observer might have perceived under Clare’s scornful chaffing the suggestion of a serious and anxious purpose. “Bless me! this is getting exciting!” she said. “Maybe the lady has a husband?”

“No, not that.”

A glint of relief showed under her lowered lids. “What’s the trouble, then?”

“Oh, just my general unworthiness, I guess.”

“I don’t think you can love her very much,” she said, with pretended scorn.

“Perhaps not,” he said, refusing to be drawn.

She allowed the subject to drop. It was characteristic of Clare in her lighter moments that her conversation skipped from subject to subject like a chamois on the heights. Those who knew her well, though, began to suspect in the end that there was often a method in her skipping. She now talked of the day’s journey, of the weather, of Mary’s good cooking, of a dozen minor matters. After a long time, when he might naturally be supposed to have forgotten what they had started with, she said offhand:

“Do you mind if I ask one question about myself?”

“Fire away.”

“You told me my name was Miss Clare Starling.”

“Do you suspect otherwise?”

“What am I doing with a wedding-ring?”

It took him unawares. He stared at her a little clownishly. “I—I never noticed it,” he stammered.

“It’s hanging on a string around my neck.”

“Your husband is dead,” he said bluntly.

She cast down her eyes. “Was that—the catastrophe that happened up here?”

While he wished to keep the information from her as long as possible, he could not lie to her. “Yes,” he said. “Don’t ask any more.”

She bowed as one who acknowledges the receipt of information not personally important. “One more question; was he a good man, a man you respected?”

“Oh, yes,” he said quickly.

She looked puzzled. “Strange I should feel no sense of loss,” she murmured.

“You had been parted from him for a long time.”

They fell silent. The charming spell that had bound them was effectually broken. She shivered delicately, and announced her intention of going to bed.

But in the morning she showed him a shining morning face. To arise refreshed from sleep, hungry for one’s breakfast, and eager for the day’s journey, was enough for her just now. She was living in her instincts. Her instinct told her that Stonor loved her, and that sufficed her. The dreadful things might wait.

Having ascended the last rapid, they found they could make better time by paddling the dug-out, keeping close under the shore as the Kakisas did, and cutting across from side to side on the inside of each bend to keep out of the strongest of the current. The seating arrangement was the same as at their start; Mary in the bow, Stonor in the stern, and Clare facing Stonor. Thus all day long their eyes were free to dwell on each other, nor did they tire. They had reached that perfect stage where the eyes confess what the tongue dares not name; that

charming stage of folly when lovers tell themselves they are still safe because nothing has been spoken. As a matter of fact it is with words that the way to misunderstanding is opened. One cannot misunderstand happy eyes. Meanwhile they were satisfied with chaffing each other.

“Martin, I wonder how old I am.”

He studied her gravely. “I shouldn’t say more than thirty-three or four.”

“You wretch! I’ll get square with you for that! I can start with any age I want. I’ll be eighteen.”

“That’s all right, if you can get away with it. If I could keep you up here awhile maybe you could knock off a little more.”

“Oh, Martin, if one could only travel on this river for ever! It’s so blessed not to have to think of things!”

“Suit me all right. But I suppose Mary wants to see her kids.”

“Let her go.”

Her eyes fell under the rapt look that involuntarily leapt up in his. “I mean we could get somebody else,” she murmured.

Stonor pulled himself up short. “Unfortunately there’s the force,” he said lightly. “If I don’t go back and report they’ll come after me.”

“What is this place we are going to, Martin?”

“Fort Enterprise.”

“I am like a person hanging suspended in space. I neither know where I came from, nor where I am going. What is Fort Enterprise like?”

“A trading-post.”

“Your home?”

“Such as it is.”

“Why ‘such as it is’?”

“Well, it’s a bit of a hole.”

“No society?”

“Society!” He laughed grimly.

“Aren’t there any girls there?”

“Devil a one!—except Miss Pringle, the parson’s sister, and she’s considerable oldish.”

“Don’t you know any real girls, Martin?”

“None but you, Clare.”

She bent an odd, happy glance on him. It meant: “Is it possible that I am the first with him?”

“Why do you look at me like that?” he asked.

“Oh, you’re rather nice to look at,” she said airily.

“Thanks,” he said, blushing. He was modest, but that sort of thing doesn’t exactly hurt the most modest of men. “Same to you!”

They camped that night on a little plateau of sweet grass, and after supper Mary told tales by the fire. Mary, bland and uncensorious, was a perfect chaperon. What she thought of the present situation Stonor never knew. He left it to Clare to come to an understanding with her. That they shared many a secret from which he was excluded, he knew. Mary had soon recovered from her terror of Clare’s seeming illness.

“This the story of the Wolf-Man,” she began. “Once on a tam there was a man had two bad wives. They had no shame. That man think maybe if he go away where there were no other people he can teach those women to be good, so he move his lodge away off on the prairie. Near where they camp was a high hill, and every evenin’ when the sun go under the man go up on top of the hill, and

look all over the country to see where the buffalo was feeding, and see if any enemies come. There was a buffalo-skull on that hill which he sit on.

“In the daytime while he hunt the women talk. ‘This is ver’ lonesome,’ one say. ‘We got nobody talk to, nobody to visit.’

“Other woman say: ‘Let us kill our husband. Then we go back to our relations, and have good time.’

“Early in the morning the man go out to hunt. When he gone his wives go up the hill. Dig deep pit, and cover it with sticks and grass and dirt. And put buffalo-skull on top.

“When the shadows grow long they see their husband coming home all bent over with the meat he kill. So they mak’ haste to cook for him. After he done eating he go up on the hill and sit down on the skull. Wah! the sticks break, and he fall in pit. His wives are watching him. When he fall in they take down the lodge, pack everything, and travel to the main camp of their people. When they get near the big camp they begin to cry loud and tear their clothes.

“The people come out. Say: ‘Why is this? Why you cry? Where is your husband?’

“Women say: ‘He dead. Five sleeps ago go out to hunt. Never come back.’ And they cry and tear their clothes some more.

“When that man fall in the pit he was hurt. Hurt so bad can’t climb out. Bam-bye wolf traveling along come by the pit and see him. Wolf feel sorry. ‘Ah-h-woo-o-o! Ah-h-woo-o-o!’ he howl. Other wolves hear. All come running. Coyotes, badgers, foxes come too.

“Wolf say: ‘In this hole is my find. It is a man trapped. We dig him out and have him for our brother.’

“All think wolf speak well. All begin to dig. Soon they dig a hole close to the man. Then the wolf say: ‘Wait! I want to say something.’ All the animals listen. Wolf say: ‘We all have this man for our brother, but I find him, so I say he come live with the big wolves.’ The others say this is well, so the wolf tear down the

dirt and drag the man out. He is almost dead. They give him a kidney to eat and take him to the lodge of the big wolves. Here there is one old blind wolf got very strong medicine. Him make that man well, and give him head and hands like wolf.

“In those days long ago the people make little holes in the walls of the cache where they keep meat, and set snares. When wolves and other animals come to steal meat they get caught by the neck. One night wolves all go to the cache to steal meat. When they come close man-wolf say: ‘Wait here little while, I go down and fix place so you not get caught.’ So he go and spring all the snares. Then he go back and get wolves, coyotes, badgers and foxes, and all go in the cache and make feast and carry meat home.

“In the morning the people much surprise’ find meat gone and snares sprung. All say, how was that done? For many nights the meat is stolen and the snares sprung. But one night when the wolves go there to steal find only meat of a tough buffalo-bull. So the man-wolf was angry and cry out:

“‘Bad-you-give-us-ooo! Bad-you-give-us-ooo!’

“The people hear and say: ‘It is a man-wolf who has done all this. We catch him now!’ So they put nice back-fat and tongue in the cache, and hide close by. After dark the wolves come. When the man-wolf see that good food he run to it and eat. Then the people run in and catch him with ropes and take him to a lodge. Inside in the light of the fire they see who it is. They say: ‘This is the man who was lost!’

“Man say: ‘No. I not lost. My wives try to kill me.’ And he tell them how it was. He say: ‘The wolves take pity on me or I die there.’

“When the people hear this they angry at those bad women, and they tell the man to do something about it.

“Man say: ‘You say well. I give them to the Bull-Band, the Punishers of Wrong.’

“After that night those two women were never seen again.”

Mary Moosa, when one of her stories went well, with the true instinct of a story-teller could seldom be persuaded to follow it with another, fearing an anti-climax perhaps. She turned in under her little tent, and soon thereafter trumpeted to the world that she slept.

Stonor and Clare were left together with self-conscious, downcast eyes. All day they had longed for this moment, and now that it had come they were full of dread. Their moods had changed; chaffing was for sunny mornings on the river; in the exquisite, brooding dusk they hungered for each other. Yet both still told themselves that the secret was safe from the other. Finally Clare with elaborate yawns bade Stonor good-night and disappeared under her tent.

An instinct that he could not have analysed told him she would be out again. Half-way down the bank in a little grassy hollow he made a nest for her with his blankets. When she did appear over the top of the bank she surveyed these preparations with a touch of haughty surprise. She had a cup in her hand.

“Were you going to spend the night here?” she asked.

“No,” he said, much confused.

“What is this for, then?”

“I just hoped that you might come out and sit for a while.”

“What reason had you to think that?”

“No reason. I just hoped it.”

“Oh! I thought you were in bed. I just came out to get a drink.”

Stonor, considerably dashed, took the cup and brought her water from the river. She sipped it and threw the rest away. He begged her to sit down.

She sat in a tentative sort of way, and declined to be wrapped up. “I can only stay a minute.”

“Have you a pressing engagement?” he asked aggrievedly.

“One must sleep some time,” she said rebukingly.

Stonor, totally unversed in the ways of women, was crushed by her changed air. He looked away, racking his brains to hit on what he could have done to offend her. She glanced at him out of the tail of her eye, and a wicked little dimple appeared in one cheek. He was sufficiently punished. She was mollified. But it was so sweet to feel her power over him, that she could not forbear using it just a little.

“What’s the matter?” he asked sullenly.

“Why, nothing!” she said with an indulgent smile, such as she might have given a small boy.

An intuition told him that in a way it was like dealing with an Indian; to ask questions would only put him at a disadvantage. He must patiently wait until the truth came out of itself.

In silence he chose the weapon she was least proof against. She tried to out-silence him, but soon began to fidget. “You’re not very talkative,” she said at last.

“I only seem to put my foot in it.”

“You’re very stupid.”

“No doubt.”

She got up. “I’m going back to bed.”

“Sorry, we don’t seem to be able to hit it off after supper.”

“I’d like to beat you!” she cried with a little gust of passion.

This was more encouraging. “Why?” he asked, grinning.

“You’re so dense!”

At last he understood, and a great peace filled him. “Sit down,” he said coaxingly. “Let’s be friends. We only have nine days more.”

This took her by surprise. She sat. “Why only nine days?”

“When we get out your life will claim you. This little time will seem like a dream.”

She began to see then, and her heart warmed towards him. “Now I understand what’s the matter with you!” she cried. “You think that I am not myself now; that this me which is talking to you is not the real me, but a kind of—what do they call it?—a kind of changeling. And that when we get back to the world, or some day soon, this me will be whisked away again, and my old self come back and take possession of my body.”

“Something like that,” he said, with a rueful smile.

“Oh, you hurt me when you talk like that!” she cried. “You are wrong, quite, quite wrong! This is my ownest self that speaks to you now; that is—that is your friend, and it will never change! Think a little. What I have lost is not essential. It is only memory. That is to say, the baggage that one gradually collects through life; what was impressed on your mind as a child; what you pick up from watching other people and from reading books; what people tell you you ought to do; outside ideas of every kind, mostly false. Well, I’ve chucked it all—or it has been chucked for me. Such as I am now, I am the woman I was born to be! And I will never change. I don’t care if I never find my lost baggage. My heart is light without it. But if I do it can make no difference. Baggage is only baggage. And having once found your own heart you never could forget that.”

They both instinctively stood up. They did not touch each other.

“Do you still doubt me?” she asked.

“No.”

“You will see. I understand you better now. I shall not tease you any more. Good-night, Martin.”

“Good-night, Clare.”

CHAPTER XI

THE MYSTERY

Next morning, when they had been on the river for about three hours, they came upon their friend Etzooah, he of the famous hair, still hunting along shore in his canoe, but this time without the little boy. Stonor hailed him with pleasure; for of all the Kakisa Indians only this one had acted towards them like a man and a brother.

But the policeman was doomed to disappointment. When they overtook Etzooah they saw that the red man's open, friendly look had changed. He turned a hard, wary eye on them, just like all the other Kakisas. Stonor guessed that he must have visited his people in the interim, and have been filled up with their nonsensical tales. Affecting to notice no change, Stonor said:

"We are going to spell here. Will you eat with us?"

No Indian was ever known to refuse a meal. Etzooah landed without a word, and sat apart waiting for it to be prepared. He made no offer to help, but merely sat watching them out of his inscrutable, beady eyes. Stonor, hoping to find him with better dispositions after he had filled up, let him alone.

Throughout the meal Etzooah said nothing except to answer Stonor's questions in monosyllables. He denied having been up to Ahcunazie's village. Stonor was struck by the fact that he made no inquiry respecting his friend Imbrie. Stonor himself did not like to bring up the subject of Imbrie in Clare's hearing. Altogether baffled by the man's changed air, he finally said:

"Mary, translate this just as I give it to you.—When the policeman come down the river he meet Etzooah. He is glad to see Etzooah. He say, here is a good man.

Etzooah give the policeman good talk. They part friends. But when the policeman come back up the river Etzooah is changed. He is not glad to see the policeman. He gives him black looks. Why is that? Has anyone spoken evil of the policeman to Etzooah? He is ready to answer. He asks this in friendship."

But it was all wasted on the Indian. He shrugged, and said with bland, unrelenting gaze: "Etzooah not changed. Etzooah glad to see the policeman come back."

When they had finished eating, Clare, guessing that Stonor could talk more freely if she were out of hearing, strolled away to a little distance and sat down to do some mending.

Stonor said to Etzooah through Mary: "I have bad news for you."

The Indian said: "You not find White Medicine Man?"

"He is dead."

Etzooah's jaw dropped. He stared at Stonor queerly. "What for you tell me that?" he demanded.

The style of the question nonplussed Stonor for the moment. "Why do I tell you? You said you were his friend."

Etzooah veiled his eyes. "So—he dead," he said stolidly. "I sorry for that."

Now it was perfectly clear to Stonor that while the man's first exclamation had been honest and involuntary, his later words were calculated. There was no trace of sorrow in his tones. It was all very puzzling.

"I think he must have been crazy," Stonor went on. "He shoved off in his canoe, and let the current carry him down. Then he shot himself."

Etzooah still studied Stonor like a man searching for ulterior motives. Clearly he did not believe what he was being told. "Why you think that? The falls never tell."

"His body didn't go over the falls. It caught on a log-jam in the rapids."

“I know that log-jam. How you know his body there?”

“I brought it ashore. Mary helped me.”

Etzooah smiled in a superior way.

Stonor, exasperated, turned to Mary. “Make it clear to him that I am telling the truth if it takes half-an-hour.” He turned away and filled his pipe.

Mary presumably found the means of convincing the doubter. Etzooah lost his mask. His mouth dropped open; he stared at Stonor with wild eyes; a yellowish tint crept into the ruddy copper of his skin. This agitation was wholly disproportionate to what Mary was telling him. Stonor wondered afresh. Etzooah stammered out a question.

Mary said in her impassive way: “Etzooah say how we know that was the White Medicine Man’s body?”

“Was there any other man there?” said Stonor.

When this was repeated to the Indian he clapped his hands to his head. “Non! Non!” he muttered.

Stonor indicated Clare. “She said it was Imbrie’s body. She was his wife.”

Etzooah stared stupidly at Clare.

Suddenly he started to rise.

Mary said: “He say he got go now.”

Stonor laid a heavy hand on the Indian’s shoulder. “Sit down! Not until this matter is explained. Perhaps the man did not kill himself. Perhaps he was murdered.”

Etzooah seemed beside himself with terror.

“Ask him what he’s afraid of?”

“He say he sick in his mind because his friend is dead.”

“Nonsense! This is not grief, but terror. Tell him I want the truth now. I asked as a friend at first: now I ask in the name of the law.”

Etzooah suddenly rolled away on the ground out of Stonor’s reach. Then, springing to his feet with incredible swiftness, he cut for the water’s edge. But Mary stuck out her leg in his path and he came to earth with a thud. Stonor secured him. Clare from where she sat looked up with startled eyes.

“For the last time I ask you what you know about this matter,” said Stonor sternly. “If you refuse to answer, I’ll carry you outside and put you in the white man’s jail.”

Etzooah answered sullenly.

“He say he know not’ing,” said Mary.

“Get the tracking-line, and help me tie his hands and feet.”

When Etzooah saw that Stonor really meant to do what he said, he collapsed.

“He say he tell now,” said Mary.

Etzooah spoke rapidly and tremblingly to Mary. Little doubt now that he was telling the truth, thought Stonor, watching him. The effect of his communication on the stolid Mary was startling in the extreme. She started back, and the same look of panic terror appeared in her eyes. She was unable to speak.

“For God’s sake, what’s the matter with you all?” cried Stonor.

Mary moistened her dry lips. She faltered: “He say—he say he so scare when you say you find Imbrie’s body five sleeps ago because—because two sleeps ago Imbrie spell wit’ him beside the river.”

It was the turn of Stonor’s jaw to drop, and his eyes to stare. “But—but this is nonsense!” he cried.

Clare could no longer contain her curiosity. “What is the matter, Martin?” she asked.

“Some red-skin mumbo-jumbo,” he answered angrily. “I’ll soon get to the

bottom of it.”

Lowering his voice, he said to Mary: “Have him tell me exactly what happened two sleeps ago.”

Mary translated as Etzooah spoke. “Two sleeps ago. The sun was half-way to the middle of the sky. I spell down river near the rapids on the point where the tepee-poles are. I see White Medicine Man come paddling up. I moch surprise see him all alone because I know you gone down to see him. I call to him. He come on shore to me.”

“What kind of a canoe?” asked Stonor.

“Kakisa canoe. Got willow-branches in it, for cause Eembrie sit on his knees and paddle, not like Kakisa.”

This was a convincing detail. Little beads of perspiration sprang out on Stonor’s brow.

Etzooah went on: “We talk——”

“Could he speak Kakisa?”

“No. We talk by signs. He know some Kakisa words. I teach him that. I say to him Red-coat and White girl gone down river to see you. You not see them? How is that? Eembrie laugh: say: ‘I see them, but they not see me. Red-coat want to get me I guess, so I run away.’ Eembrie say: ‘Don’ you tell Red-coat you see me.’ That is why I not want tell. I mean no harm. Eembrie is my friend. I not want police to get him.”

Stonor scarcely heard the last words. His world was tumbling around his ears. But Etzooah’s and Mary’s sly, scared glances in his face brought him to himself. “Anything more?” he asked harshly.

Etzooah hastened on: “Eembrie moch in a hurry. Not want spell. Say he come away so quick got no grub but duck him shoot. I got not’ing but little rabbit, but I say, come to my camp, got plenty dry meat, dry fish. So we paddle up river till the sun is near gone under. Eembrie not talk much. Eembrie not want come to

my camp. Not want my wife, my brot'er, my children see him. My camp little way from river. Eembrie wait beside the river. I go bring him dry meat, dry fish, matches and a hatchet. Eembrie go up river. That is all."

The story had a convincing ring. So far as it went Stonor could scarcely doubt it, though there was much else that needed to be explained. It pricked the bubble of his brief happiness. How was he going to tell Clare? He had much ado to keep his face under the Indians' curious glances. They naturally were ascribing their terrors to him. This idea caused him to smile grimly.

"What kind of a gun did Imbrie have?" he asked.

Etzooah replied through Mary that he had not seen Imbrie's gun, that it was probably covered by his blankets.

Stonor seemed to be pondering deeply on what he had heard. As a matter of fact, conscious only of the hurt he had received, he was incapable of consecutive thought. The damnable question reiterated itself. "How am I going to tell Clare?" Even now she was waiting with her eyes upon him for some word. He dared not look at her.

He was roused by hearing Etzooah and Mary talking together in scared voices.

"What does Etzooah say?" he demanded.

Mary faltered: "He say Eembrie got ver' strong medicine. Him not stay dead."

"That is nonsense. You saw the body. Could a man without a face come to life?"

She asked Etzooah timidly if Imbrie's face was all right.

"Well, what does he say?" Stonor demanded with a scornful smile.

"He say Eembrie's face smooth lak a baby's," Mary replied with downcast eyes.

"If Etzooah's story is true it was another man's body that we buried," said Stonor dejectedly.

He saw by the dogged expression on both red faces that they would not have this. They insisted on the supernatural explanation. In a way they loved the mystery that scared them half out of their wits.

“What man’s body was that?” asked Etzooah, challengingly.

And Stonor could not answer. Etzooah insisted that no other man had gone down the river, certainly no white man. Stonor knew from the condition of the portage trail that no one had come up from below that season. There remained the possibility that Imbrie had brought in a companion with him, but everything in his shack had been designed for a single occupant; moreover the diary gave the lie to this supposition. Etzooah said that he had been to Imbrie’s shack the previous fall, and there was no other man there then. There were moments when the bewildered policeman was almost forced to fall back on the supernatural explanation.

It would never do for him, though, to betray bewilderment; not only the two Indians, but Clare, looked to him for guidance. He must not think of the wreck of his own hopes, but only of what must be done next. He rose stiffly, and gave Mary the word to pack up. At any rate his duty was clear. The fleeing Imbrie held the key to the mystery, and he must be captured—Imbrie, Clare’s husband, and now a possible murderer!

“Martin, tell me what’s the matter,” Clare said again, as he held the dug-out for her to get in.

“I’ll tell you as soon as I get rid of this Indian,” he said, with as easy an air as he could muster.

He ordered Etzooah to take him to his camp, as he wished to search it, and to question his family. The Indian stolidly prepared to obey.

It was at no great distance up-stream. It consisted of three tepees hidden from the river, a Kakisa custom dating from the days when they had warlike enemies. The tepees were occupied by Etzooah’s immediate family, and the households respectively of his brother and his brother-in-law.

The search and the examination revealed but one significant fact, and that

corroborated Etzooah's story. Two days before he had undoubtedly come into camp and had taken meat and fish from their slender store. Exerting the prerogative of the head of the family, he had declined to tell them what he wanted it for, and the women recited the fact to Stonor as a grievance. It was a vastly relieved Etzooah that Stonor left among his relatives. The fear of being carried off among the white men remained with him until he saw the policeman out of sight. Stonor had warned him to say nothing of what had happened down-river.

Stonor rejoined Clare and Mary, and they continued up-stream. Stonor had now to tell Clare what he had learned. She was waiting for it. In her anxious face there was only solicitude for him, no suspicion that the affair concerned herself. He had wished to wait until night, but he saw that he could not travel all day in silence with her. No use beating about the bush either; she was an intelligent being and worthy of hearing the truth.

"Clare," he began, avoiding her eyes, "you know I told you how I found your husband's body in the river, but I did not tell you—I merely wished to spare you something horrible—that it was much mutilated by being thrown against the rocks, especially the face."

She paled. "How did you know then—how did we know that it was he?" she asked, with a catch in her breath.

"You appeared to recognize it. You cried out his name before you fainted. I thought there must be certain marks known to you."

"Well?"

"It appears we were mistaken. It must have been the body of another man. According to the story the Indian has just told, Imbrie went up the river two days ago. The story is undoubtedly true. There were details he could not have invented."

There was a silence. When he dared look at her, he saw with relief that she was not so greatly affected as he had feared. She was still thinking of him, Stonor.

“Martin,” she murmured, deprecatingly, “there’s no use pretending. I don’t seem to feel it much except through you. You are so distressed. For myself it all seems—so unreal.”

He nodded. “That’s natural.”

She continued to study his face. “Martin, there’s worse behind?” she said suddenly.

He looked away.

“You suspect that this man … my husband … whom I do not know … that other man … murder, perhaps?”

He nodded.

She covered her face with her hands. But only for a moment. When they came down she could still smile at him.

“Martin, do not look so, or I shall hate myself for having brought all this on you.”

“That’s silly,” he said gruffly.

She did not misunderstand the gruffness. “Do not torment yourself so. It’s a horrible situation, unspeakably horrible. But it’s none of our making. We can face it. I can, if I am sure you will always—be my friend—even though we are parted.”

He raised his head. After all she was the comforter. “You make me ashamed,” he said. “Of course we can face it!”

“Perhaps I can help you. I must try to remember now. We must work at it like a problem that does not concern us especially.”

“Have you the diary?” he asked suddenly. “That’s essential now.”

“Did I have it?”

“In the side pocket of your coat.”

“It’s not there now. It’s not among my things. I haven’t seen it since—I came to myself.”

