Waters of the North

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WATERS OF THE NORTH

BY

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DIMBLEBY'S

DUCKWORTH

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Waters of the North

CHAPTER I

"Five hundred thousand dollars in United States bearer bonds," said Mr. Coniston, "taken right out of my private safe."

Seated well back in his big desk-chair the banker regarded his son narrowly. Until now, Easy Street had been the boy's home address—Number One on the sunny side. Public School and 'Varsity, sport and travel; in these was comprised the total of his experience. Would the training, which before her death his mother had demanded so insistently, stand the test of crisis? Would it prove to have been worth while, or would it be shown as superficial, and without the solid backing of courage and self-respect?

In the momentary silence which followed, the glances of the two locked in mutual appraisement. The banker was not the only one who was weighing up his man.

"Why not apply to Scotland Yard?" enquired Roy quietly.

There was a detachment in the question which might, or might not, mean strength. The banker did not know. He wished he did. But his acquaintance with the correctly turned-out boy who was his own son was not extensive. He had been too much wrapped up in his business, the boy so much from home. But for the blood-tie, almost they might have been strangers. And now, in his extremity, he had no one else to whom he might turn.

"Suppose," he suggested gently, "you defer your advice until you have all particulars."

Something in his father's tone brought home to Roy that there was more behind the words than was indicated by their face value. He looked up to find the banker's expression unrelaxed and purposeful. And if there were lines under the eyes and furrows across the broad forehead which a month ago had not been there, the eyes themselves were clear and unwavering; if the mouth showed in a grimmer line across the face, at least it had lost none of the old determination. Whatever the trouble, the old man was facing it with colours nailed to the mast.

"Sorry, sir," Roy said quietly, and then: "Carry on, please."

The banker's mouth grew grimmer still.

"This is the position," he said. "A few months ago I returned from America to find that, in direct opposition to our agreement, Dacre had been speculating with bank funds." He met Roy's eyes significantly. "At heavy loss," he added.

Roy making no comment during the ensuing pause, the banker went on.

"The position left me but two lines of action," he said. "The first was to settle the loss—the slightest delay would have been fatal to our credit. The second was to clear Dacre out of the firm—lock, stock and barrel."

Roy shrugged his shoulders. "That's no calamity, at any rate," he observed.

Again that penetrating look from the older man. The boy had spoken as though from long-established conviction.

"But the cost of settling his losses was," continued the banker. And then, impressively: "At this moment our reserves are lower than they have been for twenty years."

The younger man drew a deep breath. "To have got rid of that blighter," he said emphatically, "was worth the money."

The banker held his son's eyes with the same unwavering steadfastness. "Quite so," he agreed dryly—"if when he cleared out he hadn't taken those bonds with him."

Roy leaned forward in his chair, his eyes blazing.

"Do you mean that Dacre walked off with a cool hundred thousand pounds of your money?" he demanded tensely.

His father nodded, still searching deep into the other's mind.

"From the date of the dissolution of partnership to the day when actually he left the bank there was a margin of about a week. It was during this time that he took the script. I know it as surely as I know I'm here now. And what's more," he added grimly, "Dacre knows that I know."

For a moment Roy's glance travelled rather helplessly about the room. Apparently the situation found him at a loss, and the thought made the father's heart throb bleakly. The only thing in life he wanted more than to make up his losses was for the son of his body to prove himself a man. The moment of actual testing, however, was at hand. A moment and he would

know one way or the other. Nevertheless, his voice as he continued was as detached, almost impersonal, as ever.

"Before the end of the financial year, unless I get those dollars back, or can make up my loss in some other way, the firm of Coniston & Dacre will go out of business," he said quietly.

Roy whitened. He knew enough to understand the effect on public confidence of such a serious shrinking of assets as the double loss entailed by Dacre's speculation and the absence of these bonds would occasion, and was sufficiently in sympathy with his father's code to realise that the day the bank's position offered the slightest risk to depositors was the day which would see the doors close for the last time. Just as surely, too, he realised that this destruction of his life's work would mean the end of his father.

"Why not go to Scotland Yard?" he repeated.

Neither by sign nor gesture did the older man betray the battle-ground of his thoughts.

"Because I can't afford to prosecute," he stated levelly. "Once Dacre was in the witness-box, he'd blow the bank's credit as high as Hamen. And so," he supplemented with a shrug of the shoulders, "I've just got to take it lying down." Momentarily his mouth hardened to a line of steel. "For the time being, anyway," he concluded.

For two minutes by the Sheraton clock on the high mahogany mantelpiece neither broke the strange compelling silence that ensued; two full minutes that irrevocably were to make or mar the destinies, not only of a great business house, but of the blood bond between father and son.