He concealed his disappointment. “Oh, well, if it was left in the shack it will be safe there. I’m sure no Indian would go within fifty miles of the spot now.”

“Have you any idea who the dead man could have been?”

“Not the slightest. It’s a black mystery.”

CHAPTER XII

IMBRIE

Stonor went ashore at Ahcunazie's village, searched every tepee, and questioned the inhabitants down to the very children. The result was nil. The Indians one and all denied that Imbrie had come back up the river. Stonor was convinced that they were lying. He said nothing of what had happened down at the falls, though the young Kakisa, Ahteeah, displayed no little curiosity on his own account.

They went on, making the best time they could against the current. Clare wielded a third paddle now. The river was no less beautiful; the brown flood moved with the same grace between the dark pines; but they had changed. They scarcely noticed it. When they talked it was to discuss the problem that faced them in businesslike voices. Like the Kakisas they searched the shores now, but they were looking for two-legged game. What other Indians they met on the river likewise denied having seen Imbrie.

Stonor had in mind the fact that the devoted Kakisas could hide Imbrie in any one of a thousand places along the shores. It was impossible for him to make a thorough search single-handed, nor did he feel justified in remaining on the river with Clare. His plan was to return to Fort Enterprise as quickly as possible, making the best search he could by the way, and, after obtaining assistance, to return. In the end, unless he got out, the river would be like a trap for Imbrie. It was quite likely that he understood this, and was even now struggling to get away as far as possible.

On the morning of the tenth day after leaving Imbrie's shack they arrived at the Horse Track, and Ahchoogah's village. Their coming was hailed with the same noisy excitement, in which there was no trace of a welcome. Stonor

instantly sought out the head man, and abruptly demanded to know when Imbrie had returned, and where he had gone. Ahchoogah, with the most perfect air of surprise, denied all knowledge of the White Medicine Man, and in his turn sought to question Stonor as to what had happened. It was possible, of course, that Ahchoogah's innocence was real, but he had the air of an accomplished liar. He could not quite conceal the satisfaction he took in his own fine acting.

Stonor posted Clare at the door of the shack, whence she could overlook the entire village, with instructions to raise an alarm if she saw anybody trying to escape. Meanwhile, with Mary, he made his usual search among the tepees, questioning all the people. Nothing resulted from this, but on his rounds he was greatly elated to discover among the canoes lying in the little river the one with the peculiar notches cut in the bow-thwart. So he was still on his man's track! He said nothing to any one of his find.

He set himself to puzzle out in which direction Imbrie would likely next have turned. Certainly not to Fort Enterprise; that would be sticking his head in the lion's mouth. It was possible Ahchoogah might have concealed him in the surrounding bush, but Stonor doubted that, for they knew that the policeman must soon be back, and their instinct would be to get the man safely out of his way. There remained the third Kakisa village at Swan Lake, seventy miles up the river, but in that case, why should he not have gone on in the canoe? However, Stonor learned from Mary that it was customary for the Kakisas to ride to Swan Lake. While it was three days' paddle up-stream it could be ridden in a day. In fact, everything pointed to Swan Lake. If Imbrie was trying to get out of the country altogether the upper Swan provided the only route in this direction. Stonor decided to take the time to pay a little surprise visit to the village there.

Stonor announced at large that he was returning to Fort Enterprise that same day. Ahchoogah's anxiety to speed his departure further assured him that he was on the right track. Collecting their horses and packing up, they were ready for the trail about five that afternoon. The Indians were more cordial in bidding them farewell than they had been in welcoming them. There was a suspicious note of "good riddance" in it.

After an hour's riding they came to the first good grass, a charming little

“prairie” beside the stream that Clare had christened Meander. Stonor dismounted, and the two women, reining up, looked at him in surprise, for they had eaten just before leaving the Indian village, and the horses were quite fresh, of course.

“Would you and Mary be afraid to stay here all night without me?” he asked Clare.

“Not if it is necessary,” she answered promptly. “That is, if you are not going into danger,” she added.

He laughed. “Danger! Not the slightest! I think I know where Imbrie is. I’m going after him.”

Clare’s eyes widened. “I thought you had given him up for the present.”

He shook his head. “I couldn’t tell you back there, but I found his canoe among the others.”

“Where are you going?”

“To the Kakisa village at Swan Lake.”

He saw Mary’s expression change slightly, and took encouragement therefrom. Mary, he knew, divided between her loyalty to Clare and her allegiance to her own people, was in a difficult position. Stonor was very sure, though, that he could depend on her to stand by Clare.

“Haven’t you come far out of your way?” Clare asked.

“Not so far as you might think. We’ve been travelling south the last few miles. By crossing the Meander here and heading east through the bush I’ll hit the Swan River in four miles or so. I’ll be out of the bush long before dark. I’ve heard there’s a short-cut trail somewhere, if I only knew where to find it.”

He said this purposely within Mary’s hearing. She spoke up: “Other side this little prairie where the ford is. There the trail begins.”

Stonor was not a little touched by this. “Good for you, Mary!” he said simply.

“I shan’t forget it. You’ve saved me a struggle through the bush.”

Mary only looked inscrutable. One had to take her feelings for granted.

“When will you be back?” Clare asked.

“By land it’s about ninety miles’ round trip. As I must ride the same horse the whole way, say three or four to-morrow afternoon. I won’t take Miles Aroon, he’s too valuable to risk. I’ll ride the bay. If anything should delay me Tole Grampierre is due to arrive from the post day after to-morrow.”

They made camp beside the ford that Mary pointed out. Clare waved Stonor out of sight with a smile. His mind was at ease about her, for he knew of no dangers that could threaten her there, if her fears created none.

The side trail was little-used and rough, and he was forced to proceed at a slow walk: the roughest trail, however, is infinitely better than the untrodden bush. This part of the country had been burned over years before, and the timber was poplar and fairly open. Long before dark he came into the main trail between the two Indian villages. This was well-travelled and hard, and he needed to take no further thought about picking his way; the horse attended to that. For the most part the going was so good he had to hold his beast in, to keep him from tiring too quickly. He saw the river only at intervals on his right hand in its wide sweeps back and forth through its shallow valley.

He spelled for his supper, and darkness came on. Stonor loved travelling at night, and the unknown trail added a zest to this ride. The night world was as quiet as a room. Where one can see less one feels more. The scents of night hung heavy on the still air; the pungency of poplar, the mellowness of balsam, the bland smell of river-water that makes the skin tingle with desire to bathe, the delicate acidity of grass that caused his horse to whicker. The trail alternated pretty regularly between wooded ridges, where the stones caused him to slacken his pace, and long traverses of the turfy river-bottoms, where he could give his horse his head. Twice during the night he picketed his horse in the grass, and took a short nap himself. At dawn, from the last ridge, he saw the pale expanse of Swan Lake stretching to the horizon, and at sun-up he rode among the tepees of the Kakisa village.

It was built on the edge of the firm ground bordering the lake, though the lake itself was still half a mile distant across a wet meadow. Swan Lake was not a true lake, but merely a widening of the river where it filled a depression among its low hills. With its flat, reedy shores it had more the characteristics of a prairie slough. As in the last village, the tepees were raised in a double row alongside a small stream which made its way across the meadow to the lake. In the middle of their village the stream rippled over shallows, and here they had placed stepping-stones for their convenience in crossing. Below it was sluggish and deep, and here they kept their canoes. These Kakisas used both dug-outs, for the lake, and bark-canoes for the river. The main body of the lake stretched to the west and south: off to Stonor's right it gradually narrowed down to the ordinary dimensions of the river.

When Stonor reined up alongside the little stream not a soul was stirring outside the tepees. He had at least succeeded in taking them by surprise. The first man who stuck his head out, aroused by the dogs, was, to his astonishment, white. But when Stonor got a good look at him he could scarcely credit his eyes. It was none other than Hooliam, the handsome young blackguard he had deported from Carcajou Point two months before. Seeing the policeman, Hooliam hastily made to withdraw his head, but Stonor ordered him out in no uncertain terms. He obeyed with his inimitable insolent grin.

Stonor dismounted, letting his reins hang. The well-trained horse stood where he left him. "What are you doing here?" the policeman demanded.

"Just travelling," drawled Hooliam. "Any objection?"

"I'll take up your case later. First I want the white man Ernest Imbrie. Which tepee is he in?"

Hooliam stared, and a peculiar grin wreathed itself around his lips. "I've seen no white man here," he said. "Except myself. They call me a white man." He spoke English without a trace of the red man's clipped idiom.

Stonor's glance of scorn was significant. It meant: "What are you doing in the tepees, then?"

But the other was quite unabashed. “I’ll get Myengeen for you,” he said, turning to go.

He seemed a bit too eager. Stonor laid a heavy hand on his shoulder. “You stay where you are.”

Meanwhile the little Kakisas had begun to appear from the tepees, the men hanging back bashfully, the women and children peering from under flaps and under the edges of the tepees, with scared eyes.

“I want Myengeen,” said Stonor to the nearest man.

All heads turned to a figure crossing the stream. Stonor waited for him, keeping an eye on Hooliam meanwhile. The individual who approached was a little larger than the average of the Kakisas; well-favoured, and with a great shock of blue-black hair hanging to his neck. He was quite sprucely dressed in store clothes. His close-set eyes and extremely short upper lip gave him a perpetual sneer. He had the walled look of a bold child caught in mischief. He came up to Stonor and offered his hand with a defiant air, saying: “How!”

Stonor shook hands with him, affecting not to notice the signs of truculence. The other Indians, encouraged by the presence of their head man, drew closer.

“I want Ernest Imbrie,” Stonor said sternly. “Where is he?”

Myengeen could speak no English, but the spoken name and the tone were significant enough. He fell back a step, and scowled at Stonor as if he suspected him of a desire to make fun of him. Then his eyes went involuntarily to Hooliam. Stonor, following his glance, was struck by the odd, self-conscious leer on Hooliam’s comely face. Suddenly it flashed on him that this was his man. His face went blank with astonishment. The supposed Hooliam laughed outright.

“Is *this* Imbrie??” cried Stonor.

Myengeen nodded sullenly.

Hooliam said something in Kakisa that caused the surrounding Indians to grin covertly.

And in truth there was a comic aspect to Stonor's dismay. His brain was whirling. This hardy young villain married to the exquisite Clare! This the saviour of the Indians! This the high-minded gentleman whose diary Clare had read to him! It was inexplicable. Yet Stonor suddenly remembered Hooliam's curiosity concerning the reports that were in circulation about the White Medicine Man; this was understandable now. But how could Clare have so stooped——? Well, it must be left to time to unravel.

He pulled himself together. "So you're Imbrie," he said grimly.

"That was my dad's name," was the impudent reply.

"I'll have to trouble you to take a journey with me."

"What's the charge?"

"Oh, we merely want to look into your doings up here."

"You have no right to arrest me without some evidence of wrong-doing."

"Well, I'm going to arrest you anyhow, and take my chances of proving something on you."

Hooliam scowled and pulled at his lip.

Stonor thought: "You'd give a lot to know how much I know, my man!"

Myengeen addressed Imbrie. Stonor watched him narrowly. He could only understand one word, the man's name, "Eembrie," but Myengeen's whole attitude to the other was significant. There was respect in it; admiration, not unmixed with awe. Stonor wondered afresh. Clearly there could be no doubt this was their White Medicine Man.

Imbrie said to Stonor, with his cynical laugh: "I suppose you want to know what he's saying. I don't understand it all. I'm just learning their lingo. But he's offering me the homage of the tribe or something like that."

"It's more than you deserve," thought Stonor. Aloud he said: "Imbrie, if you do what I tell you you can ride as you are. But if you want to make trouble I'll

have to tie you up. So take your choice."

"Oh, I don't hanker after any hempen bracelets," said Imbrie. "What do you want of me?"

"First of all order somebody to bring out all your gear and spread it on the ground."

"That's not much," said Imbrie. By word and by sign he communicated the order to one of the Kakisas. It seemed to Stonor that something was reserved.

The Indian disappeared in the tepee and presently returned with Imbrie's "bed," that is to say, a pair of heavy blankets and a small, grimy pillow, and Imbrie's hatchet.

"That's all I brought," said Imbrie, "except a little dried moose-meat, and that's eaten up."

"I want your gun," said Stonor.

"Didn't bring any."

"Then what are you wearing a cartridge-belt for?" Imbrie shrugged airily.

"Produce your gun, or I'll tie you up, and search for it myself."

Imbrie spoke, and the Kakisa disappeared again, returning with a revolver, which he handed to Stonor. Stonor was careful not to betray the grim satisfaction he experienced at the sight of it. It was of thirty-eight calibre, the same as the bullet that reposed in his pocket. While not conclusive, perhaps, this was strong evidence. Since he had seen this man he had lost his dread of bringing the crime home to him. He wished to convict him now. He dropped the revolver in his side pocket, and held out his hand for the ammunition-belt, which was handed over.

"Now get a horse," he said.

Myengeen objected with violent shakes of the head.

"He says he's got no horses to hand over," said Imbrie, grinning.

“Make him understand that I will give a receipt for the horse. If it is not returned the company will pay in trade.”

“No spare horses,” he says.

“Let him give you the horse you came on.”

“I walked.”

Stonor did not believe this for a moment. “Very well then, you can walk back,” he said coolly.

Imbrie thought better of this. He entered into a colloquy with Myengeen which eventually resulted in a horse being caught and led up and saddled. Stonor gave a receipt for it as promised. Myengeen handled the bit of paper fearfully.

“Now mount!” said Stonor.

“Aren’t you going to let me have my breakfast?”

“We’ll spell beside the trail.”

Myengeen became visibly excited and began to harangue Imbrie in a fiery style, with sidelong looks at the policeman. Stonor out of the tail of his eye saw answering scowls gather on the faces of the other Indians as they listened. Myengeen’s gestures were significant; with a sweep of his arm he called attention to the number of his followers, and then pointed to Stonor, who was but one.

Imbrie said with a sneering laugh: “He’s telling me that I have only to say the word, and you’ll never take me.”

“Rubbish!” said Stonor coolly. “Men do not oppose the police.”

They could not understand the words, but the tone intimidated them. Their eyes bolted as he looked sternly from man to man. He saw that look of angry pain come into their eyes that he knew in their race. It was not that they did not wish to defy him, but they dared not, and they knew they dared not.

“Oh, I’m helping you out, old man,” said Imbrie, with airy impudence. “I’m

telling them I don’t mind going with you, because you’ve got nothing in the world against me. I’m going to give them some good advice now. Listen.”

He did indeed address Myengeen earnestly at some length. Stonor could not guess what he was saying, for he used no gestures. He saw that it was true Imbrie was unpractised in their tongue, for he spoke with difficulty, hesitating for words, and they had to pay close attention to get his meaning. Myengeen listened with a face as inscrutable as Imbrie’s own. At the end he nodded with an expression of approval, and bent a queer look on Stonor that the trooper was unable to fathom.

Imbrie then tied his bed behind his saddle and swung himself on the horse. Stonor signed to him to start first, and they trotted out from among the tepees. Stonor sat stiffly with the butt of his gun on his thigh, and disdained to look around. The instant they got in motion a wailing sound swept from tepee to tepee. Stonor wondered greatly at the hold this fellow had obtained over the simple people; even the Kakisas, it seemed to him, should have been able to see that he was no good.

They trotted smartly over the first ridge and out of sight. A long, grassy bottom followed. When they had put what Stonor considered a safe distance between them and the village, he called a halt. Picketing the horses, and building a fire, he set about preparing their simple meal. Imbrie seemed willing enough to do his share of unpacking, fetching wood and water, etc.; indeed in his cynical way he was almost good-natured.

As they sat over their meal he said tauntingly: “Why are you afraid to tell me what the charge is against me?”

Stonor had no intention of letting out what he knew. He figured that Imbrie’s mind was probably perfectly at ease regarding the murder—always supposing there had been a murder—because he could not possibly guess that the body had not been carried over the falls. He retorted: “If your conscience is easy, what do you care what charge is made?”

“Naturally I want to know why I’m obliged to upset all my plans to make this journey.”

“There is no charge yet.”

“But when you bring me in you’ll have to make some kind of a charge.”

“Oh, I suppose they’ll merely ask you to explain your business up here.”

“And if I stand on my rights as a free man, and refuse to tell my business?”

Stonor shrugged. “That’s not up to me. I shan’t be the one to question you.”

“Is it a crime to live alone?”

“No. But why did you run away when I came to see you?”

“I didn’t run away.”

“Don’t know what you call it, then. When you saw us coming you hid in a tree.”

“Who was us?” asked Imbrie, with a leer.

Stonor could not bring himself to name Clare’s name to the man. “I think you know,” he said quietly. “When night came you fell or jumped out of the tree, and took to the bush. Later you attempted to sneak into the house——”

“Well, it was my own house, wasn’t it?”

“Sure, that’s what puzzles me. What were you afraid of? Then when the Indian woman screamed you lit out for the beach, and beat it up the river.”

“Well, was that a crime?”

“No, only a suspicious circumstance. Frankly, now, don’t you consider yourself a suspicious character?”

“Oh, it’s your business to suspect everybody!”

“Well, when I first met you, why did you lie to me concerning your identity?”

“I didn’t lie. I just kept the truth to myself.”

“You told me your name was Hooliam.”

“Can’t a man have more than one baptismal name?”

“Is it Ernest William, or William Ernest?” asked Stonor mockingly.

“I shan’t tell you. I shan’t tell you anything about myself until I know what I’m wanted for. I suppose that’s my right, isn’t it?”

“Sure!” said Stonor good-naturedly. “Anything you like. Travellers must be saying something to each other.”

But Imbrie was not content to let the matter drop. There was a little gnawing anxiety somewhere. He burst out: “And have I got to put myself to the trouble of taking this long journey, just because you’re too thick-witted to understand my perfectly natural motives?”

“Put it that way if you like,” said Stonor, grinning. “The police *are* thick sometimes in dealing with clever fellows like you.”

“Well, I’ll tell you. I came up to this country because I choose to live alone. My reasons are my own affair. I’m not wanted by the police of this or any other country. But I don’t choose to be spied on and followed up. That’s why I got out of the way.”

“Did you live alone down there?” asked Stonor casually.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, there was that lady who left Carcajou Point with you.”

“Oh, that was just a temporary affair,” said Imbrie, with a leer.

Stonor, thinking of Clare, could have struck him for it. With an effort he swallowed his rage. “Did you never have any visitors?” he asked coolly.

Imbrie favoured him with a lightning glance. “What put that idea into your head?”

Stonor lied in the good cause. “One of the Indians said you had a visitor.”

“When?”

“Just a few days before we went down.”

“What kind of visitor?”

“A man much like yourself,” said Stonor.

Imbrie lost his grin for the moment. “It’s a lie,” he said thickly.

“Oh, well, it’s no crime to have a visitor,” said Stonor smoothly.

Imbrie saw his mistake, and quickly commanded himself. He laughed easily. “Just my way,” he said. “I’m cracked on the subject of living alone.”

They had to spell at short intervals during the day, for Stonor’s horse was growing very tired. Whenever they halted they began to fence with words in much the same way, each trying to discover the other’s weak joint without letting down his own guard. It seemed to Stonor that, under his cynical insolence, his prisoner was growing ever more anxious.

On one occasion Imbrie said with a careless air: “Did you see the big falls when you were down the river?”

“No,” said Stonor instantly.

“Very fine sight.”

It occurred to Stonor that a certain amount of curiosity on his part would appear natural. “What are they like?”

Imbrie looked at him through slightly narrowed lids. “Big horse-shoe effect. The water falls all around in a sort of half-circle, and there are tremendous rocks below. The water falls on the rocks.”

This description sounded purposely misleading. The place, of course, was not like that at all. Stonor thought: “What does he tell me that for? Living there all that time, it isn’t possible he hasn’t seen the falls. In his diary he mentioned going there.” Suddenly the explanation came to him. “I know! He’s trying to tempt me to call him a liar, and then he’ll know I’ve been there.”

“Must be great!” he said offhand.

During the last spell Imbrie slept part of the time. Stonor dared not close his eyes, though he needed sleep sorely. He sat smoking and watching Imbrie, trying to speculate on what lay behind that smooth, comely mask.

“It’s like a book I read once,” he thought. “A man had two natures in him, one good, one bad. At one time the good nature would have the upper hand; at another time the bad. He was like two entirely different people. A case of double

personality, they called it. It must be something like that with this man. Clare married the good man in him, and the bad turned up later. No doubt that was why she left him. Then the good man reappeared, and she felt she had done him a wrong. It explains everything."

But a theory may work too perfectly to fit the haphazard facts of life. There was still the dead man to be explained. And a theory, however perfect, did not bring him any nearer to solving the personal problems concerned. What was one to do with a man who was at once sane and irresponsible? He could give up Clare like a man, he told himself, if it were necessary to her happiness; but to give her up to this——! He jumped up and shook himself with the gesture that was becoming habitual. He could not allow himself to dwell on that subject; frenzy lay that way.

CHAPTER XIII

THE RESCUE

They had struck off from the main trail between the two Indian villages, and were within a mile or two of Stonor's camp. Their pace was slow, for the going was bad, and Stonor's horse was utterly jaded. The trooper's face was set in grim lines. He was thinking of the scene that waited ahead.

Imbrie, too, had the grace to look anxious and downcast. He had been exasperatingly chipper all the way, until it had occurred to him just now to ask Stonor what he had done with the women. Upon learning that they were waiting just ahead, his feathers drooped. A whine crept into his voice, and, without saying anything definite, he began to hedge in an odd way.

"The truth about this case hasn't come out yet," he said.

"I never thought it had," said Stonor.

"Well, a man under arrest has the right to lie to protect his interests, at least until he has the opportunity to consult a lawyer."

"Sure, and an officer has the right to draw his own inferences from the lies."

"Hell! I don't care what you think. As you said, you're not going to try me."

"When did you lie to me?"

"Well, if I thought it necessary to lie to you awhile ago, I'm not going to tell the truth now."

"All right. Why bring the matter up?"

“I just wanted to warn you not to jump to conclusions.”

The trooper was dead tired, and dead sick of gazing at the smooth, evil face of his companion. “Oh, go to hell!” he said. “You talk too much!”

Imbrie subsided into a sullen silence.

Stonor thought: “For some reason he’s afraid of meeting Clare. I suppose that’s natural enough when he’s like this. He must know what’s the matter with him. Probably he hates everything connected with his better side. Well, if he doesn’t want Clare it may simplify matters.” Thus he was still making his theory work.

At last they came out from among the trees, and the little grassy valley of the Meander lay below them. There were the three little tents pitched on the other side of the stream, and the four horses quietly grazing in the bottom. Mary was baking bread at the fire. It was a picture of peace, and Stonor’s first anxiety for their safety was relieved.

He had not the heart to hail them; they would see soon enough. And almost immediately Mary did look up and see the two horsemen. She spoke over her shoulder, and Clare quickly appeared from her tent. The two women awaited them motionless.

Imbrie still rode ahead, hunched in his saddle. He glanced over his shoulder, and Stonor saw that a sickly yellow tint had crept under his skin. He looked at Stonor’s failing horse. Suddenly he clapped heels to his own beast, and, jerking the animal’s head round, circled Stonor and attempted to regain the trail behind him. He evidently counted on the fact that the policeman would be unable to follow.

To urge his spent beast to a run would only have been to provoke a fall. Stonor made no attempt to follow. Pulling his horse round, he whipped up his gun and fired into the air. It was sufficient. Imbrie pulled up. Stonor possessed himself of the other’s bridle-rein and turned him round again. They said nothing to each other.

They splashed across the shallow ford. On the other side Stonor curtly bade

Imbrie to dismount and ungirth. He did likewise. Clare and Mary awaited their coming at a few paces' distance. Clare's eyes were fixed on Imbrie with a painful intensity. Curiosity and apprehension were blended in her gaze. Imbrie avoided looking at her as long as possible.

They turned out the weary beasts to the grass, and Stonor marched his prisoner up to Clare—there was no use trying to hedge with what had to be gone through.

"Here is Imbrie," he said laconically.

The man moistened his dry lips, and mustered a kind of bravado. "Hello, Clare!" he said flippantly.

"Do you recognize him?" asked Stonor—dreading her answer.

"No—I don't know—perhaps," she stammered. "I feel that I have seen him before somewhere."

Imbrie's face underwent an extraordinary change. He stared at Clare dumbfounded.

"You're sure," murmured Clare uncertainly to Stonor.

"Oh, yes, this is the Kakisas' White Medicine Man."

Imbrie turned sharply to Stonor. "What's the matter with her?" he demanded.

"She's temporarily lost her memory."

"Lost her memory!" echoed Imbrie incredulously. He stared at Clare with sharp, eager eyes that transfixed her like a spear. She turned away to escape it. Imbrie drew a long breath, the ruddy colour returned to his cheeks, the old impudent grin wreathed itself about his lips once more.