"And that," said the former, bringing to bear a quality of dispassionate acceptance of the inevitable that was not the least of his strength, "is that." His face relaxed none of its cold detachment. "And now for finding a way out," he supplemented briskly.

He got up from his chair and went over to the safe that was let into the wall in one corner of the room. He unlocked one of the smaller drawers, and returned to the desk carrying a slim roll of oiled silk paper. Before displaying it, however, he turned sharply to Roy.

"You remember John Rudd?" he enquired.

Roy nodded; the death of that brilliant engineer was still fresh in his mind.

“Three years ago,” the banker proceeded, “he was sent to Northern Canada to survey the route of a railway it was proposed to build from Fort Churchill to Hudson’s Bay. He spent three months on the work, traversing a portion of the district where but few white men had ever been. Before the survey was completed, however, before even he had furnished his report, the project fell through, the company who engaged him went into liquidation, and he was recalled to England.”

Pausing, the banker unrolled the silk paper and spread it flat upon the desk, disclosing a rough-drawn map, across the right upper corner of which was traced the outline of Hudson’s Bay. From a little above the centre, skirting what obviously was intended for a chain of lakes, a dotted line extended to the Bay itself. At the northern point of one of these was a splash of vivid red. It was upon this that the banker’s finger rested.

“At that spot,” he said, “Rudd found gold.”

He glanced upward from the map with a look that invited interrogation. But though Roy’s expression had stiffened to sudden interest, he made no further sign.

“Please go on,” he said at last quietly, and for a fraction of time the older man’s eyes brightened to a new alertness.

“If the company who employed him had still been in being,” the banker went on after another momentary pause, “it would have been Rudd’s duty to report that find to his directors. As it no longer existed, and he had been paid no salary for what work had been done, he felt justified in turning the discovery to his own advantage. Knowing that I had some knowledge of mining, he brought it to me. While we were negotiating he was seized with his last illness. Before he died he gave me the map unconditionally.”

Immediately Roy’s mind jumped to the inevitable query.

“Did he actually register the claim?” he asked.

His father shook his head. “He didn’t even stake it,” he said. “At the time of the discovery, having sold his services to the company, he did not feel justified in doing so. When the smash came he was hundreds of miles from the site of the find, and the condition of affairs forced him to come straight home.”

Followed the same strange silence as before. With a tensity that only his iron self-control enabled him to hide, the banker waited for Roy to show his hand.

“And you want me,” the latter said at last, “to go over and stake it?”

His father’s tightly held breath escaped slowly and inaudibly. Beyond that, the measure of his pride was displayed only by the passage of his hand across his forehead.

“Yes,” he said; “next week. If your report confirms the high value shown by the samples of quartz Rudd brought back with him, I’ll send McQueen straight out to you. He’s a first-class metallurgist, and if he reports favourably the bank is saved.”

Roy unhooked the receiver from the telephone.

“Is that the C.P.R.?” he demanded when he had got through to the required number. There was the usual silence, and then: “When is the next boat for Montreal?” he enquired.

CHAPTER II

The jumping-off place for that almost uncharted section of the Dominion of Canada known as "The North" or more locally "the woods," the district which lies immediately west of Hudson's Bay, is the frontier town of Cinnamon Creek, a straggling, wooden-built, board-walked community of some fifteen hundred restless, transient souls.

Of the jumbled collection of pool-rooms, barber-shops, drug-stores, and prospectors' supply establishments, by far the most important is Tom Long's Chinese Eats Parlour. If only for the reason that none of the three nondescript hotels of which the "city" boasts provide meals, and that the food supplied by the ever-smiling celestial is well cooked and appetising, Tom's is always fairly full. At such times as "freeze-up," when the prospectors come in from the woods, and again when the ice breaks in the spring and they return, as often as not it is packed to suffocation.

Roy found the long bare room filled with the strange assortment of crude humanity that only a frontier town can provide. Lean, hard-bitten men in khaki shirts and jean trousers tucked into prospectors' boots; trappers from the Barren Lands of Hudson's Bay—canvas-faced men with the curious puckered wrinkles about the eyes which are the legacy of the shimmering steel-cold of that area where, for a thousand square miles, one has to "pack" one's fuel; sturgeon fishers from the Saskatchewan River, and a few odd hands from the neighbouring lumber mills.

One or two of the company had their women-folk with them.

But until later, when his attention was attracted so dramatically in another direction, Roy had eyes for but one person present.

Dacre!

What, by everything wonderful, was his father's discarded partner doing in a world-end place like Cinnamon Creek? Dacre, whose boast it had been that apart from occasional trips to Scotland or Monte Carlo he was never to be lured from within easy motoring distance of Piccadilly Circus?

Yet there, unmistakably, he was, as large as life, if not quite as natural. Seemingly quite at home, too, though in such strange company.

Even in a setting removed so entirely from his habit, Roy could not but admit the man's attraction. There was the same ease of manner, the same

ready smile, the same air of complete harmony with his environment that always had so distinguished him. Even—and because he seemed so entirely unaware of them—the Sackville Street clothes and spotless linen struck no false note.

And yet, watching him closely, not for the first time Roy observed that though his smile was so ready, only rarely did it establish communication with his eyes; that though willing always to meet the glance of the man with whom he was speaking, his face, as he did so, bore a curious *masked* expression, as though by some secret process he was able to disconnect his eyes entirely from any expression of his thoughts.

Roy had been watching him for perhaps five minutes before the other realised his presence. When at last their eyes met it was obvious that the encounter was so unexpected as, momentarily, to throw Dacre off his guard. A look of amazement flashed across his face, succeeded by an expression which for the life of him Roy was unable to interpret. There was fear there, true, but mingled with that fear was a look of cunning that had in it something of triumph, something of exultation. Then, recovering himself instantaneously, all else was blotted out in a smile of greeting so cordial that Roy's face flushed into anger at the sheer effrontery of it. To which, as though in recognition of a challenge, Dacre's smile merged gradually to a look of contemptuous indifference. Their glances held for a moment only, before, with the peculiar droop to the corners of his mouth that Roy had always recognised as Nature's danger-signal, Dacre turned away.

Roy's companion for the evening was the teamster who had hauled his baggage from the station to the hotel, a sturdy, fair-haired man with a face burned to a rich mahogany-brown, and eyes of an intense and vivid blue. There was something clean and straight and open about Harry Pullen that took Roy's fancy from the first, and the two had struck up a fast friendship.

"Say," said Harry Pullen, who had noticed this silent passage of arms, "who's your swell city friend?"

"A man named Dacre," said Roy shortly.

Harry shrugged his shoulders. "Guess he'd better watch his step," he said soberly; "Jake Brine ain't exactly healthy company for strangers."

It needed only one glance at Dacre's companion, in whom he had no difficulty in recognising a half-breed Indian, for Roy unhesitatingly to accept this estimate. Brutality was in his narrow, lowering forehead, in his broad, flattened nose, in his wide, thin-lipped mouth, and in the fleshy, out-

thrust jaw. But more than all else it was the eyes that proclaimed the animal; they were the eyes of a beast of prey. The very look of the man sent a chill through him.

Also, and for some reason he was unable to define, the sight of these two in company filled him with a strange uneasiness. It was as though in the alliance was a threat directed towards himself. What was Dacre doing in Canada—and in Cinnamon Creek of all places? And in the company of a man like Brine?

He had not long, however, in which to turn the question in his mind before his thoughts were deflected by a sneer, which, passing over the 'breed's face like an evil shadow, brought to the surface all the animal of which the soul of the man was composed. And with the sneer came a remark which quite obviously was directed towards a girl who, in company with a man of middle age, was seated at a table near by, and towards whom Roy's eyes had more than once been directed.

And she was worthy of all the attention a man could bestow. Small she was, and dainty; pretty as a picture. But added to her clean-cut beauty was the supreme gift of personality. Captaincy of her soul shone steadfast and unafraid from her eyes, clear and candid as those of a child; the tenderness of her mouth was but sublimated by the clean curve of jaw from tiny ears to the rounded firmness of her chin.

Instead of a simple black frock, had she been draped in the Stars and Stripes her nationality could not more definitely have been proclaimed. Yet, so adaptable is American girlhood, that in spite of the obvious Parisian origin of the frock, her presence in that mixed assembly struck no note of incongruity.

Until the half-breed's remark drew all eyes upon her she had been laughing and chatting with her companion—an iron-jawed man who faced the world four-square through shrewd and kindly eyes, and by the strong likeness between them was obviously her father—as though a Chinese restaurant in a Canadian frontier town was as naturally her background as any hotel on Fifth Avenue.

It was in accordance with Roy's estimate of Brine's mentality that the latter should go out of his way to level insults at strangers because merely they happened to bear evidence of refinement. What made his blood boil and filled him with a sense of sickening disgust was that any effort made by Dacre to check the campaign of insult that from the moment he had first observed the pair the 'breed had launched, was undertaken with a diffidence

that spoke either one of two things—either he was determined not to allow chivalry to interfere with self-interest, or was frightened to death of the half-breed. Perhaps a little of both.

True, at first he made some half-hearted attempt at remonstrance, but after the inherent savagery with which this was greeted contented himself with nothing more effective than a sickly protest against anything more directly offensive than usual.

It was after the remark already referred to, one which caused the girl's cheek to flood with sudden shame, that the affair took the turn which led to a sequel so amazing.