"Too bad!" he said, with a leer. "You don't recognize your hubby!"

Clare shrank back, and involuntarily flung an arm up over her face.

Stonor saw red. "Hold your tongue!" he cried, suddenly beside himself.

Imbrie cringed from the clenched fist. “Can’t a man speak to his wife?” he snarled.

“Speak to her with respect, or I’ll smash you!”

“You daren’t! You’ve got to treat me well. It’s regulations.”

“Damn the regulations! You mind what I tell you!”

Imbrie looked from one to another with insufferable malice. “Ah! So that’s the way the wind lies,” he drawled.

Stonor turned on his heel and walked away, grinding his teeth in the effort to get a grip on himself.

Imbrie was never one to forego such an advantage. He looked from one to another with bright, spiteful eyes. When Stonor came back he said:

“You must excuse me if I gave you a turn. To tell the truth, a man forgets how attractive his wife is. I’m sorry I had to turn up, old man. Perhaps you didn’t know that she had a Mrs. to her name. She took back her maiden name, they told me.”

“I knew it very well,” said Stonor. “Since before we started to look for you.”

“Well, if you knew it, that’s your look-out,” said Imbrie. “You can’t say I didn’t do my best to keep out of your way.”

This was intolerable. Stonor suddenly bethought himself what to do. In a low voice he bade Mary bring him the tracking-line. Imbrie, who stood stroking his chin and surveying them with the air of master of the situation, lost countenance when he saw the rope. Stonor cut off an end of it.

“What’s that for?” demanded Imbrie.

“Turn round and put your hands behind you,” said the policeman.

Imbrie defiantly folded his arms.

Stonor smiled. “If you resist my orders,” he said softly, “there is no need for

me to hold my hand.—Put your hands behind you!” he suddenly rasped.

Imbrie thought better to obey. Stonor bound his wrists firmly together. He then led Imbrie a hundred yards from their camp, and, making him sit in the grass, tied his ankles and invited him to meditate.

“I’ll get square with you for this, old man!” snarled Imbrie. “You had no right to tie me up!”

“I didn’t like the style of your conversation,” said Stonor coolly.

“You’re damn right, you didn’t! You snivelling preacher! You snooper after other men’s wives! Oh, I’ve got you where I want you now! Any charge you bring against me will look foolish when I tell them——”

“Tell them what?”

“Tell them you’re after her!”

Stonor walked away and left the man.

Clare still stood in the same place like a carven woman. She waited for him with wide, harassed eyes. As he came to her she said simply:

“This is worse than I expected.”

“The man is not right in his head!” said Stonor. “There is something queer. Don’t pay any attention to him. Don’t think of him.”

“But I must think of him; I can’t escape it. What do you mean by not right?”

“A screw loose somewhere. What they call a case of double personality, perhaps. It is the only way to reconcile what you told me about him and what we see.”

Clare’s glance was turned inward in the endeavour to solve the riddle of her own blind spot. She said slowly: “I have known him somewhere; I am sure of that. But he is strange to me. He makes my blood run cold. I cannot explain it.”

“Do not brood on it,” urged Stonor.

She transferred her thoughts to Stonor. “You look utterly worn out. Will you sleep now?”

“Yes. We won’t leave here until morning. My horse must have a good rest.”

“You’d wait for him, but not for yourself!”

“Tole ought to be along in the morning to help pack, and to guard the prisoner.”

Before Stonor had a chance to lie down, Imbrie called him. There was a propitiatory note in his voice.

The trooper went to him. “What do you want?” he asked sternly.

“Say, I’m sorry I riled you, Sergeant,” said Imbrie with a grin. “I was a bit carried off my feet by the situation. I’ll be more careful hereafter. Untie this damned rope, will you?”

Stonor slowly shook his head. “I think we’re both better off with a little distance between us.”

Imbrie repented of his honeyed tones. His lip curled back. But he made an effort to control himself. “Aren’t you afraid your spotless reputation will suffer?” he asked, sneering.

“Not a bit!” said Stonor promptly.

Imbrie was taken aback. “Well—can I speak to my wife for a minute?” he asked sullenly.

Stonor observed, wincing, how he loved to bring out the word “wife.” “That’s up to her,” he answered. “I’ll put it to her.”

Returning to Clare, he said: “He wants to speak to you.”

She shrank involuntarily. “What should I do, Martin?”

“I see nothing to be gained by it,” said Stonor quickly.

“But if, as you say, in a way he’s sick, perhaps I ought——”

“He’s not too sick to have a devil in him. Leave him alone!”

She shook her head. She was gaining in firmness. “It won’t hurt me to hear what he has to say. It may throw some light on the situation.”

“I doubt it,” said Stonor. “His object is to raise as much dust as possible. But go ahead. If he’s insulting, leave him instantly. And don’t let him know what I suspect him of.”

She went, and Stonor walked up and down in the grass in a fever until she returned. She was with Imbrie some little time. Stonor could not guess of what they talked. Clare’s white composed face, and Imbrie’s invariable grin, told him nothing.

The instant she came towards him he burst out: “He didn’t annoy you?”

She shook her head. “No, he seemed quite anxious to please. He apologized for what he said before.”

Stonor said, blushing and scowling: “Perhaps you do not care to tell me what you——”

“Certainly!” she said, with a quick look. “Don’t be silly, Martin. It was just what you might expect. Nothing important. He asked me dozens of questions as to what we did down the river.”

“You did not tell him?”

“How could I? Apparently he is greatly puzzled by my condition. He seems not fully to believe, or at least he pretends not to believe, that I cannot remember. He tried to work on my feelings to get you to liberate him. And of course he was most anxious to know what he was wanted for. I told him I could not interfere in your affairs, that’s all.”

Stonor nodded.

“Martin,” she said, with the withdrawn look that he had marked before, “I

cannot remember anything, yet I am conscious of a deep resentment against this man. At some time in the past he has injured me cruelly, I am sure.—Yet I told you I had injured him, didn't I?" She passed a hand across her face. "It is very puzzling."

"Don't worry!" he said cheerily. "It's bound to be made clear in the end."

"You wish to do all the worrying, don't you?" she said, with a wry smile.

He could not meet her dear eyes. "Worry nothing!" he cried. "I only have one idea in my mind, and that is to get some sleep!" He bustled to get his blankets.

They awoke him for the evening meal. After eating, he inspected his camp, sent Clare to bed, moved Imbrie closer, instructed Mary to keep watch that he did not succeed in freeing himself, and went back to sleep again. Mary was to call him at dawn, and they would take the trail at sunrise.

In the middle of the night he was brought leaping to his feet by a cry out of the dark: a cry that was neither from wolf, coyote, nor screech-owl. Wakened from a deep sleep, his consciousness was aware only of something dreadful. Outside the tent Mary ran to him: her teeth were chattering with terror: she could not speak. Clare crept from her tent. Both women instinctively drew close to their protector.

"What was it?" Clare asked, tremblingly.

A shriek answered her; a dreadful urgent cry of agony that made the whole night shudder. It came from a little way down the trail, from the edge of the woods perhaps, not more than a quarter of a mile away.

"A human voice!" gasped Clare.

"A woman's!" muttered Stonor grimly.

Again it shattered the stillness, this time more dreadful, for they heard words in their own tongue. "Don't hurt me! Don't hurt me!" Then a horrible pause, and with added urgency: "Help! Help!"

"By God! English words!" cried Stonor, astounded.

“Go to her! Go to her!” cried Clare, urging him with her hands.

On the other hand, Mary, falling to her knees, clung to him, fairly gibbering in the extremity of her terror.

Stonor was suspicious, yet every instinct of manliness drew him towards these cries. Under that pull it was impossible to think clearly. He shook Mary off, and started to run. He took three steps and pulled himself up short.

“Look at Imbrie,” he muttered. “Strange he hasn’t wakened.”

It was true the prisoner still lay motionless, entirely covered with his blanket.

“It’s a trick!” said Stonor. “There could be no English woman near here. It’s a trick to draw me out of camp!”

“But none of the Kakisas could speak English,” said Clare.

“I don’t know,” muttered Stonor, in an agony of indecision. “My first duty is here. Look at Mary. She thinks it’s a trick.”

Mary was lying on the ground, muttering a Kakisa word over and over.

“What is it?” Stonor harshly demanded.

“Spirits!” she gasped.

Stonor turned away, flinging his arms up. “Good God! Ghosts again!” he cried, in exasperation.

The dreadful cries were raised again. “Help! Help! He’s killing me!”

“I can’t stand it!” cried Clare. “I must go myself!”

“Stay where you are!” commanded Stonor. “It is too strange a thing to happen so close to our camp if it was not staged for our benefit!”

Just the same, it was not easy for him to hold himself. When the cries were raised again a deep groan was forced from him:

“If I only had another man!”

“Go! Mary and I will be all right!” said Clare.

“Don’ go! Don’ go!” wailed Mary from the ground.

Stonor shouted into the darkness. “Come this way! Help is here!”

The cries were redoubled.

Imbrie suddenly awoke, and rolled clear of his blanket. “What’s that?” he cried, with an admirable assumption of surprise. “A woman’s voice! A white woman! Why don’t you go to her?”

It was a little too well done; Stonor felt partly reassured.

Imbrie appeared to be struggling desperately in his bonds. “For God’s sake, man!” he cried. “If you won’t go, cut me loose! I can’t stand it!”

“I am sure now,” said Stonor, in a voice of relief. “This was what he fixed up with Myengeen this morning. I ought to have been prepared for it. Mary, help me make up the fire. A blaze will help chase the horrors.”

“Oh, you coward!” taunted Imbrie. “If I had my hands free! This is the famous nerve of the police!”

Stonor could afford to laugh at this. His courage was tried.

The voice came with a fresh note of despair. “He’s taking me away! He’s taking me away! Oh, come! come!” Sure enough the sounds began to recede.

But the spell was broken now. They were only conscious of relief at the prospect of an end to the grim farce.

“Damn clever work here,” said Stonor. “She says the very things that ought to pull the hardest.”

“Where could they have got the English words?” said Clare.

“Search me! It’s another mystery to add to what’s facing us.”

Meanwhile the flames were beginning to lick the twigs that Mary placed with

trembling hands.

“If we make a big fire won’t it reveal us to them?” said Clare nervously.

“They won’t shoot,” said Stonor contemptuously. “Stage business is more their line; conjure-tricks.”

Imbrie, seeing that the game was up, had given over trying to taunt Stonor, and lay watching them with an unabashed grin. He seemed rather proud of his scheme, though it had failed.

“Can I smoke?” he said.

“Mary, fill his pipe, and stick it in his mouth,” said Stonor.

They heaped up a big fire, and at Stonor’s initiative, sat around it clearly revealed in the glare. He knew his Indians. At first Clare trembled, thinking of the possible hostile eyes gazing at them from beyond the radius of light, but Stonor’s coolness was infectious. He joked and laughed, and, toasting slices of bacon, handed them round.

“We can eat all we want to-night,” he said. “Tole will be along with a fresh supply to-morrow.”

Imbrie lay about fifteen paces from the fire, near enough to make himself unpleasant, if not to hear what was said. “Mighty brave man by the fire,” he sneered.

Stonor answered mildly. “One more remark like that, my friend, and I’ll have to retire you again from good society.”

Imbrie held his tongue thereafter.

Clare, wishing to show Stonor that she too could set an example of coolness, said: “Let’s sing something.”

But Stonor shook his head. “That would look as if we were trying to keep our courage up,” he said, smiling, “and of course it is up. But let Mary tell us a story to pass the time.”

Mary, having reflected that it was her own people and not ghostly visitants that had made the hideous interruption in the night, had regained her outward stolidity. She was not in the humour for telling stories, though.

“My mout’ too dry,” she said.

“Go ahead,” coaxed Stonor. “You know your own folks better than I do. You know that if we sit here by the fire, eating, talking, and laughing like a pleasant company, it will put respect into their hearts. They’ll have no appetite for further devilry.”

“Can’t tell stories,” she said. “Too late, too dark, too scare. Words won’t come.”

“Just tell us why the rabbits have a black spot on their backs. That’s a short one.”

After a little more urging Mary began in her stolid way:

“One tam Old Man him travel in the bush. Hear ver’ queer singin’. Never hear not’ing like that before. Look all round see where it come. Wah! he see cottontail rabbits singing and making medicine. They mak’ fire. Got plenty hot ashes. They lie down in those ashes and sing, and another rabbit cover them up with ashes. They not stay there ver’ long for cause those ashes moch hot.

“Old Man say: ‘Little brothers, that is wonderful how you lie down in those hot ashes without burning. Show me how to do it.’

“Rabbits say: ‘Come on, Old Man. We show you how. You got sing our song, only stay in ashes little while.’ So Old Man begin to sing, and he lie down, and they cover him with ashes. Him not burn at all.

“He say: ‘That is ver’ nice. You sure got ver’ strong medicine. Now I want do it myself. You lie down, and I cover you up.’

“So rabbits all lie down in ashes, and Old Man cover them up. Then he put the whole fire over them. Only one old rabbit get out. Old Man catch her and go put her back, but she say: ‘Pity me, my children soon be born.’

“Old Man say: ‘All right, I let you go, so there is plenty more rabbits bam-bye. But I will cook these nicely and have a feast.’ And he put more wood on the fire. When those rabbits cooked nice, he cut red willow bush and lay them on to cool. Grease soak into those branches; that is why when you hold red willow to the fire you see grease on the bark. You can see too, since that time, how rabbits got burnt place on their back. That is where the one that got away was singed.

“Old Man sit down waitin’ for rabbits to cool a little. His mouth is wet for to taste them. Coyote come along limpin’ ver’ bad. Say: ‘Pity me, Old Man, you got plenty cooked rabbits, give me one.’

“Old Man say: ‘Go along! You too lazy catch your dinner, I not help you!’

“Coyote say: ‘My leg broke. I can’t catch not’ing. I starving. Just give me half a rabbit.’

“Old Man say: ‘I don’t care if you die. I work hard to cook all these rabbits. I will not give away. But I tell you what we do. We run a race to that big hill way off there. If you beat me I give you a rabbit.’

“Coyote say: ‘All right.’ So they start run. Old Man run ver’ fast. Coyote limp along close behind. Then coyote turn round and run back very fast. Him not lame at all. Tak’ Old Man long tam to get back. Jus’ before he get there coyote swallow las’ rabbit, and trot away over the prairie with his tail up.

“That is the end.”

Stonor laughed. “That’s the kind of story I like. No cut and dried moral!”

Mary never could be got to see anything funny in the stories she told. Just what her attitude was towards them the whites could not guess.

“Give us another about Old Man,” Stonor went on. “A longer one. Tell how Old Man made medicine. A crackerjack!”

Clare looked at him wonderingly. If he were aware of the weirdness of their situation no sign betrayed it. The crackling flames mounted straight in the air, the smoke made a pillar reaching into the darkness. Fifteen paces from Stonor

lay his prisoner, staring unwinkingly at him with eyes that glittered with hatred; and from all around them in the darkness perhaps scores of their enemies were watching.

Mary stolidly began again:

“It was long tam ago before the white man come. The people not have horses then. Kakisas hunt on the great prairie that touch the sky all around. Many buffalo had been killed. The camp was full of meat. Great sheets hung in the lodges and on the racks outside to smoke. Now the meat was all cut up and the women were working on the hides. Cure some for robes. Scrape hair from some for leather——”

The story got no further. From across the little stream they heard a muffled thunder of hoofs in the grass.

Stonor sprang up. “My horses!” he cried. “Stampeded, by God! The cowardly devils!”

Imbrie laughed.

Stonor snatched up his gun. “Back from the fire!” he cried to the women. “I’m going to shoot!”

He splashed across the ford, and, climbing the bank, dropped on his knee in the grass. The horses swerved, and galloped off at a tangent. They were barely visible to eyes that had just left the fire. Stonor counted seven animals, and he had but six with Imbrie’s. On the seventh there was the suggestion of a crouching figure. Stonor fired at the horse.

The animal collapsed with a thud. Stonor ran to where he lay twitching in the grass. It was a strange horse to him. The rider had escaped. But he could not have got far. The temptation to follow was strong, but Stonor, remembering his prisoner and the women who depended on him, refused to be drawn. He returned to where Clare and Mary awaited him at a little distance from the fire. Meanwhile the horses galloped away out of hearing into the bush beyond the little meadow. Imbrie was still secure in his bonds. Stonor kept a close watch on him.

They had not long to wait before dawn began to weave colour in the sky. Light revealed nothing living but themselves in the little valley, or around its rim. The horse Stonor had shot still lay where he had dropped. Stonor returned to him, taking Mary. The animal was dead, with a bullet behind its shoulder. It was a blue roan, an ugly brute with a chewed ear. It had borne a saddle, but its owner had succeeded in retrieving that under cover of darkness. The man's tracks were visible, leading off towards the side trail.

"Mary, whose horse is that?" Stonor asked.

She shrugged and spread out her hands. As she had been living at Fort Enterprise for years, and saw her own people but seldom, he had no choice but to believe that she did not know. They returned to Clare.

Stonor said: "I shall have to leave you for awhile. There's no help for it. I'm expecting Tole Grampierre this morning, but I can't tell for sure how fast he will travel, and in the meantime the horses may be getting further away every minute. If you are afraid to stay, I suppose you can come with me—though I may have to tramp for miles."

Clare kept her chin up. "I'll stay here. If you have to go far I'd only be a drag on you. I shan't be afraid."

The harassed policeman gave her a grateful glance. "I'll leave you my revolver. There's no use arming Mary, because I couldn't ask her to fire on her own people. I do not think there is the slightest danger of your being attacked. If the Indians, seeing me go, come around, pay no attention to them. Show no fear and you are safe. If they want Imbrie let them take him. I'll get him later. It only means a little delay. He cannot escape me up here."

"You must eat before you start," said Clare anxiously.

"I'll take cold food. Can't wait for hot bread."

As Stonor started off Imbrie cried mockingly: "So long, Redbreast!" Stonor doubted very much if he would find him on his return. But there was no help for it. One has to make the best of a bad situation.

After traversing the little meadow the stampeded horses had taken to the trail in the direction of Fort Enterprise. Stonor took heart, hoping that Tole might meet them and drive them back. But, reliable as Tole was, of course he could not count on him to the hour; nor had he any assurance that the horses would stay in the trail. He kept on.

The horses' tracks made clear reading. For several miles Stonor followed through the bush at a dog-trot. Then he came to another little open glade and saw that they had stopped to feed. He gained on them here. A short distance further he suddenly came upon his bay in the trail, the horse that had carried him to Swan Lake and back. As he had expected, she was hopelessly foundered, a pitiable sight. He regretfully put a bullet through her brain.

Near here the remaining horses had swerved from the trail and turned northward, looking for water perhaps. Stonor pinned a note to a tree, briefly telling Tole what had happened, and bidding him hasten forward with all speed.

Stonor followed the hoof-prints then through the trackless bush, painfully slow going over the stones and the fallen trunks, with many a pitfall concealed under the smooth moss. After an hour of this he finally came upon them all five standing dejectedly about in a narrow opening, as if ashamed of their escapade and perfectly willing to be caught.

Mounting Miles Aroon, he drove the others before him. To avoid the risk of breaking their legs he had to let them make their own slow pace over the down timber, and it was a sore trial to his patience. He had already been gone two hours. When finally he struck the trail again he saw that his note to Tole was still where he had left it. He let it stay, on the chance of its bringing him on a little quicker. He put his horses to the trail at a smart pace. They all clattered through the bush, making dizzying turns around the tree-trunks.

As he approached the little meadow by the Meander his heart rose slowly in his throat. He had been more anxious for their safety than he would let himself believe. As he came to the edge of the trees his eyes were ready to leap to the spot where he had left his charges. A shock awaited them. Of the three little tents there was but one remaining, and no sign of life around it. He furiously urged his

horse to the place.

Mary and Clare were gone with Imbrie. The camp site was trampled by scores of hoofs. The Indians had taken nothing, however, but the two little tents and the personal belongings of the women—an odd scrupulousness in the face of the greater offence. All the tracks made off across the meadow towards the side trail back to the Swan.

CHAPTER XIV

PURSUIT

Stonor sat down on a grub-box, and, gripping his bursting head between his hands, tried to think. His throbbing blood urged him to gallop instantly in pursuit. They could not have more than two hours' start of him, and Miles Aroon was better than anything they had in the way of horse-flesh, fresh into the bargain. But a deeper instinct was telling him that a little slow thought in the beginning brings quicker results at the end.

Even with only two hours' start they might make the village before he overtook them, and Imbrie might get away on the lake. A stern chase with all the hazards of travel in the wilderness might continue for days; Stonor was running short of grub; he must provide for their coming back; above all it was necessary that he get word out of what had happened; Clare's safety must not depend alone on the one mortal life he had to give her. Hard as it was to bring himself to it, he determined to get in touch with Tole before starting after Imbrie and the Kakisas.

To that end he mounted one of his poorer horses and galloped headlong back through the bush. After ten miles or so, in a little open meadow he came upon the handsome breed boy riding along without a care in the world, hand on hip and "Stetson" cocked askew, singing lustily of *Gentille Alouette*. Never in his life had Stonor been so glad to see anybody. His set, white face worked painfully; for a moment he could not speak, but only grip the boy's shoulder. Tole was scared half out of his wits to see his revered idol so much affected.

All the way along Stonor had been thinking what he would do. It would not be sufficient to send a message by Tole; he must write to John Gaviller and to Lambert at the Crossing; one letter would do for both; the phrases were all ready

to his pencil. Briefly explaining the situation to Tole, he sat down to his note-book. Two pages held it all; Stonor would have been surprised had he been told that it was a model of conciseness.

"JOHN GAVILLER and Sergeant LAMBERT, R.N.W.M.P.

"While returning with my prisoner Ernest Imbrie, suspected of murder, at a point on the Horse Track six miles from Swan River, a band of Indians from Swan Lake drove off my horses, and while I was away looking for them, rescued my prisoner, and also carried off the two women in my party. Am returning to Swan Lake now with four horses. Suppose that Imbrie reaching there will take to the lake and the upper Swan, as that provides his only means of getting out of the country this way. Suggest that Mr. Gaviller get this through to Lambert regardless of expense. Suggest that Lambert as soon as he gets it might ride overland from the Crossing to the nearest point on the Swan. If he takes one of his folding boats, and takes a man to ride the horses back, he could come down the Swan. I will be coming up, and we ought to pinch Imbrie between the two of us. The situation is a serious one, as Imbrie has the whole tribe of Kakisas under his thumb. He will stop at nothing now; may be insane. The position of the women is a frightful one.

"MARTIN STONOR."

Stonor took Tole's pack-horse with its load of grub, and the breed tied his bed and rations for three days behind his saddle. Stonor gripped his hand.

"So long, kid! Ride like hell. It's the most you can do for me."

Eight hours later, Stonor, haggard with anxiety and fatigue, and driving his spent horses before him, rode among the tepees of the village beside Swan Lake. That single day had aged him ten years. His second coming was received with a significant lack of surprise. The Indians were ostentatiously engaged at their customary occupations: mending boats and other gear, cleaning guns, etc. Stonor

doubted if such a picture of universal industry had ever been offered there. Dismounting, he called peremptorily for Myengeen.

The head man came to him with a certain air of boldness, that slowly withered, however, under the fire that leaped up in the white man's weary blue eyes. Under his savage inscrutability the signs of fidgets became perceptible. Perhaps he had not expected the trooper to brave him single-handed, but had hoped for more time to obliterate tracks, and let matters quiet down. Many a dark breast within hearing quailed at the sound of the policeman's ringing voice, though his words were not understood. The one determined man struck more terror than a troop.

"Myengeen, you and your people have defied the law! Swift and terrible punishment awaits you. Don't think you can escape it. You have carried off a white woman. Such a thing was never known. If a single hair of her head is harmed, God help you! Where is she?"

Myengeen's reply was a pantomime of general denial.

Stonor marched him back of the tepees where the Kakisas' horses were feeding on the flat. He silently pointed to their hanging heads and sweaty flanks. Many of the beasts were still too weary to feed: one or two were lying down done for. Stonor pointed out certain peculiarities in their feet, and indicated that he had been following those tracks. This mute testimony impressed Myengeen more than words; his eyes bolted; he took refuge in making believe not to understand.

Stonor's inability to command them in their own tongue made him feel maddeningly impotent.

"Where is the woman who speaks English?" he cried, pointing to his own tongue.

Myengeen merely shrugged.

Stonor then ordered all the people into their tepees, and such is the power of a single resolute voice that they meekly obeyed. Proceeding from tepee to tepee he called out likely-looking individuals to be questioned out of sight of the others.

For a long time it was without result; men and women alike, having taken their cue from Myengeen, feigned not to understand. Such children as he tried to question were scared almost into insensibility. Stonor began to feel as if he were butting his head against a stone wall.

At last from a maiden he received a hint that was sufficient. She was a comely girl with a limpid brown eye. Either she had a soul above the Kakisas or else the bright-haired trooper touched her fancy. At any rate, when he looked in the tepee, where she sat demurely beyond her male relatives, she gave him a shy glance that did not lack humanity. Calling her outside, he put the invariable question to her, accompanied with appropriate signs: where was the white woman?

She merely glanced towards the mouth of the creek where the canoes lay, then looked up the lake. It was sufficient. Stonor gave her a grateful glance and let her go. He never knew her name. That the Kakisas might not suspect her of having betrayed them, he continued his questioning for awhile. Last of all he re-interrogated Myengeen. He did not care if suspicion fell on him.

Stonor coolly picked out the best-looking canoe in the creek, and loaded aboard what he required of his outfit. Myengeen and his men sullenly looked on. The trooper, seeing that a fair breeze was blowing up the lake, cut two poplar poles, and with a blanket quickly rigged mast and sail. When he was ready to start he delivered the rest of his outfit to Myengeen, and left his horses in his care.

“This is government property,” he said sternly. “If anything is lost full payment will be collected.”

He sailed down the creek followed by the wondering exclamations of the Kakisas. Sailing was an unknown art to them, and in their amazement at the sight, like the children they were, they completely forgot the grimness of the situation. Stonor thought: “How can you make such a scatter-brained lot realize what they’re doing!”

Stonor had supposed that Imbrie would take to the lake. On arriving at the brow of the last ridge his first thought had been to search its expanse, but he had

seen nothing. Since then various indications suggested that they had between four and five hours' start of him. He had been delayed on the trail by his pack-horses. The speed he was making under sail was not much better than he could have paddled, but it enabled him to take things easy for a while.

Swan Lake is about thirty miles long. Fully ten miles of it was visible from the start. It is shaped roughly like three uneven links of a chain, and in width it varies from half a mile to perhaps five miles. It seems vaster than it is on account of its low shores which stretch back, flat and reedy, for miles. Here dwelt the great flocks of wild geese or "wavies" that gave both lake and river their names.

As he got out into the lake the wind gradually strengthened behind him, and his canoe was blown hither and yon like an inflated skin on the water. She had no keel, she took no grip of the water, and much of the goodly aid of the wind was vainly measured against the strength of Stonor's arms as he laboured to keep her before it. When he did get the wind full in his top-heavy sail it blew him almost bodily under. Stonor welcomed the struggle. He was now making much better time than he could have hoped for by his paddle. He grimly carried on.

In order to accommodate the two women and their necessary outfit, Stonor supposed that Imbrie must have taken one of the dug-outs. He did not believe that any of the Kakisas had accompanied the fugitive. The prospect of a long journey would appal them. And Stonor was pretty sure that Mary was not over-working herself at the paddle, so that it was not too much to hope that he was catching up on them at this rate. Thinking of their outfit, Stonor wondered how Imbrie would feed Clare; the ordinary fare of the Kakisas would be a cruel hardship on her. Such are the things one worries about in the face of much more dreadful dangers.

It had been nearly six o'clock before Stonor left Myengeen's village, and the sun went down while he was still far from the head of the lake. He surveyed the flat shores somewhat anxiously. Nowhere, as far as he could see, was there any promising landing-place. In the end he decided to sail on through the night. As darkness gathered he took his bearings from the stars. With the going-down of the sun the wind moderated, but it still held fair and strong enough to give him good steerage-way. After an hour or two the shores began to close around him.

He could not find the outlet of the river in the dark, so he drove into the reeds, and, taking down his sail, supped on cold bread and lake-water and lay down in his canoe.

In the morning he found the river without difficulty. It was a sluggish stream here, winding interminably between low cut banks, edged with dangling grass-roots on the one side and mud-flats on the other. From the canoe he could see nothing above the banks. Landing to take a survey, Stonor beheld a vast treeless bottom, covered with rank grass, and stretching to low piny ridges several miles back on either hand. No tell-tale thread of smoke on the still air betrayed the camp of the man he was seeking.

He resumed his way. Of his whole journey this part was the most difficult trial to his patience. There was just current enough to mock at his efforts with the paddle. He seemed scarcely to crawl. It was maddening after his brisk progress up the lake. Moreover, each bend was so much like the last that he had no sense of getting on, and the invariable banks hemmed in his sight. He felt like a man condemned to a treadmill.

He had been about two hours on the river when he saw a little object floating towards him on the current that instantly caught his eye because it had the look of something fashioned. He paddled to it with a beating heart. It proved to be a tiny raft contrived out of several lengths of stout stick, tied together with strips of rag. On the little platform, out of reach of the water, was tied with another strip a roll of the white outer bark of the birch. Stonor untied it and spread it out on his knee with a trembling hand. It was a letter printed in crooked characters with a point charred in the fire.

WE WELL. HIM NOT HURT CLARE ENY. HIM SCAR OF CRAZEE CLARE SLEEP BY ME. HIM GOIN CROST [Drawing of mountains]. FROM MARY

A warm stream forced its way into the trooper's frozen breast, and the terrible strained look in his eyes relaxed. For a moment he covered his eyes with his arm, though there was none to see. His most dreadful and unacknowledged fear was for the moment relieved. Gratitude filled him.

"Good old Mary!" he thought. "She went to all that trouble just on the chance of easing my mind. By God! if we come through this all right I'll do something for her!"

"Him scar of crazee," puzzled him for a while, until it occurred to him that Mary wished to convey that Imbrie let Clare alone because he believed that her loss of memory was akin to insanity. This was where the red strain in him told. All Indians have a superstitious awe of the insane. The sign at the end of the letter was for mountains, of course. The word, no doubt, was beyond Mary's spelling. What care and circumspection must have gone to the writing and the launching of the note! It must all have been done while Imbrie slept.

Stonor applied himself to his paddle again with a better heart. After two hours more he came to their camping-place of the night before. It was a spot designed by Nature for a camp, with a little beach of clean sand below, and a grove of willow and birch above. Stonor landed to see what tell-tale signs they had left behind them.

He saw that they were in a dug-out: it had left its furrow in the sand where it was pulled up. He saw the print of Clare's little common-sense boot in the sand, and the sight almost unmanned him; Mary's track was there too, that he knew well, and Imbrie's; and to his astonishment there was a fourth track unknown to him. It was that of a small man or a large woman. Could Imbrie have persuaded one of the Kakisas to accompany him? This was all he saw. He judged from the signs that they had about five hours' start of him.

From this point the character of the country began to change. The river-banks became higher and wooded; there were outcroppings of rock and small rapids. Stonor saw from the tracks alongshore that where the current was swift they had

towed the dug-out up-stream, but he had to stick to his paddle. Though he put forth his best efforts all day he scarcely gained on them, for darkness came upon him soon after he had passed the place where they spelled in mid-afternoon.

On the next day in mid-morning he was brought to stand by a fork in the river. There was nothing to tell him which branch to choose, for the current was easy here and the trackers had re-embarked. Both branches were of about equal size: one came from the south-east, one from due east; either might reach to the mountains if it was long enough. Stonor had pondered on the map of that country, but on it the Swan River was only indicated as yet by a dotted line. All that was known of the stream by report was that it rose in the Rocky Mountains somewhere to the north of Fort Cheever, and, flowing in a north-westerly direction, roughly parallel with the Spirit, finally emptied into Great Buffalo Lake. Stonor remembered no forks on the map.

He was about to choose at random, when he was struck by a difference in the colour of the water of the two branches. The right-hand fork was a clear brown, the other greenish with a milky tinge. Now brown water, as everybody knows, comes from swamps or muskegs, while green water is the product of melting snow and ice. Stonor took the left-hand branch.

Shortly afterwards he was rewarded by a sight of the spot where they had made their first spell of the day. Landing, he found the ashes of their fire still warm; they could not have been gone more than an hour. This was an unexpected gain; some accident of travel must have delayed them. Embarking, he bent to his paddle with a renewed hope. Surely by going without a meal himself he ought to come on them before they finished their second spell.

But the river was only half of its former volume now, and the rapids were more brawling, and more tedious to ascend. However, he consoled himself with the thought that if they held him back they would delay the dug-out no less. The river was very lovely on these upper reaches; in his anxiety to get on he scarcely marked that at the moment, but afterwards he remembered its park-like shores, its forget-me-nots and raspberry-blossoms, and the dappled sunlight falling through the aspen-foliage. It was no different from the rivers of his boyhood in a sheltered land, with swimming-holes at the foot of the little rapids: only the

fenced fields and the quiet cattle were lacking above the banks, and church-spires in the distant vistas.

Within an hour Stonor himself became the victim of one of the ordinary hazards of river-travel. In a rapid one of his paddles broke in half; the current carried him broadside on a rock, and a great piece of bark was torn from the side of his frail craft. Landing, he surveyed the damage, grinding his teeth with angry disappointment. It meant the loss of all he had so hardly gained on the dug-out.

To find a suitable piece of bark, and spruce-gum to cement it with, required a considerable search in the bush. It then had to be sewed on with needle and thread, the edges gummed, and the gum given time to dry partly, in the heat of the fire. The afternoon was well advanced before he got afloat again, and darkness compelled him to camp in the spot where they had made their second, that is to say, the mid-afternoon, spell.

The next two days, his third and fourth in the river, were without especial incident. The river maintained its sylvan character, though the bordering hills or bench were gradually growing higher and bolder. Stonor, by putting every ounce that was in him into his paddle, slowly gained again on the dug-out. He knew now that Imbrie, irrespective of Mary, had a second paddle to help him. It gave the dug-out an advantage, especially in swift water, that more than neutralized its extra weight.

By evening of the fourth day all signs indicated that he was drawing close to his quarry again. He kept on until forced to stop by complete darkness. On this night the sky was heavily overcast, and it was as dark as a winter’s night. He camped where he happened to be; it was a poor spot, no more than a stony slope among willows. He had done all his necessary cooking during the day, so there was no need to wait for his supper.

The mosquitoes were troublesome, and he put up his tent, hastily slinging it between two trees, and weighing down the sides and the back with a few stones. To his tent he afterwards ascribed the preservation of his life. It was the simplest form of tent, known as a “lean-to,” or, as one might say, merely half a tent sliced along the ridge-pole, with a roof sloping to the ground at the back, and the entire

front open to the fire except for a mosquito-bar.

His bed was hard, but he was too weary to care. He lay down in his blanket, but not to achieve forgetfulness immediately; strong discipline was still required to calm his hot impatience. How could he sleep, not knowing perhaps but that one more mile might bring him to his goal? Indeed, Imbrie's camp might be around the next bend. But he could not risk his frail canoe in the shallow river after dark.

Stonor was on the borderland of sleep when he was suddenly roused to complete wakefulness by a little sound from behind his tent. A woodsman soon learns to know all the normal sounds of night, and this was something different, an infinitely stealthy sound, as of a body dragging itself an inch at a time, with long waits between. It seemed to be slowly making its way around his tent towards the open front.

Now Stonor knew that there was no animal in his country that stalks human prey, and he instantly thought of his two-legged enemy. Quick and noiselessly as a cat he slipped out of his blankets, and rolling his dunnage-bag in his place drew the blanket over it. In the faint light reflected from the embers outside it might be supposed that he still lay there. He then cautiously moved the stones aside, and slipped out under the wall of his tent on the side opposite to that whence the creeping sounds now came.

On hands and knees he crawled softly around the back of his tent, determined to stalk the stalker. He felt each inch of the way in advance, to make sure there was nothing that would break or turn under his weight. He could hear no sounds from the other side now. Rounding the back of his tent, at the corner he lay flat and stuck his head around. At first he could see nothing. The tall trees on the further shore cut off all but the faintest gleam of light from the river. A little forward and to the left of his tent there was a thick clump of willow, making a black shadow at its foot that might have concealed anything. Stonor watched, breathing with open mouth to avoid betraying himself. Little by little he made out a shadowy form at the foot of the willows, a shape merely a degree blacker than its background. He could be sure of nothing.

Then his heart seemed to miss a beat, for against the wan surface of the river he saw an arm raised and a gun point—presumably at the dummy he had left under the tent. Oddly enough his shock of horror was not primarily that one should seek to kill him, Stonor; he was first of all appalled at the outrage offered to the coat he wore.

The gun spoke and flame leaped from the barrel. Stonor, gathering himself up, sprang forward on the assassin. At the first touch he recognized with a great shock of surprise that it was a woman he had to deal with. Her shoulders were round and soft under his hands; the grunt she uttered as he bore her back was feminine. He wrenched the gun from her hands and cast it to one side.

When she caught her breath she fought like a mad cat, with every lithe muscle of her body and with teeth and claws too. She was strong; strong and quick as a steel spring. More than once she escaped him. Once she got half-way up the bank; but here he bore her down on her face and locked her arms behind her in a grip she was powerless to break.

Jerking her to her feet—one is not too gentle even with a woman who has just tried to murder one—he forced her before him back to his tent. Here, holding her with one arm while she swayed and wrenched in her efforts to free herself, he contrived to draw his knife, and to cut off one of the stay-ropes of his tent. With this he bound her wrists together behind her back, and passed the end round a stout trunk of willow. The instant he stood back she flung herself forward on the rope, but the jerk on her arms must have nearly dislocated them. It brought a shriek of pain from her. She came to a standstill, sobbing for breath.

Stonor collected dead twigs, and blew on the embers. In a minute or two he had a bright blaze, and turned, full of curiosity to see what he had got. He saw a breed woman of forty years or more, still, for a wonder, uncommonly handsome and well-formed. The pure hatred that distorted her features could not conceal her good looks. She had the fine straight features of her white forebears, and her dusky cheeks flamed with colour. She bore herself with a proud, savage grace.

More than the woman herself, her attire excited Stonor’s wonder. It was a white woman’s get-up. Her dress, though of plain black cotton, was cut with a

certain regard to the prevailing style. She wore corsets—strange phenomenon! Stonor had already discovered it before he got a look at her. Her hair had been done on top of her head in a white woman's fashion, though it was pretty well down now. Strangest of all, she wore gold jewellery; rings on her fingers and drops in her ears; a showy gold locket hanging from a chain around her neck. On the whole a surprising apparition to find on the banks of the unexplored river.

Stonor, studying her, reflected that this was no doubt the woman he had seen with Imbrie at Carcajou Point two months before. The Indians had referred to her derisively as his "old woman." But it was strange he had heard nothing of her from the Kakisas. She must have been concealed in the very tepee from which Imbrie had issued on the occasion of Stonor's first visit to the village at Swan Lake. The Indians down the river had never mentioned her. He was sure she could not have lived with Imbrie down there. Where, then, had he picked her up? Where had she been while Imbrie was down there? How had she got into the country anyway? The more he thought of it the more puzzling it was. Certainly she had come from far; Stonor was well assured he would have heard of so striking a personage as this anywhere within his own bailiwick.

Another thought suddenly occurred to him. This of course would be the woman who had tried to decoy him out of his camp with her cries for help in English. At least she explained that bit of the all-enveloping mystery.

"Well, here's a pretty how-de-do!" said Stonor with grim humour. "Who are you?"

She merely favoured him with a glance of inexpressible scorn.

"I know you talk English," he said, "good English too. So there's no use trying to bluff me that you don't understand. What is your name, to begin with?"

Still no answer but the curling lip.

"What's the idea of shooting at a policeman? Is it worth hanging for?"

She gave no sign.

He saw that it only gratified her to balk his curiosity, so he turned away with a

shrug. “If you won’t talk, that’s your affair.”

He had thrown only light stuff on the fire, and he let it burn itself out, having no mind to make of himself a shining mark for a bullet from another quarter. He lit his pipe and sat debating what to do—or rather struggling with his desire to set off instantly in search of Imbrie’s camp. Knowing it must be near, it was hard to be still. Yet better sense told him he would be at a fatal disadvantage in the dark, particularly as Imbrie must now be on the alert. There was no help for it. He must wait for daylight.

He knew that above all he required sleep to fit him for his work next day, and he determined to impose sleep on himself if will-power could do it. As he rose to return to his tent a sullen voice from the direction of the willow-bushes spoke up in English as good as his own:

“The mosquitoes are biting me.”

“Ha!” said Stonor, with a grim laugh. “You’ve found your tongue, eh? Mosquitoes! That’s not a patch on what you intended for me, my girl! But if you want to be friends, all right. First give an account of yourself.”

She relapsed into silence.

“I say, tell me who you are and where you came from.”

She said, with exactly the manner of a wilful child: “You can’t make me talk.”

“Oh, all right! But I can let the mosquitoes bite you.”

Nevertheless he untied her from the willows and let her crawl under his mosquito-bar. Here he tied ankles as well as wrists, beyond any possibility of escape. It was not pure philanthropy on his part, for he reflected that when she failed to return, Imbrie might come in search of her, and take a shot inside his tent just on a chance. For himself he took his blanket under the darkest shadow of the willows and covered himself entirely with it excepting a hole to breathe through.

He did succeed in sleeping, and when he awoke the sky was clear and the stars

paling. Before crawling out of his hiding-place he took a careful survey from between the branches. Nothing stirred outside. Under his tent his prisoner was sleeping as calmly as a child. Apparently a frustrated murder more or less was nothing to disturb her peace of mind. Stonor thought grimly—for perhaps the hundredth time in dealing with the red race: “What a rum lot they are!” He ate some bread that he had left, and began to pack up.

The woman awoke as he took down the tent over her head, and watched his preparations in a sullen silence.

“Haven’t you got a tongue this morning?” asked Stonor.

She merely glowered at him.

However, by and by, when she saw everything being packed in the canoe, she suddenly found her tongue. “Aren’t you going to feed me?” she demanded.

“No time now,” he answered teasingly.

Her face turned dark with rage. “You hangman!” she muttered savagely. “You’ve got a hangman’s face all right! Anybody would know what you are without your livery!”

Stonor laughed. “Dear! Dear! We are in a pleasant humour this morning! You believe in the golden rule, don’t you?—for others!”

When he was ready to start he regarded her grimly. He saw no recourse but to take her with him, thus quadrupling his difficulties. He did consider leaving her behind on the chance of returning later, but he could not tell what hazards the day might have for him. He might be prevented from returning, and murderess though she were, she was human, and he could not bring himself to leave her helpless in the bush. She stolidly watched the struggle going on in him.

He gave in to his humanitarian instincts with a sigh. As a final precaution he gagged her securely with a handkerchief. He wished to take no chances of her raising an alarm as they approached Imbrie’s camp. He then picked her up and laid her in the canoe. She rolled the light craft from side to side.

“If you overturn us you’ll drown like a stone,” said Stonor, grinning. “That would help solve my difficulties.”

After that she lay still, her eyes blazing.

Stonor proceeded. This part of the river was narrow and fairly deep, and the current ran steadily and slow. Through breaks in the ranks of the trees he caught sight from time to time of the bench on either hand, which now rose in high bold hills. From this he guessed that he had got back to the true prairie country again. As is always the case in that country, the slope to the north of the river was grassy, while the southerly slope was heavily wooded to the top.

He peered around each bend with a fast-beating heart, but Imbrie’s camp proved to be not so near as he had expected. He put a mile behind him, and another mile, and there was still no sign of it. Evidently the woman had not made her way through the bush, as he had supposed, but had been dropped off to wait for him. After giving him his quietus she had no doubt intended to take his canoe and join her party. Well, it was another lovely morning, and Stonor was thankful her plan had miscarried.

The river took a twist to the southward. The sun rose and shot his beams horizontally through the tree-trunks, lighting up the underbrush with a strange golden splendour. It was lovely and slightly unreal, like stage-lighting. The surface of the river itself seemed to be dusted with light. Far overhead against the blue, so tender and so far away at this latitude, eagles circled and joyously screamed, each one as if he had an intermittent alarm in his throat.

In the bow the woman lay glaring at him venomously. Stonor could not help but think: “What a gorgeous old world to be fouled with murder and hatred!”

At last, as he crept around an overhanging clump of willows, he saw what he was in search of, and his heart gave a great leap. Arresting his paddle, he clung to the branches and peered through, debating what to do. They were still far off and he had not been perceived. With straining eyes he watched the three tiny figures that meant so much to him. Unfortunately there was no chance of taking Imbrie by surprise, for he had had the wit to choose a camping-place that commanded a view down-stream for half a mile. Stonor considered landing, and

attempting to take them from the rear, but even as he looked he saw Imbrie loading the dug-out. They would be gone long before he could make his way round through the bush. There was nothing to do but make a dash for it.

They saw him as soon as he rounded the bend. There was a strange dramatic quality in the little beings running this way and that on the beach. Stonor, straining every nerve to reach them, was nevertheless obliged to be the witness of a drama in which he was powerless to intervene. He saw Imbrie throw what remained of his baggage into the dug-out. He saw the two petticoated figures start running up the beach towards him, Stonor. Imbrie started after them. The larger of the two figures dropped back and grappled with the man, evidently to give the other a chance to escape. But Imbrie succeeded in flinging her off, and, after a short chase, seized the other woman. Stonor could make out the little green Norfolk suit now.

Mary snatched up a billet of wood, and as the man came staggering back with his burden, she attacked him. He backed towards the dug-out, holding Clare's body in front of him as a shield. But under Mary's attacks he was finally compelled to drop Clare. She must have fainted, for she lay without moving. Imbrie closed with Mary, and there was a brief violent struggle. He succeeded in flinging her off again. He reached the dug-out. Mary attacked him again. Snatching up his gun, he fired at her point-blank. She crumpled up on the stones.

Imbrie picked up Clare and flung her in the dug-out. He pushed off. All this had been enacted in not much more time than it takes to read of it. Stonor was now within a furlong, but still helpless, for he dared not fire at Imbrie for fear of hitting Clare. The dug-out escaped out of sight round a bend.

CHAPTER XV

UPS AND DOWNS

Stonor, raging in his helplessness, was nevertheless obliged to stop. He found Mary conscious, biting her lips until they bled to keep from groaning. Her face was ashy. Yet she insisted on sitting up to prove to him that she was not badly hurt.

“Go on! Go on!” she was muttering as he reached her. “I all right. Don’ stop! Go after him!”

“Where are you hurt?” Stonor demanded.

“Just my leg. No bone broke. It is not’ing. Go after him!”

“I can’t leave you like this!”

“Give me your little medicine-bag. I dress it all right myself. Go quick!”

“Be quiet! Let me think!” cried the distracted trooper. “I can’t leave you here helpless. I can’t tell when I’ll be back. You must have food, a blanket, gun and ammunition.”

As he spoke, he set about getting out what she needed; first of all the little medicine chest that he never travelled without. He laid aside the breed woman’s gun and shells for her, and one of his two blankets. The delay was maddening. With every second he pictured Imbrie drawing further and further away, Clare without a protector now. Though the dug-out was heavier than the bark-canoe, he would be handicapped by the devilish breed woman, who would be sure to hinder him by every means within her power. Yet he still closed his ears to Mary’s urgings to be off. He built up Imbrie’s fire and put on water to heat for

her. He carried her near the fire, where she could help herself.

As he worked a new plan came to him, a way out of part of his difficulties. “Mary,” he said suddenly, “I’m going to leave the canoe with you, too, and this woman to take care of for me. I’ll take to the bench. I can cut him off above.”

“No! No!” she groaned. “Leave the woman and take the canoe. You can come back when you get her.”

But his mind was made up. A new hope lightened his despair. “No! He might get me. Then you’d starve to death. I don’t mean to let him get me, but I can’t take the chance. I’ll travel faster light. Even if I don’t get him to-day, he shan’t shake me off. The river is bound to get more difficult as he goes up. And it’s prairie-land above.”

He hastened to get together his pack: gun and ammunition, knife, hatchet, matches, and a little cooking-pot; a small store of flour, salt, baking-powder and smoked meat.

“Mary, as soon as you feel able to travel, you are to start down-stream in the canoe with the woman. It is up to you to take her out, and deliver her to the authorities. The charge is attempted murder. You are to tell John Gaviller everything that has happened, and let him act accordingly.”

All this was said in low tones to keep it from reaching the breed woman’s ears. Stonor now dropped to his knees and put his lips to Mary’s ear. “Tell Gaviller we know for sure that Imbrie is trying to escape over the mountains by way of the head-waters of the Swan, and to make sure that he is intercepted there if he slips through our fingers below.”

“I onerstan’,” said Mary.

He gave her a pull from his flask, and she was able to sit up and attend to the dressing of her own wound.

In ten minutes Stonor was ready to start. He put on a cheery air for Mary’s benefit. Truly the Indian woman had a task before her that might have appalled the stoutest-hearted man.

“Good-bye, Mary!” he said, gripping her hand. “You’re a good pardner. I shan’t forget it. Keep up a good heart. Remember you’re a policeman now. Going down you’re only about three days’ journey from Myengeen’s village. And you’ll have company—though I can’t recommend it much. Keep the gun in your own hands.”

Mary shrugged, with her customary stoicism. “I make her work for me.” She added simply: “Good-bye, Stonor. Bring her back safe.”