His jaw set in fighting lines, her father had dropped his knife and fork and half risen from his seat as though to exact reprisal for the insult. Roy, unable actually to overhear what passed, had risen in the American's support, when in an instant the matter was taken out of their hands in a manner as unexpected as it was dramatic.

Roy had noticed the boy when he came in, and in the freshly-laundered spotlessness of his shirt and neckerchief, the Savile Row breeches, and the russet perfection of his prospector's boots, no less than in his carefully-brushed hair, had put him down as the type of well-bred waster with which too often the overseas Dominions are inflicted, an impression the curious blend of diffidence and aloofness with which he bore himself did nothing to remove. Roy had gathered, too, an impression of effeminacy that a skin as yet but slightly shaded by the fierce northern suns, his clear blue eyes, and a figure slim and elegant as a girl's, went only to confirm. At that time Roy had not the experience which afterwards enabled him to distinguish what perhaps is the most deceptive type on earth.

This superficially unpromising specimen of the order was nearer both to Dacre and to the girl than was Roy, and thus was in a better position to overhear what passed. Somewhat contemptuously Roy had observed the boy's manifest distress, and, as the campaign of insult developed, the quick uneasy glances which from time to time he cast towards the girl. To Roy it was as though he was speculating upon how far Brine would be permitted to go before someone else intervened.

And then, suddenly, at this climax reached, Roy saw the flush mount upwards to the boy's cheeks until they glowed with a shame to match that of the girl herself. With a sudden stiffening of interest he noted, too, how, as with the removal of a mask, his face lost its softness, and showed suddenly

hard as chilled steel, and that his eyes, no longer soft and dreamy, shone with the light that is seen only in those of the fighter born.

Before either the American or Roy himself had time to interfere, the boy leaped to his feet, and covering the space that separated him from his objective more quickly, almost, than the eyes could follow, with the flat of his hand struck the half-breed across the face with a force that sent him reeling sideways in his chair.

“Get up, you swine,” he said, “and ask this lady’s pardon, before I kill you!”

CHAPTER III

For a moment those in a position to see what had occurred were too amazed to move. Then, from trappers and prospectors alike—even from the women—went up a great shout of laughter. To those hard-bitten veterans of rough usage it was as if a tame rabbit had started to rough-house with a cinnamon bear. Good judges of men, these northerners, but, like the rest of us, liable sometimes to guess wrongly.

It was hard to say if the 'breed was more furious at the blow or at the laughter. As Harry Pullen whispered to Roy, it looked as though the "Honourable Cissy"—his name for the Englishman—was "looking for trouble of the worst kind."

"And believe me, he'll get all that's coming to him," he added half admiringly, half in regret. "Within the next few minutes there'll be a strange face in heaven—if he's any face left to take there."

Which, indeed, appealed to Roy as a fairly accurate forecast of what actually would happen, for with a bound that overturned the table with a crash that shook the room, the 'breed was on his feet. A second later and everyone else stood too, gaping and expectant of slaughter.

Standing, the half-breed's natural resemblance to a gorilla was accentuated. His great arms hung almost to his knees; his enormous width of chest and his huge columns of leg made him appear a giant in comparison with the slim figure who faced him, taut and rigid as so suddenly and surprisingly this had become.

Physical superiority apart, moreover, the 'breed's insensate savagery, lashed to red fury by this weakling's blow, rendered it a foregone conclusion that the Englishman would be overborne and crushed by the other's first mad-bull rush. It would be not so much a fight as an annihilation.

Curiously, the one least affected by the situation was the prospective victim himself. The first hot phase of his indignation cooled, those who had expected to see him make one quick dive for cover received what must have been the outstanding surprise of their lives.

In the free-for-all scraps of the frontier town it is probable that punches had been launched harder than the one that, landing fairly and squarely on the jaw, lifted Jake Brine a good six inches from the floor and deposited him

a mussed-up heap among the chairs and tables, but never one timed and delivered with such amazing accuracy. The 'breed must have thought the roof had fallen in.

When the almost reverential silence that followed was broken at last, it was with such a yell of delight as surely the walls of Tom Long's had never heard before.

Harry Pullen turned his eyes to the heavens: "Gawd *save* the King!" he breathed ecstatically.

But Jake was by no means done with. It is true that to digest that punch and yet come up for more he must have had a jaw of teak, but come up for more he did.

And if his next rush was hardly as elemental in its ferocity as was the first, this was only because he took some slight care of his guard.

And then it was that before the fascinated gaze of those sons of the North the languid, effeminate "Cissy," who for six months had been their standing jibe and entertainment, became transformed into an ice-cold terror. Deliberately and with intent he proceeded to cut Jake Brine to ribbons.