“I won’t come without her,” he said, and with a wave of his hand struck into the bush.

He laid a course at right angles to the river. The floor of this part of the valley was covered with a forest which had never known axe nor fire, and the going was difficult and slow over the down timber, some freshly-fallen, making well-nigh impassable barricades erected on the stumps of its broken branches, some which crumbled to powder at a touch. There was no undergrowth except a few lean shrubs that stretched great, pale leaves to catch the attenuated rays that filtered down. It was as cool and still as a room with a lofty ceiling. High overhead the leaves sparkled in the sun.

It was about half a mile to the foot of the bench, that is to say, to the side of the gigantic trough that carried the river through the prairie country, though it required an amount of exertion that would have carried one over ten times that distance of road. As soon as Stonor began to climb he left the forest behind him; first it diminished into scattered trees and scrub and then ceased altogether in clean, short grass, already curing under the summer sun. Presently Stonor was able to look clear over the tops of the trees; it was like rising from a mine.

The slope was not regular, but pushed up everywhere in fantastic knolls and terraces. He directed his course as he climbed for a bold projecting point from which he hoped to obtain a prospect up the valley. Reaching it at last, he gave himself a breathing-space. He saw, as he hoped, that the valley, which here ran due north and south, returned to its normal course from the westward a few miles above. Thus, by making a bee-line across the prairie, he could cut off a great bend in the watercourse, not to speak of the lesser windings of the river in

its valley. He prayed that Imbrie might have many a rapid to buck that day.

On top of the bench the prairie rolled to the horizon with nothing to break the expanse of grass but patches of scrub. Stonor's heart, burdened as it was, lifted up at the sight. "After all, there's nothing like the old bald-headed to satisfy a man's soul," he thought. "If I only had Miles Aroon under me now!" Taking his bearings, he set off through the grass at the rolling walk he had learned from the Indians.

Of that long day there is little to report. The endless slopes of grass presented no distinguishing features; he was alone with the west wind's noble clouds. He came up on the wind on a brown bear with cream-coloured snout staying his stomach with the bark of poplar shoots until the berries should be ripe, and sent him doubling himself up with a shout. Time was too precious to allow of more than one spell. This he took beside a stream of clear water at the bottom of a vast coulée that lay athwart his path. While his biscuits were baking he bagged a couple of prairie-chickens. One he ate, and one he carried along with him, "for Clare's supper."

At about four o'clock in the afternoon, that is to say, the time of the second spell, he struck the edge of the bench again, and once more the valley was spread below him. He searched it eagerly. The forest covered it like a dark mat, and the surface of the river was only visible in spots here and there. He found what he was looking for, and his heart raised a little song; a thin thread of smoke rising above the trees alongside the river, and at least a couple of miles in his rear.

"I'll get him now!" he told himself.

He debated whether to hasten directly to the river, or continue further over the prairie. He decided that the margin of safety was not yet quite wide enough, and took another line along the bench.

Three hours later he came out on the river's edge with a heart beating high with hope. The placid empty reach that opened to his view told him nothing, of course, but he was pretty sure that Imbrie was safely below him. His principal fear was that he had come too far; that Imbrie might not make it before dark. The prospect of leaving Clare unprotected in his hands through the night was one to

make Stonor shudder. He decided that if Imbrie did not come up by dark, he would make his way down alongshore until he came on their camp.

Meanwhile he sought down-stream for a better point of vantage. He came to a rapid. The absence of tracks on either side proved positively that Imbrie had not got so far as this. Stonor decided to wait here. The man would have to get out to track his dug-out up the swift water, and Stonor would have him where he wanted him. Or if it was late when he got here, he would no doubt camp.

Stonor saw that the natural tracking-path was across the stream; on the other side also was the best camping-spot, a shelving ledge of rock with a low earth bank above. In order to be ready for them, therefore, he stripped and swam across below the rapid, towing his clothes and his pack on an improvised raft, that he broke up immediately on landing. Dressing, he took up his station behind a clump of berry-bushes that skirted the bank. Here he lay at full length with his gun in his hands. He made a little gap in the bushes through which he could command the river for a furlong or so.

He lay there with his eyes fixed on the point around which the dug-out must appear. The sun was sinking low; they must soon come or they would not come. On this day he was sure Imbrie would work to the limit. He smiled grimly to think how the man would be paddling with his head over his shoulder, never guessing how danger lay ahead. Oh, but it was hard to wait, though! His muscles twitched, the blood hammered in his temples.

By and by, from too intense a concentration on a single point, the whole scene became slightly unreal. Stonor found himself thinking: “This is all a dream. Presently I will wake up.”

In the end, when the dug-out did come snaking around the bend, he rubbed his eyes to make sure they did not deceive him. Though he had been waiting for it all that time, it had the effect of a stunning surprise. His heart set up a tremendous beating, and his breath failed him a little. Then suddenly, as they came closer, a great calm descended on him. He realized that this was the moment he had planned for, and that his calculations were now proved correct. For the last time he threw over the mechanism of his gun and reloaded it.

Imbrie was paddling in the stern, of course. The man looked pretty nearly spent, and there was little of his cynical impudence to be seen now. Clare lay on her stomach on the baggage amidships, staring ahead with her chin propped in her palms, a characteristic boy's attitude that touched Stonor's heart. Her face was as white as paper, and bore a look of desperate composure. Stonor had never seen that look; seeing it now he shuddered, thinking, what if he had not found them before nightfall!

Imbrie grounded the canoe on the shelf of rock immediately below Stonor, and no more than five paces from the muzzle of his gun. Clare climbed out over the baggage without waiting to be spoken to, and walked away up-stream a few steps, keeping her back turned to the man. Her head was sunk between her shoulders; she stared out over the rapids, seeing nothing. At the sight of the little figure's piteous dejection rage surged up in Stonor; he saw red.

Imbrie got out and went to pick his course up the rapids. He cast a sidelong look at Clare's back as he passed her. The man was too weary to have much devilry in him at the moment. But in his dark eyes there was a promise of devilry.

Having laid out his course he returned to the bow of the dug-out for his tracking-line. This was the moment Stonor had been waiting for. He rose up and stepped forward through the low bushes. Clare saw him first. A little gasping cry broke from her. Imbrie spun round, and found himself looking into the barrel of the policeman's Enfield. No sound escaped from Imbrie. His lips turned back over his teeth like an animal's.

Stonor said, in a voice of deceitful softness: "Take your knife and cut off a length of that line, say about ten feet."

No one could have guessed from his look nor his tone that an insane rage possessed him; that he was fighting the impulse to reverse his gun and club the man's brains out there on the rock.

Imbrie did not instantly move to obey.

"Look sharp!" rasped Stonor. "It wouldn't come hard for me to put a bullet

through you!”

Imbrie thought better of it, and cut off the rope as ordered.

“Now throw the knife on the ground.”

Imbrie obeyed, and stepped towards Stonor, holding the rope out. There was an evil glint in his eye.

Stonor stepped back. “No, you don’t! Keep within shooting distance, or this gun will go off!”

Imbrie stopped.

“Miss Starling,” said Stonor. “Come and tie this man’s wrists together behind his back, while I keep him covered.”

She approached, still staring half witlessly as if she saw an apparition. She was shaking like an aspen-leaf.

“Pull yourself together!” commanded Stonor with stern kindness. “I am not a ghost. I am depending on you!”

Her back straightened. She took the rope from Imbrie’s hands, and passed a turn around his extended wrists. Stonor kept his gun at the man’s head.

“At this range it would make a clean hole,” he said, grinning.

To Clare he said: “Tie it as tight as you can. I’ll finish the job.”

When she had done her best, he handed his gun over and doubled the knots. Forcing Imbrie to a sitting position, he likewise tied his ankles.

“That will hold him, I think,” he said, rising.

The words seemed to break the spell that held Clare. She sank down on the stones and burst into tears, shaking from head to foot with uncontrollable soft sobs. The sight unnerved Stonor.

“Oh, don’t!” he cried like a man daft, clenching his impotent hands.

Imbrie smiled. Watching Stonor, he said with unnatural perspicacity: “You’d like to pick her up, wouldn’t you?”

Stonor spun on his heel toward the man. “Hold your tongue!” he roared. “By God! another word and I’ll brain you! You damned scoundrel! You scum!”

If Imbrie had wished to provoke the other man to an outburst, he got a little more than enough. He cringed from the other’s blazing eyes, and said no more.

Stonor bent over Clare. “Don’t, don’t grieve so!” he murmured. “Everything is all right now.”

“I know,” she whispered. “It’s just—just relief. I’m just silly now. To-day was too much—too much to bear!”

“I know,” he said. “Come away with me.”

He helped her to her feet and they walked away along the beach. Imbrie’s eyes as they followed were not pleasant to see.

“Martin, I must touch you—to prove that you’re real,” she said appealingly. “Is it wrong?”

“Take my arm,” he said. He drew her close to his side.

“Martin, that man cannot ever have been my husband. It is not possible I could ever have given myself to such a one!”

“I don’t believe he is.”

“Martin, I meant to throw myself in the river to-night if you had not come.”

“Ah, don’t! I can’t bear it! I saw.”

“My flesh crawls at him! To be alone with such a monster—so terribly alone—I can’t tell you——!”

“Don’t distress yourself so!”

“I’m not—now. I’m relieving myself. I’ve got to talk, or my head will burst.

The thing that keeps things in broke just now. I've got to talk. I suppose I'm putting it all off on you now."

"I guess I can stand it," he said grimly.

She asked very low: "Do you love me, Martin?"

"You know I do."

"Yes, I know, but I had to make you say it, because I've got to tell you. I love you. I adore you. If loving you in my mind is wicked, I shall have to be a wicked woman. Oh, I'll keep the law. From what I told you in the beginning, I must have already done some man a wrong. I shall not wrong another. But I had to tell you. You knew already, so it can do no great harm."

He glanced back at Imbrie. "If the law should insist on keeping up such a horrible thing it would have to be defied," he said—"even if I am a policeman!"

"I tell you he is not the man."

"I hope you're right."

"But if I am not free, I should not let you ruin yourself on my account."

"Ruin? That's only a word. A man's all right as long as he can work."

"Oh, Martin, it seems as if I brought trouble and unhappiness on all whom I approach!"

"That's nonsense!" he said quickly. "You've made me! However this thing turns out. You've brought beauty into my life. You've taken me out of myself. You've given me an ideal to live up to!"

"Ah, how sweet for you to say it!" she murmured. "It makes me feel real. I am only a poor wandering ghost of a woman, and you're so solid and convincing!

"There! I'm all right now!" she said, with an abrupt return to the boyish, prosaic air that he found utterly adorable. "I have exploded. I'm hungry. Let's go back and make supper. It's your turn to talk. Tell me how you got here in advance of us, you wonderful man! And Mary——!" She stopped short and her

eyes filled. “How selfish of me to forget her even for a moment!”

“She was not badly wounded,” he said. “We’ll probably overtake her to-morrow.”

“And you? I thought I saw a ghost when you rose up from the bushes.”

“No magic in that,” said Stonor. “I just walked round by the hills.”

“Just walked round by the hills,” she echoed, mocking his offhand manner, and burst out laughing. “That was nothing at all!” Her eyes added something more that she dared not put into words: “You were made for a woman to love to distraction!”

When they returned to the dug-out, Imbrie studied their faces through narrowed lids, trying to read there what had passed between them. Their serenity discomposed him. Hateful taunts trembled on his lips, but he dared not utter them.

As for Clare and Stonor, neither of them sentimental persons, their breasts were eased. Each now felt that he could depend on the other in the best sense until death: meanwhile passion could wait. They made a fire together and cooked their supper with as unconscious an air as if they had just come out from home a mile or two to picnic. They ignored Imbrie, particularly Clare, who, with that wonderful faculty that women possess, simply obliterated him by her unconsciousness of his presence. The prisoner could not understand their air towards each other. He watched them with a puzzled scowl. Clare was like a child over the prairie-chicken. An amiable dispute arose over the division of it, which Stonor won and forced her to eat every mouthful.

She washed the dishes while he cleared a space among the bushes on top of the bank, and pitched her little tent. The camp-bed was still in Imbrie’s outfit, and Stonor set it up with tender hands, thinking of the burden it would bear throughout the night. Also in Imbrie’s outfit he found his own service revolver, which he returned to Clare for her protection.

Afterwards they made a little private fire for themselves a hundred feet or so from Imbrie, and sedately sat themselves down beside it to talk.

Stonor said: “If you feel like it, tell me what happened after I went to hunt my horses that morning.”

“I feel like it,” she said, with a smile. “It is such a comfort to be able to talk again. Mary and I scarcely dared whisper. You had been gone about half an hour that morning when all the Indians rode down out of the woods, and crossed the ford to our side. There were about thirty of them, I should say. I did just what you told me, that is, went on with my packing as if they were not there. For a little while they stood around staring like sulky children. Finally one of them said to me through Mary with a sort of truculent air, like a child experimenting to see how far he can go, that they were going to take Imbrie back. I told Mary to tell him that that was up to him; that he would have to deal with you later, if they did. Meanwhile I noticed they were edging between me and Imbrie, and presently Imbrie stood up, unbound. He took command of the band. It seemed he had known they were coming. I was only anxious to see them all ride off and leave us.

“Soon I saw there was worse coming. At first I knew only by Mary’s scared face. She argued with them. She would not tell me what it was all about. Gradually I understood that Imbrie was telling them I was his wife, and they must take me, too. I almost collapsed. Mary did the best she could for me. I don’t know all that she said. It did no good. The principal Indian asked me if I was Imbrie’s wife, and I could only answer that I did not know, that I had lost my memory. I suppose this seemed like a mere evasion to them. When Mary saw that they were determined, she said they must take her, too. She thought this was what you would want. They refused, but she threatened to identify every man of them to the police, so they had to take her.

“One man’s horse had been killed, and they sent him and three others off to the Horse Track village on foot to get horses to ride home on. That provided horses for Imbrie, Mary, and me. They made them go at top speed all day. I expect it nearly killed the horses. I was like a dead woman; I neither felt weariness nor anything else much. If it had not been for Mary I could not have survived it.

“We arrived at their village near Swan Lake early in the afternoon. Imbrie stopped there only long enough to collect food. We never had anything to eat but tough smoked meat of some kind, dry biscuits, and bitter tea, horrible stuff! It didn’t make much difference, though.

“Imbrie told the Indians what to say when the police came. He couldn’t speak their language very well, so he had to use Mary to translate, and Mary told me. Mary was trying to get on Imbrie’s good side now. She said it wouldn’t do any harm, and might make things easier for us. If we lulled his suspicions we might get a chance to escape later, she said. She wanted me to make up to Imbrie, too, but I couldn’t.

“Imbrie told the Indians to go about their usual work as if nothing had happened, and simply deny everything if they were questioned. Nothing could be proved he said, for he and Mary and I would never be found nor heard of again. He was going to take us back to his country, he said. By that they understood, I think, that we were going to disappear off the earth. They seemed to have the most absolute faith in him. They thought you wouldn’t dare follow until you had secured help from the post, which would take many days.”

“What about the breed woman?” interrupted Stonor.

“She was waiting there at the Swan Lake village. She came with us as a matter of course, and helped paddle the dug-out. Mary paddled, too, but she didn’t work as hard as she made believe. We got in the river before dark, but Imbrie made them paddle until late. I dreaded the first camp, but Imbrie let me alone. Mary said he was afraid of me because he thought I was crazy. After that, you may be sure, I played up to that idea. It worked for a day or two, but I saw from his eyes that he was gradually becoming suspicious.

“At night Imbrie and the breed woman took turns watching. Whenever we got a chance Mary and I talked about you, and what you would do. We knew of course that the man was coming out from Fort Enterprise, and I was sure that you would send him back for aid, and come right after us yourself. So Mary wrote you the note on a piece of bark, and set it adrift in the current. It was wonderful how she deceived them right before their eyes. But they gave us a

good deal of freedom. They knew we could do nothing unless we could get weapons, or steal the canoes. She went down the shore a little way to launch her message to you.

“Well, that’s about all I can remember. The days on the river were like a nightmare. All we did was to watch for you, and listen at night. Then came yesterday. By that time Imbrie was beginning to feel secure, and was taking it easier. We were sitting on the shore after the second spell when the breed woman came running in in a panic. We understood from her gestures that she had seen you turning into the next reach of the river below. Mary’s heart and mine jumped for joy. Imbrie hustled us into the dug-out, and paddled like mad until he had put a couple of bends between us and the spot.

“Later, he put the breed woman ashore. She had her gun. We were terrified for you, but could do nothing. Imbrie carried us a long way further before he camped. That was a dreadful night. We had no way of knowing what was happening. Then came this morning. You saw what happened then.”

Stonor asked: “What did you make of that breed woman?”

“Nothing much, Martin. I felt just as I had with Imbrie, that I must have known her at some time. She treated me well enough; that is to say, she made no secret of the fact that she despised me, but was constrained to look after me as something that Imbrie valued.”

“Jealous?”

“No.”

“What is the connection between her and Imbrie?”

“I don’t know. They just seemed to take each other for granted.”

“How did Imbrie address her?”

“I don’t know. They spoke to each other in some Indian tongue. Mary said it sounded a little like the Beaver language, but she could not understand it.”

“Where do you suppose this woman kept herself while Imbrie was living

beside the falls?”

Clare shook her head.

“If we knew that it would explain much!”

“Well, that’s all of my story,” said Clare. “Now tell me every little thing you’ve done and thought since you left us.”

“That’s a large order,” said Stonor, smiling.

When he had finished his tale he took her to the door of her tent.

“Where are you going to sleep?” she asked anxiously.

“Down by the fire.”

“Near—him?”

“That won’t keep me awake.”

“But if he should work loose and attack you?”

“I’ll take precious good care of that.”

“It’s so far away!” she said plaintively.

“Twenty-five feet!” he said smiling.

“Couldn’t you—sleep close outside my tent where I could hear you breathing if I woke?”

He smiled, and gave her his eyes deep and clear. There comes a moment between every two who deeply love when shame naturally drops away, and to assume shame after that is the rankest hypocrisy. “I couldn’t,” he said simply.

She felt no shame either. “Very well,” she said. “You know best. Good-night, Martin.”

Stonor went back to the fire. He was too much excited to think of sleeping immediately, but it was a happy excitement; he could even afford at the moment

not to hate Imbrie. The prisoner watched his every movement through eyes that he tried to make sleepy-looking, but the sparkle of hatred betrayed him.

“You seem well pleased with yourself,” he sneered.

“Why shouldn’t I be?” said Stonor good-naturedly. “Haven’t I made a good haul to-day?”

“How did you do it?”

“I just borrowed a little of your magic for the occasion and flew through the air.”

“Well, you’re not out of the woods yet,” said Imbrie sourly.

“No?”

“And if you do succeed in taking me in, you’ll have some great explaining to do.”

“How’s that?”

“To satisfy your officers why you hounded a man simply because you were after his wife.”

Stonor grinned. “Now that view of the matter never occurred to me!”

“It will to others.”

“Well, we’ll see.”

“What’s become of the two women?” asked Imbrie.

“They’re on their way down-stream.”

“What happened anyway, damn you?”

Stonor laughed and told him.

Later, after a thoughtful silence, Stonor suddenly asked: “Imbrie, how did you treat measles among the Kakisas last year? That would be a good thing for me to

know.”

“No doubt. But I shan’t tell you,” was the sullen answer.

“The worst thing we have to deal with up here is pneumonia; how would you deal with a case?”

“What are you asking me such questions for?”

“Well, you’re supposed to be a doctor.”

“I’m not going to share my medical knowledge with every guy who asks. It was too hard to come by.”

“That’s not the usual doctor’s attitude.”

“A hell of a lot I care!”

Stonor took out his note-book, and wrote across one of the pages: “The body was not carried over the falls.” He then poked the fire into a bright blaze, and showed the page to Imbrie.

“What have I written?” he asked, watching the man narrowly.

Imbrie glanced at it indifferently, and away again. There was not the slightest change in his expression. Stonor was convinced he had not understood it.

“I won’t tell you,” muttered Imbrie.

“Just as you like. If I untie your hands, will you write a line from my dictation?”

“No. What foolishness is this?”

“Only that I suspect you can neither read nor write. This is your opportunity to prove that you can.”

“Oh, go to hell!”

“I’m satisfied,” said Stonor, putting away the book.

Travelling down the river next morning was child's play by comparison with the labour of the ascent. The current carried them with light hearts. That is to say, two of the hearts on board were light. Imbrie, crouched in the bow with his inscrutable gaze, was hatching new schemes of villainy perhaps. Clare sat as far as possible from him, and with her back turned. All day she maintained the fiction that she and Stonor were alone in the dug-out. In the reaction from the terrors of the last few days her speech bubbled like a child's. She pitched her voice low to keep it from carrying forward. All her thoughts looked to the future.

"Three or four days to the village at Swan Lake, you say. We won't have to wait there, will we?"

"My horses are waiting."

"Then four days more to Fort Enterprise. You said there was a white woman there. How I long to see one of my own kind! She'll be my first—in this incarnation. Then we'll go right out on the steamboat, won't we?"

"We'll have to wait a few days for her August trip."

"You'll come with me, of course."

"Yes, I'll have to take my prisoners out to headquarters at Miwasa landing—perhaps all the way to town if it is so ordered."

"And when we get to town, what shall I do? Adrift on the world!"

"Before that I am sure we will meet with anxious inquiries for you."

"Yes, I have a comfortable feeling at the back of my head that I have people somewhere. Poor things, what a state they must be in! It will be part of your duty to take me home, won't it? Surely the authorities wouldn't let me travel alone."

"Surely not!" said Stonor assuming more confidence than he felt.

"Isn't it strange and thrilling to think of a civilized land where trolley cars clang in the streets, and electric lights shine at night; where people, crowds and crowds of people, do exactly the same things at the same hours every day of their lives except Sundays, and never dream of any other kind of life! Think of

sauntering down-town in a pretty summer dress and a becoming hat, and chatting with scores of people you know, and looking at things in the stores and buying useless trifles—where have I done all that, I wonder? Think of pulling up one's chair to a snowy tablecloth—and, oh, Martin! the taste of good food! Funny, isn't it, when I have forgotten so much, that I should remember *things* so well!"

Clare insisted that Stonor had overtired himself the last few days, and made him loaf at the paddle with many a pause to fill and light his pipe. Even so their progress was faster than in the other direction. Shortly after midday she told him that they were nearing the spot where Mary had been shot the day before. They looked eagerly for the place.

To their great disappointment Mary had gone. However, Stonor pointed out that it was a good sign she had been able to travel so soon.

They camped for the night at a spot where Mary had spelled the day before. Stonor observed from the tracks that it was the breed woman who had moved around the fire cooking. Mary apparently had been unable to leave the canoe. It made him anxious. He did not speak of it to Clare. He saw Imbrie examining the tracks also.

This camping-place was a bed of clean, dry sand deposited on the inside of one of the river-bends, and exposed by the falling water. Stonor chose it because it promised a soft bed, and his bones were weary. The bank above was about ten feet high and covered with a dense undergrowth of bushes, which they did not try to penetrate, since a dead tree stranded on the beach provided an ample store of fuel. Clare's tent was pitched at one end of the little beach, while Imbrie, securely bound, and Stonor slept one on each side of the fire a few paces distant.

In the morning Stonor was the first astir. A delicate grey haze hung over the river, out of which the tops of the willow-bushes rose like islands. He chopped and split a length of the stranded trunk, and made up the fire. Imbrie awoke, and lay watching him with a lazy sneer. Stonor had no warning of the catastrophe. He was stooping over sorting out the contents of Imbrie's grub-bag, his back to the bushes, when there came a crashing sound that seemed within him—yet

outside. That was all he knew.

CHAPTER XVI

THE LAST STAGE ON SWAN RIVER.

When Stonor's sense returned the first thing of which he was conscious was Clare's soft hand on his head. He opened his eyes and saw her face bending over him, the nurse's face, serious, compassionate and self-forgetful. No one knows what reserves may be contained in a woman until another's wound draws on them. He found himself lying where he had fallen; but there was a bag under his neck to hold his head up. Putting up his hand he found that his head was tightly bandaged. There seemed to be a mechanical hammer inside his skull.

"What happened?" he whispered.

She scarcely breathed her reply. "The woman shot you. She was hidden in the bush."

Looking beyond her, Stonor saw Imbrie and the breed woman eating by the fire in high good humour. He observed that the woman was wearing the revolver he had given Clare.

"She disarmed me before I could fire," Clare went on. "Your wound is not serious. The bullet only ploughed the scalp above your ear."

"Who bandaged me?"

"I did. They didn't want to let me, but I made them. I sewed the wound first. I don't know how I did it, but I did."

Imbrie looked over and saw them talking. "Let him alone," he said harshly. "Come over here and get your breakfast."