From the moment of the first rush to when, a crumpled bleeding mass, he went down for the last time, the half-breed never for one instant had the shadow of a chance. As Harry observed to Roy, he got it coming and he got it going. When he went to hit the Englishman, the latter was not there; when the Englishman went to hit him, he was there—every square inch of him. That, in brief, was the fight's epitome. If, crudely, he attempted to guard his face, his body became the target for pile-driving jabs and half-hooks that rattled about his frame as hail on corrugated zinc; when in desperation he attempted to block these terrible body punches, he left his face wide open to be cut and torn with straight lefts and rights that, until the very last, seemed to be directed towards every portion of its surface but the one point which would have put him out of his misery.

His own rage, long since beaten out of him, had been the red-hot fury of the beast; the anger confronting him was the merciless, ice-cold fury of a strong man resenting insult to a good woman.

Nor was it until continuation would have been calculated cruelty against a man utterly defenceless that with a straight right to the angle of the jaw, and with every ounce of fighting weight behind it, the Englishman applied the closure, and Brine went down for what in a weaker man would have been the last time of all.

But even then the night's sensation was not complete. With a gesture that compelled obedience the Englishman waved aside those who would have clustered about the now but semi-conscious 'breed. Walking over to the prostrate figure he dashed the contents of a carafe of water into what was left of his opponent's face. Then, silently, he stood over him until in a measure the beaten man had regained his senses.

Wonderingly the crowd awaited the outcome. Nor was there long delay. Stooping, the boy grasped Brine by the collar and hauled him, limp and abject, to his feet; propelled him, then, towards where, white and shaken, the American girl was standing.

Two yards from her he halted, then: "Go down on your knees, you swine," he ordered, "and ask this lady's pardon."

An audible gasp went up from the onlookers. Accustomed as they were to elemental conflict, savage, relentless, and culminating not infrequently in tragedy, this deliberate and calculated rounding-off of retribution was something new in their experience.

And at that moment, impelled by some influence for which there was no accounting, Roy's attention was drawn towards Dacre. Throughout the whole scene the latter had stood apart, his face dead-white but trying hard to smile. Hitherto, of course, there had been but small excuse for his interference; the fight was one man against another, and with all the odds against the other side. And yet, somehow, Roy knew that even had interference been justified Dacre would have shirked the issue. There is something about the aura of the coward that broadcasts itself more surely than any message transmitted by wireless. As surely as he knew his own name Roy knew from that moment that, whatever his cunning, Dacre had a yellow streak.

At this point the latter's interference, displayed in an attempt to prevent this crowning humiliation to his man, was conciliatory to the point of supplication. Even as Roy watched him, Dacre stepped forward with a smile of ingratiation and laid a white hand on the Englishman's shoulder.

"Really," he protested mildly, "is this quite necessary? What I mean is . . ." He got no further; a sweep of the Englishman's arm brushed him aside as though he had been some inanimate object that impeded. Staggering half a dozen paces backwards, Dacre sat heavily on the floor.

For a moment after receiving the first command it was as though the benumbed brain of the half-breed was unable to grasp its purport. When

realisation came, it seemed from the expression of utter malignancy that crossed his features, as if he would resist. If, however, this was in his mind, it needed but one furtive glance into the boy's face to induce him to change his mind.

In full view of the men who, sturdy and hard-bitten as they were, had yet held him in fear, on his marrow bones in the dust the half-breed sued the American girl for pardon at the bidding of the English boy.

"And now," said the latter, when, his penance at an end, Brine scrambled to his feet, "clear out—*quickly*!"

It was at this moment occurred the crowning sensation of a night of thrills. Half turned as though to obey, like a flash the 'breed's hand went to his pocket, and his pistol was out. By some twist of his warped mind, moreover, it was not the Englishman, but the American girl, whom he menaced by that deadly rim of steel.

Roy's rush, and the red spit of fire from the revolver came simultaneously.

CHAPTER IV

Only by God's providence and the fractional proportion of a second was he in time.

The shock of the collision deflected the half-breed's aim, the bullet embedding itself harmlessly in the rafters overhead.

Followed then concerted action, swift and drastic, on the miners' part, during which Brine was overborne and obliterated by the flailing arms and heaving bodies of those before whose might he had fallen, with Dacre fading unostentatiously through a door in the rear premises.

The next thing Roy knew was a hand grasping his arm and propelling him out of the door and into the street.

He felt dazed and uncertain; the strain of those few seconds had been greater than he realised—more perhaps on the American girl's account than on his own.

Arrived on the narrow side-walk, he turned to find the American looking into his eyes with an expression of almost unimaginable gratitude; noticed, too, how the keen grey eyes softened and sublimated. And the girl, who had followed closely at her father's heels, though plucky as a Cockney soldier, was yet deathly pale, and seemed glad of the supporting arm of the English boy who had fought so fiercely in her cause.

Even in his shaken state Roy could not fail to observe how entirely the latter had shed his fighting spirit. Now that the necessity for action had passed he had resumed his old air of diffident self-consciousness. To Roy's mind the most extraordinary circumstance was that after a full five minutes of the fiercest fighting he had ever witnessed, the Englishman's appearance was still as immaculate as though he had just dressed after a bath. Absolutely unmarked about the face, not a hair out of place, not an article of clothing disarranged.

"Listen," said the American, "I want you two boys to come up to my hotel."

Roy smiled. "I should like to," he said, and hesitated. "The fact is, I have a friend with me," he added.

The old gentleman looked round sharply. “I guess from now on,” he said rather dryly, “that any friend of yours is a friend of ours. He’ll come right along with us.”

Harry Pullen, emerging at that moment from the restaurant and joining the little group, the party set off down the moon-drenched road.

There being no private sitting-rooms in the Prince Rupert, the party went up to the American’s bedroom, which, in those primitive parts more often than not combines with its more prosaic function the uses of office, reception room, and parlour.

Once inside the American turned, shook hands with each of his visitors in turn with extraordinary heartiness, his daughter following suit with equal frankness. Then, producing a wallet of encouraging stoutness, their host proceeded to distribute visiting cards, inscribed:

THOS. B. MURRIAN,

Knoxville,
Tenn.

and in the left-hand corner:

Lucky Strike Mining Corporation, Inc.,
199, Flatiron Buildings.

None of the guests possessing cards, the Americans were obliged to content themselves with verbal information. Roy’s fellow Englishman, it appeared, was the Hon. Anthony D’f Clarges.

“I just want to say this, boys,” said Mr. Murrian, when he had made a careful note of the name and address of each of his visitors, “that both me and Nellie here thank you for what you have done for us to-day. I’m handing out nothing that’s not coming to you when I say that you’ve acted like hundred per cent. men from the middle both ways. If every piece of quartz in the British Empire assays as rich as you, I guess the Old Country’ll hold together pretty good for a year or two yet.”

Came, then, from the big chair in the window, the girl’s soft Southern drawl. By this time she had recovered in a great measure from her experience, and once more was alert and radiant. Watching her, as, outlined against the open window through which the soft night wind stirred the dull gold of her hair, and with the vivid blue of her eyes alive and sparkling, and her cheeks flushed with excitement, she spoke her gratitude with the unself-conscious sincerity that is so much the charm of American girlhood, Roy’s

impression was one of an intense vitality. But while she was so eagerly alive, this had in it no quality of unrest, but, on the contrary, was vividly stimulating. It was as though from her abundance she radiated a generous and life-giving vitality.

"I feel just like one of those girls in the fairy stories," she said, "that the knights rescue from the dragon. And believe me," she added feelingly, to cover the Englishman's national self-consciousness, "that 'breed was some dragon all right."

"Who was the guy in the store clothes who was with him?" enquired her father shortly. "Seems to me," he added slowly, "that he wasn't what you'd call much of a he-man."

Roy flushed; after all, though an enemy, the one referred to was an Englishman. "A man from London, by the name of Dacre," he said.

The American started from his seat on the bed, his fists clenched, his face crimson. "That's the guy I've been gunning after for two years!" he cried. "It's on his account I'm here now." His mouth shut in a harsh line across his face, displaying for an instant a different side to his character; the side that was ruthless to resent an injury. "That crook handed me the biggest lemon in the way of a salted mine that ever a man could have wished on him," he added.

"Which means," the girl broke in quietly, "that before long Mr. Dacre'll have to sit up and take notice."

Roy shrugged his shoulders. "It seems to have grown into a habit with him—swindling his friends," he said, and without mentioning the consequences of the loss, told of his father's experience. He explained his own presence in Cinnamon Creek by saying merely that he was setting out on a prospecting trip up North.

Mr. Murrian pricked up his ears. "If you find anything worth while," he said, "let me know. If it looks good to me, there's all the money you want for development. . . . I guess the North owes me a bit, anyway," he went on after a pause. "There's a hole in the ground right here in the North over which that four-flusher Dacre separated me from fifty thousand dollars, and there isn't enough gold in it to fill a nigger's eye-tooth. If there *is* anything in the country except pelican and timber wolves I'd like to have a hand in it. Just," he went on to explain, "to sort of get back a bit of the self-respect I dropped down that hole. That is," he added hurriedly, and in a voice he tried with

inconsiderable success to steady, “apart from the fact that I’d be tickled to death to help out the man who saved my little girl’s life.”