“Go,” said Stonor with his eyes and lips. “If he attempted to ill-treat you in my sight I——”

She understood, and went without demur. Imbrie motioned her to a place beside him and put a plate before her. She went through the motions of eating, but her eyes never left Stonor’s face. Stonor closed his eyes and considered their situation. Frightful enough it was in good sooth, yet it might have been worse. For as he lay quiet he felt his powers returning. Beyond a slight nausea he was himself again. He thanked God for a hard skull.

Meanwhile the breed woman was bragging of her exploit. She spoke in English for the pleasure it gave her to triumph over the whites.

“He gave Mary his canoe and made for the bench.”

“I know that,” said Imbrie. “Go on.”

“Well, as soon as Mary had bound up her leg she wanted to start. But her leg got worse on the way. When it came time to spell, she had to untie me and let me cook, while she kept watch over me with the gun—my gun that Stonor gave her. It was at this place that we spelled. When we went on, her leg kept getting worse, and soon she said we’d have to stop for the night. So I made camp. Then she ordered me to come up to her and get my hands tied, and patted the gun as a sort of hint. I went up to her all right, and when she put down the gun and took up the rope, I snatched up the gun, and then I had her!”

The woman and Imbrie roared with laughter.

“Then I just took her knife and her food, and went,” the woman said, callously.

“Damned inhuman—!” Stonor cried involuntarily.

“What’s the matter with you!” she returned. “Do you think I was going to let her take me in and turn me over for shooting at a policeman? Not if I know it! I was charitable to her if it comes to that. I could have taken her canoe, too, and then she would properly have starved. But I left her the canoe and a piece of bread, too. Mary Moosa is fat enough. I guess she can live off her fat long

enough to get to Myengeen’s village.”

“What then?” asked Imbrie.

“I just walked off up the river. She couldn’t follow me with her leg. She couldn’t track the canoe up the rapids. All she can do is to go on down.”

“How did you know where I was?” asked Imbrie.

“I didn’t know. I took a chance. I had the gun and a belt of cartridges. I can snare fool-hens and catch fish. It was a sight better than going to jail. I knew if the policeman got you he’d bring you down river, and I figured I’d have another chance to get him. And if you got him I figured there wouldn’t be any hurry, and you’d wait for awhile for me.”

“You did well,” said Imbrie with condescending approval.

“Nearly all night I walked along the shore looking for your camp. At last I saw the little tent and I knew I was all right. Then I waited for daylight to shoot. The damned policeman turned his head as I fired, or I would have finished him.”

Imbrie dropped into the Indian tongue that they ordinarily used. From his knowledge of the Beaver language Stonor understood it pretty well, though a word escaped him here and there.

“What will we do with him?” he said.

“Be careful,” she said. “They may understand.”

“No fear of that. We know that Clare doesn’t speak our tongue.”

“Maybe the policeman speaks Beaver.”

“He doesn’t, though. He spoke English to them. I asked Shose Cardinal if he spoke Beaver, and he said no. And when I pushed off I insulted him in our tongue, and he paid no attention. Listen to this——”

Imbrie turned, and in the Indian tongue addressed an unrepeatable insult to the wounded trooper. Stonor, though almost suffocated with rage, contrived to maintain an unchanged face.

“You see?” said Imbrie to the woman, laughing. “No white man would take that. We can say what we like to each other. Speak English now just to torment him, the swine! Ask me in English what I’m going to do with him.”

She did so.

“Oh, I don’t know,” he answered carelessly. “Just tie him up, I guess, and leave him sitting here.”

“Tie him up?” she said with an evil smile.

“Sure! Give him leisure to prepare for his end.”

They laughed together.

Stonor dreaded the effect of this on Clare. She, however, seemed to be upborne by some inner thought.

“I know something better than that,” the woman said presently.

“What?”

“Don’t tie him up. Leave him just as he is, without gun, axe or knife. Let him walk around until he goes off his nut or starves to death. Then there’ll be no evidence. But if you leave him tied they’ll find his body with the rope round it.”

“That’s a good idea. But he might possibly make his way to Myengeen’s village.”

“Just let him try it. It’s a hundred and fifty miles round by land. Muskeg and down timber.”

“But if he sticks to the river, Mary Moosa might bring him back help.”

“She’ll get no help from Myengeen. She’s got to go to Enterprise for help. Two weeks. Even a redbreast couldn’t last two weeks in the bush. And by that time we’ll be——”

“Easy!” said Imbrie warningly.

“We’ll be out of reach,” she said, laughing.

“All right, it’s a go,” said Imbrie. “We’ll leave him just as he is. Pack up now.”

Stonor glanced anxiously at Clare. Her face was deathly pale, but she kept her head up.

“Do you think I’m going to go and leave him here?” she said firmly to Imbrie.

“Don’t see how you’re going to help yourself,” said he, without meeting her eyes.

“If you put me in the dug-out I’ll overturn it,” she said promptly.

Imbrie was taken aback. “I’ll tie you up,” he muttered, scowling.

“You cannot tie me so tight that I can’t overturn that cranky boat.”

“You’ll be the first to drown.”

She smiled. “Do you think I value the life you offer me?” She held out her hands to him. “Tie me and see.”

There could be no mistaking the firmness of her resolve. Imbrie hesitated and weakened. He turned to the breed woman questioningly.

She said in the Indian tongue: “What do you look at me for? I’ve told you before that you’re risking both our necks by taking her. The world is full of skinny little pale-faced women, but you’ve only got one neck. Better leave her with the man.”

Imbrie shook his head slowly.

The woman shrugged. “Well, if you got to have her, fix it to suit yourself.” She ostentatiously went on with the packing.

Imbrie looked sidewise at Clare with a kind of hungry pain in his sullen eyes. “I won’t leave her,” he muttered. “I’ll take them both.”

The woman flung up her hands in a passionate gesture. “Foolishness!” she

cried.

A new idea seemed to occur to Imbrie; he said in English: “I’ll take the redbreast for my servant. Upstream work is no cinch. I’ll make him track us. It’ll be a novelty to have a redbreast for a servant.”

Clare glanced anxiously at Stonor as if expecting an outbreak.

Imbrie asked with intolerable insolence: “Will you be my servant, Redbreast?”

Clare’s hands clenched, and she scowled at Imbrie like a little fire-eater.

Stonor answered calmly: “If I have to be.”

Clare’s eyes darted to him full of relief and gratitude; she had not expected so great a sacrifice. The brave lip trembled.

Imbrie laughed. “Good!” he cried. “Redbreasts don’t relish starving in the bush any better than ordinary men!”

The breed woman, on the verge of an angry outburst, checked herself, and merely shrugged again. She said quietly in her own tongue: “He thinks he’s going to escape.”

“Sure he does!” answered Imbrie, “and I’m the man who will prevent him. I’ll keep the weapons in my own hands.”

True to his word he collected all the weapons in the outfit; three guns, the revolver and three knives. He gave the breed woman her own gun and her ammunition-belt, which she strapped round her; he kept his gun, and the other two fire-arms he disabled by removing parts of the mechanism, which he put in his pocket. He stuck two knives in his belt, and gave the woman the third, which she slipped into its customary resting-place in the top of her moccasin. Imbrie ordered Stonor to get up and strike Clare’s tent.

“He must be fed,” said Clare quickly.

“Sure, I don’t mind feeding him as long as he’s going to earn it,” said Imbrie.

Clare hastened to carry Stonor her untasted plate, but Imbrie intercepted her.

“No more whispering,” he said, scowling. “Eat your own breakfast. The woman will feed him.”

In half an hour they were on their way back up the river. They allowed Stonor to rest and recuperate in the dug-out until they came to the first rapid. Later, the policeman bent to the tracking-line with a good will. This was better luck than he had hoped for. His principal fear was that he might not be able to dissemble sufficiently to keep their suspicions lulled. He knew, of course, that if they should guess of what he was thinking his life would not be worth a copper penny. His intuition told him that even though he was a prisoner, Clare was safe from Imbrie while he was present, and he had determined to submit cheerfully to anything in order to keep alive. He only needed three or four more days!

So, with a loop of the tracking-line over his shoulder, he plodded through the ooze of the shore, and over the stones; waded out round reefs, and plunged headlong through overhanging willows. Imbrie walked behind him with his gun over his arm. Clare lay on the baggage in the dug-out wistfully watching Stonor's back, and the breed woman steered. In the more sluggish reaches of the river, the men went aboard and paddled.

When they spelled in mid-morning Imbrie and the woman became involved in a discussion of which Stonor understood almost every word. They had finished eating, and all four were sitting in a row on a beach with great stones sticking up through the sand. Clare was at one end, Stonor at the other. They were giving Stonor a rest as they might have rested a horse before putting him in harness again.

The woman said impatiently: "How long are you going to keep up this foolishness?"

"What foolishness?" Imbrie said sullenly.

"Letting this man live. He's your enemy and mine. He's not going to forget that I shot at him twice. He's got some scheme in his head right now. He's much too willing to work."

"That's just women's talk. I know what I'm doing. I've got him just right because he's scared of losing the girl."

"All right. Many times you ask me what to do. Sometimes you don't do what I say, and then you're sorry afterwards. I tell you this is foolishness. You want the white-face girl and you let the man live to please her! What sense is there in that? She won't take you as long as he lives."

"If I kill him she'll kill herself."

"Wah! That's just a threat. She'll hold it over you as long as he lives. When he's dead she'll have to make the best of it. You'll have to kill him in the end. Why not do it now?"

“I know what I’m doing,” repeated Imbrie stubbornly. “I’m the master now. Women turn naturally to the master. In a few days I’ll put this white man so low she’ll despise him.”

The woman laughed. “You don’t know much about women. The worse you treat him the crazier she’ll be about him. And if she gets a knife, look out!”

“She won’t get a knife. And if my way doesn’t work I can always kill him. He’s useful. We’re getting up-stream faster than we would without him.”

“He’s too willing to go up the river, I think.”

“There’s no help for him up there, is there?”

“I don’t know. You’d better do what I say.”

“Oh, shut up. Go and pack the grub. We’ll start soon.”

The woman went to obey with her customary shrug.

Stonor had much food for thought in this conversation. He marked with high satisfaction that the way the woman spoke did not for a moment suggest that Imbrie had any rights over Clare, nor that he had ever possessed her in the past. Listen as he might, he could gain no clue to the relationship between the two speakers. He hoped they might betray themselves further later on. Meanwhile the situation was hazardous in the extreme. There was no doubt the woman would soon wear Imbrie down. If he, Stonor, could only communicate with Clare it would help.

Imbrie turned to Clare with what he meant for an ingratiating smile. “Is your memory coming back at all?” he asked.

In itself there was nothing offensive in the question, and Clare had the wit to see that nothing was to be gained by unnecessarily snubbing the man. “No,” she said simply.

“But you’re all right in every other way. There’s nothing the matter with you?”

She let it go at that.

“You don’t remember the days when I was courting you?”

“No,” she said with an idle air, “where was that?”

He saw the trap. “I’ll tell you some other time.—Redbreast has long ears.”

While Imbrie’s attention was occupied by Clare a possible way of sending her a message occurred to Stonor. The woman was busy at some paces’ distance. Stonor was sitting on a flat stone with his feet in the sand. Carelessly picking up a stick, he commenced to make letters in the sand. Clare, whose eyes never left him for long, instantly became aware of what he was doing; but so well did she cover her glances that Imbrie took no alarm.

Stonor, printing a word at a time, and instantly rubbing it out with his foot, wrote: “Make out to scorn me.”

Meanwhile Imbrie was making agreeable conversation and Clare was leading him on sufficiently to keep him interested. Small as his success was, he was charmed with it. Finally he rose regretfully.

“Time to go,” he said. “Go get in your harness, Stonor.”

The trooper arose and slouched to the tracking-line with a hang-dog air. Clare’s eyes followed him in well-assumed indignation at his supineness.

“He’ll make a good pack-horse yet,” said Imbrie with a laugh.

“So it seems,” she said bitterly.

They started. Imbrie, much encouraged by this little passage, continued to bait Stonor at intervals during the afternoon. The policeman, fearful of appearing to submit too suddenly, sometimes rebelled, but always sullenly gave in when Imbrie raised his gun. Stonor saw that, so far as the man was concerned, he need have little fear of overdoing his part. Imbrie in his vanity was quite ready to believe that Clare was turning from Stonor to him. On the other hand, the breed woman was not at all deceived. Her lip curled scornfully at all this by-play.

Clare's glance at Stonor, keeping up what she had begun, progressed from surprise through indignation to open scorn. Meanwhile in the same ratio she held herself less and less aloof from Imbrie. She, too, was careful not to overdo it. She made it clear to Imbrie that it would be a good long time yet before he could expect any positive favours from her. She did it so well that Stonor, though he had himself told her to act in that manner, was tormented by the sight. After all, he was human.

Once and once only during the day did Stonor's and Clare's glances meet unobserved by the others. It happened as the trooper was embarking in the dug-out preparatory to paddling up a smooth reach. Imbrie and the woman were both behind Clare, and she gave Stonor a deep look imploring his forgiveness for the wrong she seemed to do him. It heartened him amazingly. Bending low as he laid the coiled rope in the bow, his lips merely shaped the words:

"Keep it up!"

So long and so hard did they work that day that they were able to camp for the night only a few miles short of the highest point they had yet reached on the river. The camping-place was a pleasant opening up on top of the bank, carpeted with pine-needles. The murmur of the pines reminded Clare and Stonor of nights on the lower river—nights both happy and terrible, which now seemed years past.

While supper was preparing Clare appeared out of her tent with some long strips of cotton. She went unhesitatingly to where Stonor sat.

Imbrie sprang up. "Keep away from him!" he snarled.

Clare calmly sat down by Stonor. "I'm going to dress his wound," she said. "I'd do the same for a dog. I don't want to speak to him. You can sit beside me while I work."

Imbrie sullenly submitted.

After supper it appeared from Imbrie's evil grin that he was promising himself a bit of fun with the policeman. But this time he was taking no chances.

“I’m tired of toting this gun around; tie his hands,” he ordered the woman.

The night was chilly and they had a good fire on the edge of the bank. It lighted them weirdly as they sat in a semi-circle about it, the four strangely-assorted figures backed by the brown trunks of the pines, and roofed by the high branches. Stonor safely tied up, Imbrie put down his gun and lighted his pipe. He studied the policeman maliciously. He was not quite satisfied; even in Stonor’s submission he felt a spirit that he had not yet broken.

“You policemen think pretty well of yourselves, don’t you?” he said.

Stonor, clearly perceiving the man’s intention, was nevertheless undisturbed. This vermin was beneath him. His difficulty was to curb the sly desire to answer back. Imbrie gave him such priceless openings. But the part he had imposed on himself required that he seemed to be cowed by the man’s crude attempts at wit. A seeming sullen silence was his only safe line. It required no little self-control.

Imbrie went on: “The government sets you fellows up as a kind of bogey. For years they’ve been teaching the natives that a red-coat is a kind of sacred monkey that all must bow down to. And you forget you’re only a man like the rest of us. When you meet a man who isn’t scared off by all this hocus-pocus it comes pretty hard on you. You have to sing small, don’t you, Redbreast?”

Silence from Stonor.

“I say you have to sing small, Redbreast.”

“Just as you like.”

“I’ve heard ugly tales about the police,” Imbrie went on. “It seems they’re not above turning a bit of profit out of their jobs when it’s safe. Is that so, Stonor?”

“I hear you say it.”

“You yourself only took me up in the first place because you thought there was a bit of a bribe in it, or a jug of whisky maybe. You thought I was a whisky-runner, but you couldn’t prove it. I guess you’re sorry now that you ever fooled with me, aren’t you, Redbreast?”

Stonor said nothing.

“Answer me when I speak to you. Aren’t you sorry now that you interfered with me?”

This was a hard one. A vein stood out on Stonor’s forehead. He thought: “I wouldn’t say it for myself, but for her——!” Aloud he muttered: “Yes!”

Imbrie roared with laughter. “I’m putting the police in their place!” he cried. “I’m teaching them manners! I’ll have him eating out of my hand before I’m through with him!”

Clare, seeing the swollen vein, bled for Stonor, yet she gave him a glance of scorn, and the look she gave Imbrie caused him to rise as if moved by a spring, and cross to her.

As he passed the breed woman he said in the Indian tongue: “Well, who was right, old woman?”

He sat down beside Clare.

The woman answered: “You fool! She’s playing with you to save her lover. Any woman would do the same.”

“You lie!” said Imbrie, with a fatuous side-glance at Clare. “She’s beginning to like me now.”

“Beginning to like you!” cried the woman scornfully. “Fool! Watch me! I’ll show you how much she likes you!”

Springing to her feet, and stooping over, she drew the knife from her moccasin. She turned on Stonor. “Redbreast!” she cried in English. “I’m sick of looking at your ugly face. Here’s where I spoil it!”

She raised the knife. Her eyes blazed. Stonor really thought his hour had come. He scrambled to his feet. Clare, with a scream, ran between them, and flung her arms around Stonor’s neck.

“You beast!” she cried over her shoulder to the woman. “A bound man! You’ll

have to strike him through me!”

The woman threw back her head and uttered a great, coarse laugh. She coolly returned the knife to her moccasin. “You see how much she likes you,” she said to Imbrie.

Clare, seeing how she had been tricked, unwound her arms from Stonor’s neck, and covered her face. It seemed too cruel that all their pains the livelong day should go for nothing in a moment. Imbrie was scowling at them hatefully.

“Don’t distress yourself,” whispered Stonor. “It couldn’t be helped. We gained a whole day by it anyway. I’ll think of something else for to-morrow.”

“Keep clear of him!” cried Imbrie. “Go to your tent!”

“I won’t!” Clare said.

“Better go!” whispered Stonor. “I am safe for the present.”

She went slowly to her tent and disappeared.

Stonor sat down again. Across the fire Imbrie scowled and pulled at his lip. The breed woman, returning to her place, had the good sense to hold her tongue.

After a long while Imbrie said sullenly in the Indian tongue: “Well, you’ve got your way. You can kill him to-morrow.”

Stonor was a brave man, but a chill struck to his breast.

“I kill him?” said the woman. “Why have I got to do all the dirty work?”

“What do you care? You’ve already tried twice.”

“Why don’t you kill him yourself?”

“I’m not afraid of him.”

“Maybe not. With his hands tied.”

Imbrie’s fist clenched. “Do you want me to beat you?”

The woman shrugged.

“You know very well why I don’t want to do it,” Imbrie went on. “It’s nothing to you if the girl hates you.”

“Oh, that’s why, eh? You’re scared she’d turn from bloody hands! She’s made a fool of you, all right!”

“Never mind that. You do it to-morrow.”

“Why not to-night?”

“I won’t have it done in her sight. To-morrow morning when we spell you make some excuse to take him into the bush. There you shoot him or stick a knife in his back. I don’t care so long as you make a job of it. You come back alone and make a story of how he tried to run away, see? Then I’ll beat you ____”

“Beat me!” she cried indignantly.

“Fool! I won’t hurt you. I’ll just act rough to you for a while, till she gets better.”

“That girl has made me plenty trouble these last two years. I wish I’d never set eyes on her!”

“Forget it! Tie his feet together so he can’t wander and go to bed now!”

Mary Moosa’s little mosquito-tent was still in Imbrie’s outfit, but the woman preferred to roll up in her blanket by the fire like a man. Soon the two of them were sleeping as calmly as two children, and Stonor was left to his own thoughts.

It was a silent quartette that took to the river next day. Imbrie was sulky; it appeared that he no longer found any relish in gibing at Stonor. Clare was pale and downcast. After an hour or so they came to the rapids where Stonor had intercepted Imbrie and Clare, and thereafter the river was new to them. Stonor

gathered from their talk that the river was new, too, to Imbrie and the woman, but that they had received information as to its course from Kakisa sources.

For many miles after that the current ran smooth and slow, and they paddled the dug-out; Stonor in the bow, Imbrie guarding him with the gun, Clare behind Imbrie, and the breed woman with the stern-paddle. All with their backs to each other and all silent. About ten o'clock they came to the mouth of a little creek coming in at the left, and here Imbrie indicated they would spell.

"So this is the spot designed for my murder," thought Stonor, looking over the ground with a natural interest.

The little brook was deep and sluggish; its surface was powdered with tiny lilies and, at its edges, long grass trailed in the water. A clean, grassy bank sloped up gradually. Further back were white-stemmed aspen-trees gradually thickening into the forest proper.

"Ideal place for a picnic," thought Stonor grimly. As they went ashore he perceived that the breed woman was somewhat agitated. She continually wiped her forehead on her sleeve. This was somehow more reassuring than her usual inhuman stolidity. Imbrie clearly was anxious, too, but not about Stonor or what was going to happen to him. His eyes continually sought Clare's face.

The breed woman glanced inquiringly at Imbrie. He said in the Indian tongue: "We'll eat first."

"So I have an hour's respite," thought Stonor.

None of them displayed much appetite. Stonor forced himself to eat. Imbrie glanced at him oddly from time to time. "He's sorry to see good food wasted," thought the trooper. "Well, it won't be, if I can help it!"

When they had finished the woman said in English with a very careless air: "I'm going to see if I can get some fresh meat."

"She means me," thought Stonor.

She got her gun and departed. Stonor was aware likewise of the knife sticking

out of the top of her moccasin. Both Imbrie and the woman had a self-conscious air. A child could have seen that something was afoot. The woman walked off through the grass and was presently lost among the trees.

Imbrie commanded Stonor to wash the dishes.

Stonor reflected that since they meant to kill him anyhow if they could, there was nothing to be gained by putting up with further indignities.

“Wash them yourself,” he said coolly.

Imbrie shrugged, but said no more.

Pretty soon they heard a shot at no great distance.

Stonor thought: “Now she’ll come back and say she’s got a bear or a moose, and they’ll order me to go back with her and bring in the meat. Shall I go, or shall I refuse to go? If I refuse they’re almost sure to suspect that I understand their lingo; but if I go I may be able to disarm her. I’ll go.”

Presently they saw her returning. “I’ve got a moose,” she said stolidly.

Stonor smiled a grim inward smile. It was too simple to ask him to believe that she had walked into the bush and brought down a moose within five minutes with one shot. He knew very well that if there was a feast in prospect her face would be wreathed in smiles. He was careful to betray nothing in his own face.

Imbrie was a better actor. “Good work!” he cried. “Now we’ll have something fit to eat.”

She said: “I want help to bring in the meat.”

“Stonor, go help her,” said Imbrie carelessly.

The trooper got up with an indifferent air.

“Martin, don’t go!” Clare said involuntarily.

“I’m not afraid of her,” Stonor said.

The woman forced him to walk in advance of her across the grass. The thought of her behind him with the gun ready made Stonor’s skin prickle uncomfortably, but he reflected that she would certainly not shoot until they were hidden in the bush.

When they reached the edge of the bush he stopped and looked at her. “Which way?” he asked, with an innocent air.

“You can follow the tracks, can’t you?” said she.

He saw that she was pale and perspiring freely. She moistened her lips before she spoke.

Half a dozen paces further on he stopped again.

“Go on!” she said harshly.

“Got to tie my moccasin,” he said, dropping on one knee and turning half round, so that he could keep an eye on her. She gave a swift glance over her shoulder. They were not yet fully out of sight of the others.

“Your moccasin is not untied,” she said suddenly.

At the same moment Stonor, still crouching, sprang at her, taking care to keep under the gun. Grasping her knees, he flung her to the ground. He got the gun, but before he could raise it, she sprang at him from all fours like a cat, and clung to him with a passionate fury no man could have been capable of. Stonor was unable to shake her off without dropping the gun. Meanwhile she screamed for aid.

Both Imbrie and Clare came running. Imbrie, circling round the struggling pair, clubbed his gun and brought it down on Stonor’s head. The trooper went to earth. He did not altogether lose consciousness. The woman, maddened, recovered her gun, and was for dispatching him on the spot, but Imbrie, thinking of Clare, prevented her.

Stonor was soon able to rise, and to make his way back, albeit somewhat

groggily, to the creek. Clare wished to support him, but he stopped her with a look.

When they got back to their camp Imbrie demanded with seeming indignation: “What was the matter with you? What did you expect to gain by jumping on her?”

“What did she take me into the bush for?” countered Stonor. “To put a bullet through me?”

Imbrie made a great parade of surprise. “What makes you think that?”

“She’s tried twice already, hasn’t she? I saw it in her eye. She saw it, too——” pointing to Clare. “You heard her warn me. She never shot a moose. That was too simple a trick.”

“I did shoot a moose,” said the woman sullenly.

“Then why don’t you bring some of it in and let’s see it. You have your knife to cut off as much as we can carry.”

She turned away with a discomposed face.

“Oh, well, if you won’t take the trouble to bring in the meat we’ll go without it,” said Imbrie quickly. Stonor laughed.