“Thank you very much,” said Roy gratefully, and meant it. If the offer was genuine, a question concerning which he had little doubt, the chief difficulty that all along had troubled him—that of how to turn the discovery, if and when he made it, immediately to the best advantage—was solved automatically.

Mr. Murrian turned then to Tony Clarges. “And you,” he questioned, “what’s your business here in the North?”

The boy smiled, an amazing transfiguring grin that seemed to change the whole lineament of his face; to sublimate his usual restricted shyness to a warm and appreciative humour which as its chief merit possessed a capacity of almost gamin self-understanding.

“I’m on the dole,” he said.

The American nodded—rather gravely, Roy noticed.

“That’s money you Britishers draw when you’re not working,” he said quietly, and at his tone Nell glanced quickly up into his face, before she turned to Tony, who flushed slightly under the scrutiny. He was, however, sufficiently honest to face the issue, a fact that the American did not fail to note.

“I prefer saying I’m on the dole to admitting being a remittance man,” Tony said quietly.

A puzzled look came into the American’s eyes as he scanned the boy’s features. It seemed impossible that this self-deprecatory lad with the candid eyes and diffident manner could be the raging bear-cat who but a short hour previously, and with such calculated ferocity, had fought and cut to ribbons a man forty pounds heavier than himself.

“Say,” he said at last, “I don’t want to butt in, but at the same time I’d like fine to keep in touch with you all. I want to say right now, moreover, that if at any time either of you happen to want a job, all he’s got to do is to send a Night Letter to Knoxville, and I’ll cable your fare and give you all the work you want.” He rose from his seat on the bed to wish them good night.

“Remember,” were his parting words, “I owe you boys a debt you can call for payment of at sight. And,” he added, “I don’t forget my debts.”

And Nell, who for the last few minutes had been unwontedly silent, rose from her chair. She shook hands with Tony, to his silent embarrassment

taking his right hand in both her own and smiling rather whimsically at his rising colour.

"Guess you'd rather face a man than a woman," she said.

With Roy, who had risked his life on her behalf, she shook hands, as it seemed to him, but casually. Nor, apart from a fleeting glance before turning away, did she look at him as she did so. But even in his disappointment it struck him that Tony Clarges was not the only one in the room whose colour had heightened.

* * * * *

Two days later, at three o'clock in the afternoon, Roy disembarked from the stern-wheeler *Cree Indian* at a point some hundred and fifty miles up the Saskatchewan River.

CHAPTER V

This place, known locally as Pickerel Landing, was a low-lying, humid, wholly unattractive settlement of twenty or so dispirited fishermen and trappers, who, with their equally disillusioned wives, lived in the log cabins that clustered as though for mutual support about the river bank. Taking it by and large, the place reminded Roy of nothing so much as the Eden in *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

Apart from the human population and a few hundred million mosquitoes that settled on the fresh-blooded newcomer like vultures, was a large and prosperous colony of huskie dogs, the breeding of which appeared to be one of the main industries of the place; slinking, cowardly creatures with atavistic tendencies towards their not unduly remote timber wolf ancestry.

The head and centre of the settlement seemed to be the bunk-house, where travellers "coming in" from "the woods" lodged pending the comparatively rare visits of the steamer that would take them to Cinnamon Creek.

Attached to the bunk-house, from which it opened at one end, was the private cabin of the proprietor, one Seth Lee, a taciturn, loose-limbed man of about fifty-five, and his innumerable and equally haphazard family. Leading from the cabin was the store, where little further variety of commodities were kept for disposal than canned goods and plug tobacco.

After his canoe and engine, together with his stores, had been disembarked in an untidy and apparently inextricable heap on the river bank, Roy ventured to approach the almost unapproachable Seth.

"You got a team to carry my gear to Athapapuskow Lake?" he enquired, after having previously ascertained the approximate distance as sixteen miles.

"When d'ye wanter start?" demanded Seth, after a pause for the decantation from his cheek of an appreciable quantity of liquefied stock.

Roy cast a rapid glance round about the surrounding terrain.

"Now," he replied, quickly and decisively.

From a ragged and unsavoury plug Lee replenished what previously he had rejected—untidy work, by reason of entire lack of teeth, and regarded

the newcomer with the expression which might be imagined on the features of the purser of a cross-Channel steamer on presentation of an aeroplane ticket.

"Nope," he said at last. And then, explanatively: "Bulldogs."

"Bulldogs?" repeated Roy.

"Bulldogs," confirmed Seth. "Flies." Then, regarding Roy's bewildered face with scorn: "Can't let hosses out of the barn in daylight."

At the time Roy regarded this merely as a jocose lie in defence of his Sunday rest. Later, however, he found it actually to be the truth.