As they were making ready to start Stonor heard Imbrie say bitterly to the woman, in their own tongue: “You made a pretty mess of that!”

“Well, do it yourself, then,” she snarled back.

“Very well, I will. When I see a good chance.”

“This is only the 25th,” thought Stonor. “By hook or by crook I must contrive to keep alive a couple of days longer.”

Above this camping-place the character of the river changed again. The banks became steep and stony, and the rapids succeeded each other with only a few hundred yards of smooth water between. Stonor became a fixture in the tracking-line. He worked with a right good will, hoping to make himself so useful that

they would not feel inclined to get rid of him. It was a slim chance, but the best that offered at the moment. Moreover, every mile that he put behind him brought him so much nearer succour.

That night in camp he had the satisfaction of hearing Imbrie say in answer to a question from the woman:

“No, not to-night. All day he’s been working like a slave to try and get on the good side of me. Well, let him work. I’ve no mind to break my back while I have him to work for me. According to the Kakisas we’ll have rapids now for a long way up. Let him pull us.”

So Stonor could allow himself to sleep with an easy mind for that night, anyway.

The next two days were without special incident. Stonor lived from moment to moment, his fate hanging on Imbrie’s savage and irresponsible impulses. Fortunately for him, he was still able to inform himself from the talk of the two. Each day they broke camp, tracked up-stream, tracked and poled up the rapids, spelled and tracked again. In the rapids it was the breed woman who had to help Stonor. Imbrie would stand by smoking, with his gun over his arm. Stonor wondered at the woman’s patience.

At the end of the second day they found another soft sandy beach to camp on. Stonor was so weary he could scarcely remain awake long enough to eat. They all turned in immediately afterwards. Latterly Imbrie had been forcing Stonor to lie close to him at night, and the end of the line that bound Stonor’s wrists was tied around Imbrie’s arm. The breed woman lay on the other side of the fire, and Clare’s tent was pitched beyond her.

Stonor was awakened by a soft touch on his cheek. Having his nerves under good control, he gave no start. Opening his eyes, he saw Clare’s face smiling adorably, not a foot from his own. At first he thought he was dreaming, and lay scarcely daring to breathe, for fear of dissipating the charming phantom.

But the phantom spoke: “Martin, you looked so tired to-night it made me cry. I could not sleep. I had to come and speak to you. Did I do wrong?”

He feasted his tired eyes on her. How could he blame her? “Dangerous,” he whispered. “These breeds sleep like cats.”

“What’s the difference? It’s as bad as it can be already.”

He shook his head. “They have not ill-treated you.”

“I wouldn’t mind if they did. It is terrible to see you work so hard, while I do nothing. Why do you work so hard for them?”

“I have hope of meeting help up the river.”

She smiled incredulously. Stonor, seeing her resigned to the worst, said no more about his hopes. After all they might fail, and it would be better not to raise her hopes only to dash them.

“Better go,” he urged. “Every little while through the night one or the other of these breeds wakes, sits up, looks around, and goes back to sleep again.”

“Are you glad I came, Martin?”

“Very glad. Go back to your tent, and we’ll talk in fancy until we fall asleep again.”

Stonor was awakened the next time by a loud, jeering laugh. It was full daylight. The breed woman was standing at his feet, pointing mockingly to the tell-tale print of Clare’s little body in the sand beside him. A blinding rage filled Stonor at the implication of that coarse laugh—but he was helpless. Imbrie started up, and Stonor attempted to roll over on the depression—but Imbrie saw it, saw also the little tracks leading around behind the sleepers to Clare’s tent.

No sound escaped from Imbrie, but his smooth face turned hideous with rage; the lips everted over the clenched teeth, the ruddy skin livid and blotchy. He quickly untied the bond between him and Stonor. The woman, with a wicked smile, drew the knife out of her moccasin, and offered it to him. He eagerly snatched it up. Stonor’s eyes were fixed unflinchingly on his face. He thought: “It has come!”

But at that moment Clare came out of her tent. Imbrie hid the knife and turned away. As he passed the breed woman Stonor heard him mutter:

“I’ll fix him to-night!”

That day as he trod the shore, bent under the tracking-line, Stonor had plenty to occupy his mind. Over and over he made his calculations of time and distance:

“This is the twenty-seventh. It was the fifteenth when I sent Tole Grampierre back to Enterprise. If he rode hard he’d get there about noon on the seventeenth. The steamboat isn’t due to start up-stream until the twentieth, but Gaviller would surely let her go at once when he got my message. She’d only need to get wood aboard and steam up. She could steam night and day too, at this stage of water; she’s done it before—that is, if they had anybody to relieve Mathews at the engine. There are plenty of pilots. Surely Gaviller would order her to steam night and day when he read my letter! Even suppose they didn’t get away until the morning of the eighteenth: that would bring them to the Crossing by the twenty-second.

“Lambert, I know, would not lose an hour in setting out over the prairie—just long enough to get horses together and swim them across. I can depend on him. Nobody knows how far it is overland from the Crossing to the Swan River. Nobody’s been that way. But the chances are it’s prairie land, and easy going. Say the rivers are about the same distance apart up there, Lambert ought to reach the Swan on the twenty-fifth, or at the latest the twenty-sixth. That’s only yesterday. But we must have made two hundred or two hundred and fifty miles up-stream. The Swan certainly makes a straighter course than the Spirit. It must be less than a hundred miles from here to the spot where Lambert would hit this stream. He could make seventy-five miles or more a day down-stream. He would work. If everything has gone well I might meet him to-day.

“But things never go just the way you want them to. I must not count on it. Gaviller may have delayed. He’s so careful of his precious steamboat. Or she may have run on a bar. Or Lambert may have met unexpected difficulties. I must know what I’m going to do. Once my hands are tied to-night my goose is

cooked. Shall I resist the woman when she tries to tie my hands? But Imbrie always stands beside her with the gun; that would simply mean being shot down before Clare's eyes. Shall I let them bind me and take what comes?—No! I must put up a fight somehow! Suppose I make a break for it as soon as we land? If there happens to be cover I may get away with it. Better be shot on the wing than sitting down with my hands tied. And if I got clean away, Clare would know there was still a chance. I'll make a break for it!"

He looked at the sky, the shining river and the shapely trees. "This may be my last day on the old ball! Good old world too! You don't think what it means until the time comes to say ta-ta to it all; sunny mornings, and starry nights, with the double trail of the Milky Way moseying across the sky. I've scarcely tasted life yet—mustn't think of that! Twenty-seven years old, and nothing done! If I could feel that I had left something solid behind me it would be easier to go."

Pictures of his boyhood in the old Canadian city presented themselves unasked; the maple-foliage, incredibly dense and verdant, the shabby, comfortable houses behind the trees, and the homely, happy-go-lucky people who lived in the houses and sprayed their lawns on summer evenings; friendly people, like people everywhere prone to laughter and averse to thought. "People are so foolish and likeable, it's amazing!" thought Stonor, visualizing his kind for the first.

The sights and sounds and smells of the old town came thronging back; the school-bell with its flat clangour, exactly like no other bell on earth—it rang until five minutes before the hour, stopping with a muttering complaint, and you ran the rest of the way. There was the Dominion Hotel, with a tar pavement in front that became semi-liquid on hot days; no resident of that town ever forgot the pungent smell compounded of tar, stale beer, sawdust, and cabbage that greeted you in passing. And the candy-store was next door; the butterscotch they sold there!

How he used to get up early on summer mornings and, with his faithful mongrel Jack, with the ridiculous curly tail, walk and run a mile to the railway-station to see the Transcontinental stop and pass on. How the sun shone down the empty streets before any one was up! Strange how his whole life seemed to

be coloured by the newly-risen sun! And the long train with the mysterious, luxurious sleeping-cars, an occasional tousled head at the window; lucky head, bound on a long journey!

“Well, I’ve journeyed some myself since then,” thought Stonor, “and I have a longer journey before me!”

They spelled at ten o’clock, and again at three. “The last lap!” thought Stonor, as they took to the river after the second stop. All depended on the spot Imbrie should choose for their next camp. Stonor studied the nature of the ground anxiously. The banks continued to rise steep and high almost from the water’s edge. These slopes for the most part were wooded, but a wood on a steep stony slope does not offer good cover.

“Small chance of scrambling over the top in such a place without stopping a bullet,” thought Stonor. “If we come to a more favourable spot should I suggest camping? No! for Imbrie would be sure to keep on out of pure obstinacy. I might have a chance if I zig-zagged up the hill. The worst part will be running away from Clare. Suppose she cries out or tries to follow. If I could warn her!”

But Imbrie was taking very good care that no communications passed between the two to-day.

They came to a place where a limestone ridge made a rapid wilder than any they had passed on the upper river, almost a cataract. Much time was consumed in dragging the dug-out over the shelves of rock alongside. The ridge made a sort of dam in the river; and above there was a long reach, smooth and sluggish. Imbrie ordered Stonor aboard to paddle, and the trooper was not sorry for the change of exercise.

The sun was dropping low now, and Stonor little by little gave up hope of meeting help that day. In the course of the smooth reach they came upon an island, quaintly shaped like a woman’s hat, with a stony beach all round for a brim, a high green crown, and a clump of pines for an aigrette. In its greatest diameter it was less than a hundred feet.

Coming abreast of the island, Imbrie, without saying anything in advance of

his intention, steered the dug-out so that she grounded on the beach. The others looked round at him in surprise.

“We’ll camp here,” he said curtly.

Stonor’s heart sank. An island! “It’s early yet,” he said, with a careless air.

“The dug-out’s leaking,” said Imbrie. “I want to fix her before dark.”

“There’s no gum on the island.”

“I have it with me.”

Imbrie said this with a meaning grin, and Stonor could not be sure but that the man suspected his design of escaping. There was nothing for it but to submit for the moment. If they attempted to bind him he would put up the best fight he could. If they left him free until dark he might still escape by swimming.

They landed. The breed woman, as a matter of course, prepared to do all the work, while Imbrie sat down with his pipe and his gun. He ordered Stonor to sit near. The policeman obeyed, keeping himself on the *qui vive* for the first hostile move. Clare, merely to be doing something, put up her own little tent. The breed woman started preparing supper, and then, taking everything out of the dug-out, pulled it up on the stones, and turning it over applied the gum to the little crack that had opened in the bottom.

They supped as usual, Stonor being guarded by the woman while Imbrie ate. Stonor and Clare were kept at a little distance from each other. There was nothing that they cared to say to each other within hearing of their jailors. Soon afterwards Clare went to her tent. Stonor watched her disappear with a gripping pain at his heart, wondering if he would ever see her again. “She might have looked her good-night,” he thought resentfully, even while better sense told him she had refrained from looking at him only because such indications of an understanding always infuriated Imbrie.

The dusk was beginning to gather. Imbrie waited a little while, then said carelessly:

“Tie him up now.”

The woman went to get the piece of line she used for the purpose. Stonor got warily to his feet.

“What do you want to tie me up for?” he said, seeking to gain time. “I’m helpless without weapons. You might let me have one night’s comfortable sleep. I work hard enough for it.”

Imbrie’s suspicions were instantly aroused by this changed attitude of Stonor’s, who had always before indifferently submitted. He raised the gun threateningly. “Shut up!” he said. “Hold your hands behind you.”

The woman was approaching with the line. Stonor moved so as to bring himself in a line between Imbrie and the woman. Out of the tail of his eye he saw Clare at the door of her tent, anxiously watching. He counted on the fact that Imbrie would not shoot while she was looking on without strong provocation. They were all down on the stony beach. Stonor kept edging closer to the water.

Stonor still sought to parley. “What are you afraid of? You’re both armed. What could I do? And you sleep like cats. I couldn’t move hand or foot without waking you. I can’t work all day, and sleep without being able to stretch myself.”

While he talked he manœuvred to keep himself between Imbrie and the woman. Imbrie, to avoid the danger of hitting her, was obliged to keep circling round Stonor. Finally Stonor got him between him and the water. This was the moment he was waiting for. His muscles were braced like steel springs. Plunging at Imbrie, he got under the gun-barrel and bore the man back into the river. The gun was discharged harmlessly into the air. The beach sloped away sharply, and the force of his rush carried them both into three feet of water. They went under. Imbrie dropped his gun, and clung to Stonor with the desperate, instinctive grip of the non-swimmer. Like a ray of light the thought flashed through Stonor’s brain: “I have him on equal terms now!”

As they went under he was aware of the woman rushing into the water after him with the knife raised. He twisted his body so that Imbrie came uppermost and she was unable to strike. Stonor saw Clare running to the water’s edge.

“Get her gun!” he cried.

Clare swerved to where it stood leaning against the overturned dug-out. The woman turned back, but Clare secured the gun before she was out of the water, and dashed into the thick bushes with it. Meanwhile Stonor dragged the struggling Imbrie into deeper water. They lost their footing and went under again. The woman, after a pause of agonized indecision, ran to the dug-out, and, righting it, pushed it into the water.

Stonor, striking out as he could, carried his burden out beyond a man’s depth. The current carried them slowly down. They were as much under the water as on top, but Stonor cannily held his breath, while Imbrie struggled insanely. Stonor, with his knee against the other’s chest, broke his strangle-hold, and got him turned over on his back. Imbrie’s struggles began to weaken.

Meanwhile the dug-out was bearing down on them. Stonor waited until it came abreast and the woman swung her paddle to strike. Then letting go of Imbrie, he sank, and swimming under water, rose to the surface some yards distant. He saw that the woman had Imbrie by the hair. In this position it was impossible for her to wield her paddle, and the current was carrying her down. Stonor turned about and swam blithely back to the island.

Clare, still carrying the gun, came out of the bushes to meet him. They clasped hands.

“I knew there was only one bullet,” she said. “I was afraid to fire at the woman for fear of missing her.”

“You did right,” he said.

Stonor found the gun that Imbrie had dropped in the water. From the beach they watched to see what the breed woman would do.

“When she gets near the rapids she’ll either have to let go Imbrie or be carried over,” Stonor said grimly.

But the woman proved to be not without her resources. Still with one hand clutched in Imbrie’s hair, she contrived to wriggle out of the upper part of her

dress. Out of this she made a sling, passing it under the unconscious man's arms, and tying it to the thwart of the dug-out. She then paddled ashore and dragged the man out on the beach. There they saw her stand looking at him helplessly. Save for the dug-out she was absolutely empty-handed, without so much as a match to start a fire with.

Presently she loaded the inert body in the dug-out, and, getting in herself, came paddling back towards the island. Stonor grimly awaited her, with the gun over his arm. The dusk was thickening, and Clare built up the fire.

When she came near, Stonor said, raising the gun: "Come no closer till I give you leave."

She raised her hands. "I give up," she said apathetically. "I've got to have fire for him, blankets. Maybe he is dead."

"He's only half-drowned," said Stonor. "I can bring him to if you do what I tell you."

"What do you want?"

"Throw your ammunition-belt ashore, then your knife, and the two knives that Imbrie carries in his belt."

She obeyed. Stonor gratefully buckled on the belt. She landed, and permitted her hands to be bound. Stonor then pulled the dug-out out on the stones, and turning it over rolled Imbrie on the bottom of it until he got most of the water out of him. Then, laying him on his back, after half an hour's unremitting work, he succeeded in inducing respiration. A little colour returned to Imbrie's face, and in the end he opened his eyes and looked stupidly around him. At these signs of returning animation the enigma of a woman suddenly lowered her head and broke into a dry hard sobbing.

So intent were they upon the matter in hand they never thought of looking out on the river. It was as dark now as it would be, and anyway the glow of the fire blinded them to what lay outside its radius. Suddenly out of the murk came with stunning effect a deep-throated hail:

“Stonor, is that you?”

The policeman straightened like a man who received an electric shock. A great light broke in his face.

“Lambert! Thank God!” he cried.

Two clumsy little pot-bellied collapsible boats grounded on the stones below their fire and, as it seemed to their confused senses, they were immediately surrounded by a whole crowd of friendly faces. Stonor was aware, not of one red coat, but of three, and two natives besides. The rubicund face of his commanding officer, Major Egerton, “Patch-pants” Egerton, the best-loved man in the North, swam before his eyes. Somehow or other he contrived to salute.

“I have the honour to turn over two prisoners, sir. This man who claims to be Doctor Ernest Imbrie, and this woman, name unknown to me.”

“Good work, Sergeant!” Having returned his salute, the little Major unbent, and offered Stonor his hand.

“This is a surprise, sir, to see you,” said the latter.

“I had just got to the Crossing on my rounds when your note came to Lambert. So I came right on with him.” Major Egerton’s glance took in Stonor’s bandaged skull and dripping clothes, the woman’s bound hands, and Imbrie just returning to consciousness. “I judge you’ve been having a strenuous time,” he remarked drily.

“Somewhat, sir.”

“You shall tell me all about it, when we’ve settled down a bit. We had already camped for the night, when we saw the reflection of your fire, and came down to investigate. Introduce me to the lady.”

The little Major bowed to Clare in his best style. His face betrayed no consciousness of the strangeness of the situation, in that while Dr. Imbrie was a prisoner, Mrs. Imbrie was obviously under Stonor’s protection. He engaged her in conversation about the weather as if they had just met at a lawn fête. It was

exactly what the shaken Clare needed.

Meanwhile Stonor slipped aside to his friends. “Lambert!” he cried, gripping his brother-sergeant’s hand, “God knows your ugly phiz is a beautiful sight to my eyes! I knew I could depend on you! I knew it!”

Lambert silently clapped him on the back. He saw from Stonor’s face what he must have been through.

Beyond Lambert Stonor caught sight of a gleaming smile on a dark face. “Tole!” he cried. “They brought you! How good it is to find one’s friends!”

CHAPTER XVII

THE HEARING

They moved to a better camping-place on the mainland. Major Egerton could rough it as well as any youngster in the service, but as a matter of principle he always carried a folding bed, table, and chair in his outfit. These simple articles made a great impression on the natives. When the Major's tent was pitched, and the table and chair set up inside, the effect of a court of justice was immediately created, even in the remotest wilderness.

Next morning they all gathered in his tent. The Major sat at the table with Coulter, his orderly and general factotum, sitting on a box at his left with pen and note-book before him. Stonor stood at the Major's right. The two prisoners stood facing the table, with Lambert keeping an eye on them. Clare sat in the place of honour on the Major's cot against the side of the tent. Tole and Ancose squatted on their heels just inside the door.

"I'll start with the woman," said the Major. Addressing her directly, he said sternly: "It is my duty to tell you that anything you may say here can be used against you later, and it is therefore your privilege to refuse to answer. At the same time a refusal to answer naturally suggests the fear of incriminating yourself, so think well before you refuse. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah, you speak good English. That simplifies matters. First, what is your name?"

"Annie Alexander."

"Married?"

“No, sir.”

“Age?”

“Forty-four.”

“Hm! You don’t look it. What is your relation to the other prisoner here?”

“No relation, just a friend.”

“Ah? Where do you come from?”

The woman hesitated.

Imbrie murmured: “Winnipeg.”

“Be silent!” cried the Major. “Sergeant Lambert, take that man out, and keep him out of earshot until I call you.”

It was done.

“How long have you been in this country?”

“Since Spring—May.”

“How did you come in?”

“By way of Caribou Lake and the Crossing.”

“Alone?”

“Yes, sir.”

“By what means did you travel?”

“I got passage on a york boat up the rivers, and across Caribou Lake. From the lake a freighter took me on his load across the long portage to the Crossing.”

“Ancose,” said the Major, “you watch the prisoner outside, and ask Sergeant Lambert to step here.”

Meanwhile he went on with his questions. “How did you travel from the

Crossing?”

“I built a little raft and floated down the Spirit River to Carcajou Point.”

Lambert came in.

“Lambert,” said the Major, “this woman claims to have come over the portage to the Crossing in May with a freighter and to have built a raft there and floated down the river. Can you verify her story?”

“No, sir, never saw her before.”

“Is it possible for her to have done such a thing?”

“Possible, sir,” said Lambert cautiously, “but not likely. It’s part of my business to keep track of all who come and go. There are not enough travellers to make that difficult. Such an extraordinary thing as a woman travelling alone on a raft would have been the talk of the country. If I might ask her a question, sir ——?”

The Major signed to him to do so.

“What was the name of the freighter who brought you over the portage?”

“I don’t know his whole name. Men called him Jack.”

Lambert shrugged. “There’s many a Jack, sir.”

“Of course. Let it go for the present.” To the woman he said: “What was your object in making this long journey alone?”

“Doctor Imbrie wrote to me to come and live with him. He had nobody to take care of his house and all that.”

“I see. What do you mean by saying he was your friend?” The Major asked this with an uneasy glance in Clare’s direction.

“Just my friend,” answered the woman, with a hint of defiance. “I took care of him when he was little.”

“Ah, his nurse. When did you get the letter from him?”

“In March.”

“Where was it sent from?”

“Fort Enterprise.”

“Sergeant Stonor, can you testify as to that?”

“I can testify that it is not true, sir. It was a matter of common knowledge at the post that Doctor Imbrie neither received nor sent any letters. We wondered at it. Furthermore, the only word received from him all winter was in January.”

The Major turned to the woman. “According to that you are telling an untruth about the letter,” he said sternly. “Do you wish to change your statement?”

She sullenly shook her head.

The Major shrugged and went on. “Was Doctor Imbrie waiting for you at Carcajou Point?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Why didn’t you meet at Fort Enterprise, where there was a good trail to Swan River?”

“He didn’t feel like explaining things to the white men there. He likes to keep to himself.”

“Where did you go from Carcajou Point?”

“We bought horses from the Beaver Indians and rode overland to Swan Lake.”

“Bought horses?” said the Major quickly. “How did Doctor Imbrie get to Carcajou in the first place?”

She corrected herself. “I mean he bought extra horses for me, and for the outfit.”

“And you rode to Swan Lake on your way back to his place?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Did you go to his place?”

“No, sir, I got sick at Swan Lake and he had to leave me.”

“But if you were sick you needed a doctor, didn’t you?”

“I wasn’t very sick, I just couldn’t travel, that was all.”

“But why did he have to leave you?”

“He had business at his place.”

“Business? There was no one there but himself.”

The woman merely shrugged.

Major Egerton waved his hand in Clare’s direction. “Do you know this lady?”

“Yes, sir. It’s Doctor Imbrie’s wife.”

“How do you know that?”

“I saw them married.”

“Where was that?”

“I won’t answer that at present.”

The Major turned to Clare apologetically. “Please excuse me if I must ask a painful question or two.”

Clare nodded reassuringly.

“Why had Doctor Imbrie left his wife?”

The woman’s eyes sparkled with resentment. “He didn’t leave her. She left him. She——”

“That will do!” ordered the Major.

But the woman raised her voice. “She threw up the fact of his having red

blood to him—though she knew it well enough when she married him. He was all cut up about it. That was why he came up here."

The Major, slightly embarrassed, turned to Stonor. "Will you question her?" he asked testily. "You are better informed as to the whole circumstances."

"If I might hear the man's story first, sir?"

"Very well. Send for him. What is the charge against the woman?"

"Shooting with intent to kill, sir."

"Enter that, Coulter. Whom did she shoot at?"

"At me, sir. On two occasions."

"Ah! An officer in the performance of his duty. Amend the charge, Coulter. Please relate the circumstances."

Stonor did so.

"Have you anything to say in regard to that?" the Major asked the woman.

She shook her head.

By this time Imbrie was again facing the tribunal. At Stonor's request the woman was allowed to remain in the tent during his examination. After stating the usual formula as to his rights, the Major started questioning him.

"Your name?"

"Ernest Imbrie, M.D."

"Age?"

"Twenty-six."

"Place of birth?"

"Winnipeg."

"Father's name?"

“John Imbrie.”

“His occupation?”

“Farmer.”

The Major raised his eyebrows. “In Winnipeg?”

“He lived off the income of his farms.”

“Ah! Strange I never heard the name in Winnipeg. Do you wish to give any further information about your antecedents?”

“Not at present, sir.”

“You have Indian blood in your veins?”

“Yes, sir, my grandmother was an Indian. I never saw her.”

“How long have you been in this district?”

“A year, sir.”

“How did you come here?”

“I got employment with a crew of boatmen at Miwasa Landing. I travelled with them as far as Great Buffalo Lake. There I bought a canoe from the Indians and came up the Swan River to the Great Falls and built me a shack.”

“You were alone then?”

“Yes, sir.”

“How did this woman come to join you?”

“I sent for her to keep my house for me.”

“How did you get word to her?”

Imbrie blandly evaded the trap. “I sent a letter out privately to be passed along by the Indians—what they call moccasin telegraph.”

“Ah! Why did you choose that method?”

“Because I wished to keep my affairs to myself. I had heard of the curiosity of the white men at Fort Enterprise concerning my movements, and I did not care to gratify it.”

“Very well. Now, when you started back with her, did she go home with you?”

“No, sir. She was taken sick at Swan Lake, and I had to leave her there.”

“How did you come to leave her if she was sick?”

“She was not very sick. Her leg swelled up and she couldn’t travel, that was all.”

Stonor signed to the Major that he wished to ask a question, and the Major bade him go ahead.

“Tell us exactly what was the matter with her, as a doctor, I mean.”

“You wouldn’t understand if I did tell you.”

The Major rapped smartly on the table. “Impudence will do you no good, my man! Answer the Sergeant’s question!”

“I decline to do so.”

Stonor said: “I have established the point I wished to make, sir. He can’t answer it.”

Major Egerton proceeded: “Well, why didn’t you wait for her until she got well?”

“I had to make a garden at home.”

“You travelled three hundred miles down the river and back again to make a garden!”

“We have to eat through the winter.”

“Stonor, was there a garden started at Imbrie’s place?”

“Yes, sir, but it had been started weeks before. The potatoes were already several inches high.”

Imbrie said: “I planted the potatoes before I left.”

“Well, leave the garden for the present.” The Major indicated Clare. “You know this lady?”

“I should hope so.”

“Confine your answers to plain statements, please. Who is she?”

“My wife.”

“Have you any proof of that?”

“She says so. She ought to know.”

The Major addressed Clare. “Is it true that you have said you were his wife?”

“I cannot tell you of my own knowledge, sir. Sergeant Stonor has told me that before I lost my memory I told him I was Ernest Imbrie’s wife.”

The Major bowed and returned his attention to Imbrie. “When and where were you married?”

“I decline to answer.”

The excellent Major, who was not noted for his patience with the evil-doer, turned an alarming colour, yet he still sought to reason with the man. “The answer to that question could not possibly injure you under any circumstances.”

“Just the same, I decline to answer. You said it was my right.”

With no little difficulty the Major still held himself in. “I am asking,” he said, “for information which will enable me to return this lady to her friends until her memory is restored.”

“I decline to give it,” said Imbrie hardily. His face expressed a pleased vanity in being able, as he thought, to wield the whip-hand over the red-coats.

The little Major exploded. “You damned scoundrel!” he cried. “I’d like to wring your neck!”

“Put that down, please,” Imbrie said to the clerk with ineffable conceit.

The Major put his hands behind his back and stamped up and down the four paces that comprised the length of his tent. “Stonor, I wonder—I wonder that you took the patience to bring him to last night!” he stammered. “Go on and question him if you want. I haven’t the patience.”

“Very well, sir. Imbrie, when I was taking you and this lady back to Fort Enterprise, why did you carry her off?”

“She was my wife. I wanted her. Anything strange in that?”

“No. But when we came to you at your place, why did you run away from us?”

“I hadn’t had a good look at her then. I thought it best to keep out of the way.”

“Why weren’t you willing to come to the post and let the whole thing be explained?”

Imbrie’s face suddenly turned dark with rage. He burst out, scarcely coherently: “I’ll tell you that! And you can all digest it! A fat chance I’d have had among you! A fat chance I have now of getting a fair hearing! If she came all this way to find me, it’s clear she wanted to make up, isn’t it? Yet when she saw me, she turned away. She’d been travelling with you too long. You’d put your spell on her. You said she’d lost her memory. Bunk! Looks more like hypnotism to me. You wanted her for yourself. That’s the whole explanation of this case. You’ve got nothing on me. You only want to railroad me so that the way will be clear for you with her. Why, when I was bound up they made love to each other before my very face. Isn’t that true?”

“I am not under examination just now,” said Stonor coldly.

“Answer me as a man, isn’t it true?”

“No, it’s a damned lie!”

“Well, if it had been me, I would!” cried the little Major.

Sergeant Lambert concealed a large smile behind his large hand.

Stonor, outwardly unmoved, said: “May I ask the woman one more question, sir, before I lay a charge against the man?”

“Certainly.”

Stonor addressed the woman. “You say you are unmarried?”

“Yes.”

“What are you doing with a wedding-ring?”

“It’s my mother’s ring. She gave it to me when she died.”

“Tole,” said Stonor, “take that ring off and hand it to me.” To the Major he added in explanation: “Wedding-rings usually have the initials of the contracting parties and the date.”

“Of course!”

The ring was removed and handed to Stonor.

Examining it he said: “There is an inscription here, sir. It is: ‘J.I. to A.A., March 3rd, 1886.’ It stands to reason this woman’s mother was married long before 1886.”

“She was married twice,” muttered the woman.

Stonor laughed.

“What do you make of it, Sergeant?” asked the Major.

“John Imbrie to Annie Alexander.”

“Then you suspect——?”

“That this woman is the man’s mother, sir. It first occurred to me last night.”

“By George! there is a certain likeness.”

All those in the tent stared at the two prisoners in astonishment. The couple bore it with sullen inscrutability.

“I am now ready to make a charge against the man, sir.”

The Major sat down. “What is the charge?”

“Murder.”

Imbrie must have had this possibility in mind, for his face never changed a muscle. The woman, however, was frankly taken by surprise. She flung up her manacled hands involuntarily; a sharp cry escaped her.

“It’s a lie!”

“Whom did he murder?”

“A man unknown to me, sir.”

“Where was the deed committed?”

“At or near the shack above the Great Falls.”

The woman’s inscrutability was gone. She watched Stonor and waited for his evidence in an agony of apprehension.

“Did you find the body?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Under what circumstances?”

“It had been thrown in the rapids, sir, in the expectation that it would be carried over the falls. Instead, however, it lodged in a log-jam above the falls. As I was walking along the shore I saw a foot sticking out of the water. I brought the body ashore——”

“You brought the body ashore—out of the rapids above the falls——?”

“Yes, sir. A woman I had with me, Mary Moosa, helped me.”

“Describe the victim.”

“A young man, sir, that is to say, under thirty. In stature about the same as the prisoner, and of the same complexion. What remained of his clothes suggested a man of refinement.”

“But his face?”

“It was unrecognizable, sir.”

A dreadful low cry broke from the half-breed woman. Her manacled hands went to her face, her body rocked forward from the waist.

The man rapped out a command to her in the Indian tongue to get a grip on herself. She tried to obey, straightening up, and taking down her hands. Her face showed a ghastly yellow pallor.

“What proof have you of murder?” asked the Major.

“There was no water in the dead man’s lungs, sir, showing that he was dead before his body entered the water. There was a bullet-hole through his heart. I found the bullet itself lodged in the front of his spine. It was thirty-eight calibre, a revolver bullet. This man carried a thirty-eight revolver. I took it from him. I sent revolver and bullet out by Tole Grampierre.”

Lambert spoke up: “They are in my possession, sir.”

The breed woman seemed about to collapse. Imbrie, who had given no sign of being affected by Stonor’s recital, now said with a more conciliatory air than he had yet shown:

“If you please, sir, she is overcome by the trooper’s horrible story. Will you let her go outside for a moment to recover herself?”

“Very well,” said the good-natured Major, “watch her, Lambert.”

As the woman passed him Imbrie whispered to her in the Indian tongue: “Throw your locket in the river.”

Stonor, on the alert for a trick of some kind, overheard. “No, you don’t!” he

said, stepping forward.

The woman made a sudden dive for the door, but Lambert seized her. She struggled like a mad thing, but the tall sergeant's arms closed around her like a vice. Meanwhile Stonor essayed to unclasp the chain around her neck. The two breeds guarded Imbrie to keep him from interfering.

Stonor got the locket off at last, and opened it with his thumb nail. The woman suddenly ceased to struggle, and sagged in Lambert's arms. An exclamation escaped from Stonor, and he glanced sharply into Imbrie's face. Within the locket on one side was a tinted photograph of the heads of two little boys, oddly alike. On the other side was an inscription in the neat Spencerian characters of twenty years before: "Ernest and William Imbrie,"—and a date.

Stonor handed the locket over to the Major without speaking. "Ha!" cried the latter. "So that is the explanation. There were two of them!"

CHAPTER XVIII

A LETTER FROM MAJOR EGERTON TO HIS FRIEND ARTHUR DONCOURT, ESQ.

MY DEAR DONCOURT:

You ask me to tell you some of the circumstances underlying the Imbrie murder case of which you have read the account in the annual report of the R.N.W.M.P. just published. You are right in supposing that a strange and moving tale is hidden behind the cold and formal phraseology of the report.

The first Imbrie was the Reverend Ernest, who went as a missionary to the Sikannis Indians away back in ’79. Up to that time these Indians were absolutely uncivilized, and bore a reputation for savage cruelty. I suppose that was what stimulated the good man’s zeal. He left a saintly tradition behind him. The Sikannis live away up the corner of British Columbia, on the head-waters of the Stanley River, one of the main branches of the Spirit River. The Spirit River, as you may know, rises west of the Rocky Mountains and breaks through. There is not a more remote spot this side the Arctic Circle, nor one more difficult of access.

The missionary brought with him his son, John Imbrie, a boy just approaching manhood. Very likely the danger of bringing up a boy absolutely cut off from the women of his race never occurred to the father. The inevitable happened. The boy fell in love with a handsome half-breed girl, the daughter of a wandering prospector and a Sikanni squaw, and married her out of hand. The heartbroken father was himself compelled to perform the ceremony. This was in 1886.

The Imbries were so far cut off from their kind that in time they were forgotten. The missionary supported himself by farming in a small way and trading his surplus products with the Indians. John turned out to be a good

farmer and they prospered. Their farm was the last outpost of agriculture in that direction. From the time he went in with his father John did not see the outside world again until 1889, when he took his wife and babies out, with a vain hope, I think, of trying to educate the woman. Most of these marriages have tragic results, and this was no exception. During all the years in her husband's house this woman resisted every civilizing influence, except that she learned to deck herself out like a white woman.

She bore her husband twin sons, who were christened Ernest and William. They bore a strong resemblance to each other, but as they began to develop it appeared, as is so often the case in these mixed families, that Ernest had a white man's nature, and William a red man's. When the time came they were sent out to Winnipeg to school, but William, true to the savage nature, sickened in civilised surroundings, and had to be sent home. On the other hand, Ernest proved to be a sufficiently apt scholar, and went on through school and college. During the whole period between his thirteenth and his twenty-fourth year he was only home two or three times. William remained at home and grew up in ignorance. John Imbrie, the father, I gather, was a worthy man, but somewhat weak in his family relations.

Ernest went on to a medical college with the idea of practising among the Sikannis, who had no doctor. During his second year his father died, long before he could reach him, of course. He remained outside until he got his diploma. Meanwhile his mother and brother quickly relapsed into a state of savagery. They "pitched around" with the Indians, and the farm which had been so painstakingly hewn out of the wilderness by the two preceding generations grew up in weeds.

Ernest had a painful homecoming, I expect. However, he patiently set to work to restore his father's work. He managed to persuade his mother and brother to return and live in white man's fashion, but they made his life a hell for him, according to all accounts. They were insanely jealous of his superior attainments. Neither did the Sikannis welcome Doctor Ernest's ministrations. Since the death of the missionary they had been gradually slipping back into their ignorant ways, and now they instinctively took the part of the mother

against the educated son. One can imagine what a dreary life the young medico lived among these savages. He has been described to me as a charming fellow, modest, kindly and plucky. And, by the way, I have not mentioned that these young fellows were uncommonly good-looking. William, or, as the Indians say, Hooliam, was one of the handsomest natives I ever saw.

Meanwhile that remote country was being talked about outside on account of the gold deposits along the upper reaches of the Stanley—largely mythically I believe. However that may be, prospectors began to straggle in, and in the summer of the year following Ernest's return from college, the government sent in a surveyor, one Frank Starling, to survey the claims, and adjust disputes. Starling brought with him his daughter Clare, a young lady of adventurous disposition.

Both the Imbrie boys fell in love with her according to their natures, thus further complicating the situation. Hooliam, the ignorant savage, could not aspire to her hand, of course, but the young doctor courted her, and she looked kindly on him. I do not consider that she was ever in love with him, though apart from the dark strain he was worthy of it as men go, a manly fellow!—but it was the hardness of his lot that touched her heart. Like many a good woman before her, she was carried away by compassion for the dogged youth struggling against such hopeless odds.

The father completed his work and took her out, and Ernest Imbrie followed them. They were married in the early spring at Fort Edward on the Campbell River, where the Starlings wintered. Ernest carried his bride back by canoe, hundreds of miles through the wilderness.

Their happiness, if indeed they were ever happy, was of brief duration. Whichever way you look at it, the situation was impossible. Ernest's mother, the breed woman, acted like a fiend incarnate, I have been told, and I can quite believe it, having witnessed some of her subsequent performances. Then there was the brother-in-law always hanging around the house, nursing his evil passion for his brother's wife. And in the background the ignorant, unfriendly Indians.

The catastrophe was precipitated by a gross insult offered to the girl by her husband's brother. He broke into her room one night impudently assuming to masquerade as her husband. Her husband saved her from him, but in the shock to her nerves she experienced a revulsion against the lot of them—and small wonder!

Her husband of his own free will took her back to her father. That's one of the finest things in the story, for there's no question but that he loved her desperately. The loss of her broke his spirit, which had endured so much. He never went back home. He felt, poor fellow, as if he were cast out alike by reds and whites, and his instinct was to find a place where he could bury himself far from all humankind.

He was next heard of at Miwasa landing a thousand miles away, across the mountains. Here he got employment with a york boat crew and travelled with them down-stream some hundreds of miles north to Great Buffalo Lake. Here he obtained a canoe from the Indians, and, with a small store of grub, set off on his own. He made his way up the Swan River, an unexplored stream emptying into Great Buffalo Lake, as far as the Great Falls, and there he built himself a shack.

He could hardly have found a spot better suited to his purpose. No white man so far as known had ever visited those falls, and even the Indians avoid the neighbourhood for superstitious reasons. But even here he could not quite cut himself off from his kind. An epidemic of measles broke out among the Kakisa Indians up the river from him, and out of pure humanity he went among them and cured them. These Indians were grateful, strange to say; they almost deified the white man who had appeared so strangely in their country.

Meanwhile the wrong she had done him began to prey on his wife's mind. She could not rest under the thought that she had wrecked his usefulness. Ernest Imbrie had, with the idea of keeping his mind from rusting out in solitude, ordered certain papers and books sent to him at Fort Enterprise. His wife learned of this address through his medical college, and in the spring of the year following her marriage, that is to say the spring of the year just past, she set off in search of him without saying anything to anybody of her intention.

She and her father were still at Fort Edward—have I said that the girl had no mother?—and Hooliam Imbrie had been there, too, during the winter, not daring to approach the girl precisely, but just hanging around the neighbourhood. One can't help feeling for the poor wretch, bad as he was, he was hard-hit, too. He bribed a native servant to show him the letter giving his brother's address, and when the girl set off, he instantly guessed her errand, and determined to prevent their meeting.

Now it is only a short distance from Fort Edward over the height of land to the source of the main southerly branch of the Spirit, and Hooliam was therefore able to proceed direct to Fort Enterprise by canoe (a journey of more than a thousand miles), pausing only to go up the Stanley to pick up his mother, who was ripe for such an adventure. At Carcajou Point, when they had almost reached Enterprise, they heard the legend of the White Medicine Man off on the unknown Swan River, and they decided to avoid Enterprise and hit straight across the prairie.

Meanwhile the girl was obliged to make a long detour south to the railway, then across the mountains and north again by all sorts of conveyances, with many delays. So Hooliam and his mother arrived a few weeks before her, but they in turn were delayed at Swan Lake by the woman's illness.

You have read a transcript of the statements of this precious pair at the hearing before me. Read it again, and observe the ingenious web of truth and falsehood. For instance, it was true the woman fell sick at Swan Lake, and Hooliam after waiting awhile for her, finally went down the river without her—only a few days in advance of Sergeant Stonor and Ernest Imbrie's wife. As soon as Hooliam reached Swan Lake he began to meet Indians who had seen his brother, and thereafter he was always hailed among them as the White Medicine Man. The Indians never troubled to explain to themselves how he had got to Swan Lake, because they ascribed magical powers to him anyway.

What happened between the brothers when they met will never be known for certain. Hooliam swears that he did not intend to kill Ernest, but that the deed was done in self-defence during a quarrel. However that may be, Ernest was shot through the heart with a bullet from Hooliam's gun, and his body cast in the

river.

You have read the rest of the story; how Stonor arrived with Ernest's wife, and how, at the shock of beholding her husband's body, the poor girl lost her memory. How Hooliam sought to escape up-stream, and Stonor's confusion when he was told by an Indian that the White Medicine Man was still alive. How Hooliam kidnapped the girl from Stonor, and tried to win back to the mountains and his own country by way of the unexplored river.

We established the fact that Hooliam did not tell his mother what had happened at the Great Falls. She thought that Hooliam had found Ernest gone still further north. You can see at the hearing how when Stonor first told of the murder, in her horror at the discovery that one brother had killed the other the truth finally came out. Though she had always taken Hooliam's part she could not altogether deny her feeling for the other son.

Well, that's about all. I consider that they got off easily; Hooliam with twenty years, and the woman with half that sentence; but in the man's case it was impossible to prove that the murder was a deliberate one, and though the woman certainly did her best to put Stonor out of the way, as it happened he escaped.

You ask about the Indian woman, Mary Moosa, who served Stonor and Mrs. Imbrie so faithfully. We overtook her at Swan Lake on the way out. So she did not starve to death on the river, but recovered from her wound.

When we got out as far as Caribou Lake we met Mrs. Imbrie's distracted father coming in search of her. The meeting between them was very affecting. I am happy to say that the young lady has since recovered her memory entirely, and at the last account was very well.

You are curious to know what kind of fellow Stonor is. I can only answer, an ornament to the service. Simple, manly and dependable as a trooper ought to be. With a splendid strong body and a good wit. Out of such as he the glorious tradition of our force was built. They are becoming more difficult to get, I am sorry to say. I had long had my eye on him, and this affair settled it. I have recommended him for a commission. He is a man of good birth and education. Moreover I saw that if we didn't commission him we'd lose him; for he wants to

get married. As a result of the terrible trials they faced together he and Ernest Imbrie's widow have conceived a deep affection for each other. Enlisted men are not allowed to marry. They make a fine pair, Doncourt. It makes an old fellow sort of happy and weepy to see them together.

Stonor is now at the Officers' School at General Headquarters, and if he passes his examinations will be commissioned in the summer.

We'll talk further about this interesting case when good fortune brings us together again. In the meantime, my dear Doncourt,

Yours faithfully,
FRANK EGERTON.

EPILOGUE

In a bare and spotless company-room in headquarters in Regina eight uneasy troopers in fatigue uniform were waiting. Down one side of the room a row of tall windows looked out on the brown parade-ground, and beyond the buildings on the other side they could see a long Transcontinental train slowly gathering way up the westward grade.

“Hey, boys!” cried one. “How’d you like to be aboard her with your shoulder-straps and spurs?”

They cast unfriendly glances at the speaker and snorted.

“Don’t try to be an ass, Carter,” said one. “It doesn’t require the effort.”

They evinced their nervousness in characteristic ways. Several were polishing bits of brass already dazzling; one sat voraciously chewing gum and staring into vacancy; one paced up and down like a caged animal; another tried to pick a quarrel with his mates, and the eighth, Sergeant Stonor—the hero of Swan River they called him when they wished to annoy him—sat in a corner writing a letter.

To the eight entered a hardened sergeant-major, purpled-jowled and soldierly. All eight pairs of eyes sprang to his face in a kind of agony of suspense. He twirled his moustache and a wicked, dancing light appeared in his little blue eyes.

“You’re a nice set of duffers!” he rasped. “Blockheads all eight of you. Why they ever sent you down beats me. I’ve seen some rum lots, but never your equal. Flunked, every man of you!”

The eight pairs of eyes were cast down. Nobody said anything. Each was

thinking: “So that dream is over. I mustn’t let anything on before the others”: those who were polishing brass gave an extra twirl to the chamois.

Stonor, suddenly suspicious, narrowly searched the sergeant-major’s face. “Fellows, he’s joshing!” he cried. “It isn’t possible that every one of us has flunked! It isn’t reasonable!”

The sergeant-major roared with laughter. “Wonderful penetration, Sherlock! When I saw your faces I couldn’t help it. You were asking for it. All passed! That’s straight. Congrats!” He passed on down the corridor.

There was a silence in the company-room. They looked shyly at each other to see how the news was being taken. Each felt a sudden warmth of heart towards all his mates. All of them displayed an elaborate and perfectly transparent assumption of indifference. Stonor added a postscript to his letter, and sedately folded it.

Then speech came, at first softly. “Damn old Huggins, anyway. Almost gave me heart-failure!… Wot t’hell, Bill! Poor old Hugs, it was his last chance. Sure, we’ll have him where we want him now.… Think of being able to call Hugs down!… Lordy, Lordy, am I awake!”

Suddenly the unnatural tension broke, and a long-limbed trooper jumped to his feet with his arms in the air. “Boys! Are you dumb! We’ve passed! We’ve got the straps! All together now, Mumbo-Jumbo!”

They marched around the room with their hands on each other’s shoulders, singing:

> “For I’ve got rings on my fingers
> And bells on my toes;
> Elephants to ride upon——”

In a little house in Vancouver, embowered in such greenery as only the mild, moist airs of Puget Sound can produce, a young woman sat in her drawing-room regarding a letter she had just read with a highly dissatisfied air. It was a pretty little room, not rich nor fussy, but expressing the charm of an individual woman

no less than the clothes she wore.

To the mistress entered the maid, to wit, a matronly Indian woman with an intelligent face. She looked from her mistress' face to the letter, and back to her mistress again. When the latter made no offer to speak she said, for she was a privileged person:

"You hear from Stonor?"

Clare nodded.

"He not pass his 'xamination, I guess?"

"Certainly he has passed!" said Clare sharply. "If anybody can pass their examinations he can."

"Why you look so sorry then?"

"Oh—nothing. I didn't expect him to write it. A five-word postscript at the end of a matter-of-fact letter."

"Maybe he couldn't get leave."

"He said he'd get leave if he passed."

"Maybe he comin' anyhow."

"He never says a word about coming."

"You ask him to come?"

"Of course not!"

"Don't you want him come?"

"I don't know whether I do or not."

Mary looked perplexed.

Clare burst out, "I can't ask him. He'd feel obliged to come. A man—man like that anyway, would feel after what we've been through together that I had a

claim on him. Well, I don’t want him to come out of a sense of duty. Don’t you understand?”

Mary shook her head. “If I want something I ask for it.”

“It’s not so simple as all that!”

“Maybe he think he not wanted here.”

“A man’s supposed to take that chance.”

“Awful long way to come on a chance,” said Mary. “Maybe I write to him.”

Clare jumped up. “Don’t you dare!” she cried. “If I thought for a moment—if I thought he had been *brought*, I should be perfectly hateful to him. I couldn’t help myself—Is that a motor at the gate?”

“Yes, Miss, a taxi-cab.”

“Stopping here?”

“Yes, Miss,”—with absolute calm: “Stonor is gettin’ out.”

“What!—Oh, Mary!—It can’t be!—It is!”

A bell rang.

“Oh, Mary! What shall I do? Don’t go to the door! Let him wait a minute. Let me think what I must do. Let me get upstairs!”

Stonor got up and sat down, and got up again. He walked to the window and back to the door. He listened for sounds in the house, and then went back to his chair again. He heard a sound overhead and sprang to the door once more. He saw her on the stairs, and retreated back into the room. She came down with maddening deliberation, step by step. She did not look through the door, but paused a second to straighten a picture that hung askew on the wall. Stonor’s heart was beating like a trip-hammer.

She came into the room smiling in friendly fashion with a little gush of speech

—but her eyes did not quite meet his.

“Well, Martin! Congratulations! I just got your letter this morning. I didn’t expect you to follow so soon. So it’s Inspector Stonor now, eh? Very becoming uniform, sir! Was the examination difficult? You must tell me all about it. I suppose you are just off the train. What kind of a trip did you have? Sit down.”

He was a little flabbergasted by her easy flow of speech. “I don’t want to sit down,” he muttered huskily. He was staring at her from a white face.

She sat; glanced out of the window, glanced here and there about the room, and rattled on: “Haven’t we got a jolly little place here? But I expect we’ll be ordered on directly. Mary and I were talking about you the moment you rang the bell. Mary is so good to me, but her heart is already turning to Fort Enterprise and her children, I’m afraid.”

He found his tongue at last. “Clare, don’t!” he cried brokenly. “I didn’t come eight hundred miles to hear you make parlour conversation. What’s the matter? What have I done? If you’ve changed towards me tell me so plainly, and let me get out. I can’t stand this!”

Panic seized her. “I must see about lunch. Excuse me just a moment,” she said, making for the door.

He caught her as she tried to pass. “Damn lunch! Look me in the eye, woman!”

She relaxed. Her eyes crept imploringly up to his. “Bear!” she whispered. “You might at least have given me a moment’s respite!—Oh, I love you! I love you! I love you!”

THE END

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