During daylight hours, at that particular season of the year, the "bulldog"—of about the size of an elongated bluebottle and the colour of an English house-beetle—will settle upon a horse in swarms. Every bite draws blood, and it takes a very few minutes for the animal either to die or to go mad. Thus during the day the horses are kept in darkened stables, and do all their work by night.

It was nine o'clock before, followed closely by a long four-wheeled cart —reminiscent in size and shape of an English farm wagon—to which his canoe and gear were lashed, Roy set out. The trail through the forest had been cut during the war for the transport of copper ore from an adjacent lake. The mine, however, closing down when the drop in prices rendered it unprofitable to work, the trail had quickly become overgrown. A very considerable proportion of that sixteen miles, moreover, was through muskeg, which is water-soaked moss six to ten feet deep, into which the traveller sinks knee-deep. And during the whole of that night's tramp Roy was assailed by a veritable army corps of mosquitoes.

Used as he was to camping, this experience was altogether new, and at least in one respect amazingly stimulating, for during the night hours the broad dome of sky was one flickering sheen of the white and multi-coloured fringes of the Northern Lights, the broad beams swinging across the heavens like the searchlights of giants.

To add variety to the monopoly of the green foliage through which the trail ran, there were times when the woods on either side would show bare and black and stark, where forest fires had ravished them, the vast plains of blackened stumps stretching in inexpressibly dreary perspective until enveloped by the kindly darkness.

At other times the living trees encroached in a solid wall to the very edge of the trail, and then could be heard the strange rustling of living things

among the undergrowth, the occasional hungry clamour of the wolf, and, dominating all other sounds, the unutterably doleful call of the loon.

Morning broke clear and sunny, and with a fresh breeze that swept away the mosquitoes as though they had never been. Roy refreshed himself greedily from the wild strawberries, dewberries, and raspberries that grew in great clumps about the trail, and tired as he was, the remainder of the way was easier.

About six o'clock the shimmer of water through the trees ahead heartened him with the first sight of Athapapuskow Lake.

On one side of the open space that fronted the water was the log cabin of the bunk-house proprietor, fronted by its small patch of ill-tended garden. On the other was the bunk-house itself, a long, barn-like structure consisting of one inexpressibly dirty room, within which still dirtier bunks were secured to the wall.

If he had paused to ask himself by whom, and in what circumstances, these bunks had been occupied for the last six months, he could not have slept in one. Weary and faint from fatigue as he was, however, he rolled himself in his own sleeping bag, and almost before he had drawn the mosquito bars about him, was asleep.

He awoke in the early afternoon, took a meal at Ike Mitchell's cabin, paid his bill, clamped the engine to the canoe, loaded up, and about four o'clock in the afternoon started across the lake.

The following days he traversed in turn Athapapuskow; First, Second, and Third Cranberry Lakes; and from thence through Separation Creek and Elbow, Island, Reed, and Sandy Lakes to Herb Lake. Each of these linked to its fellow by a stretch of the Grassy River, with its twenty-yard bordering of jade-green rushes; beautiful enough, but abounding in rapids at which he was forced to land, unload the canoe, and "pack" that stout craft and all his gear, food and equipment, overland to deep water again. He camped by nights on islands of unbelievable beauty, with hard sandy beaches that sloped serenely from the water to the thick carpet of moss between shore and forest. Here he cooked his bacon and beans over sweet-smelling cedar-wood fires; and after sunsets that transmuted the Western sky to crimson and the lakes to iridescent gold, would sink to deep, dreamless sleep. On waking in the morning, after a plunge into the ice-cold waters of the lake, he would eat a breakfast as if he had fasted for a week.

After many days of this, sunshine and water by day, and cloudless, windless nights, his map told him that he was within measurable distance of his destination.

The map of the English surveyor was so accurate that almost he could have found the spot he sought from memory. Rounding at long last the headland that separated Grassy River from Jackfish Lake, he could see across its seven-mile expanse the patch of chalk-white rock that was his objective.

During that long last quick passage, when surely his engine had never run more smoothly or at greater speed, his eye was fixed ever upon that promised land that was to be the saviour of his father's fortune, perhaps his very life.

And as he grew nearer, strain his eyes as he might, he could see no sign that that particular point was not as desolate and untouched by man as any part of the country through which he had passed.

It was not until he was within a hundred yards of the beach that he heard the shout of one unintelligible word from the figure who appeared so suddenly, and who waved so excitedly from the top of the low cliff. Then, as his engine still chugged forward, another man, who seemed to emerge almost from the earth, waved frantically a red handkerchief at the end of a stick.

A second later both figures ran scramblingly over the uneven surface of the ground to a rock larger than the majority of those surrounding them, and cowered behind it.

And then, instantaneously, came revelation. To the accompaniment of an ear-shattering detonation, a portion of the rock face seemed literally to dissolve, to leap upwards in a fountain of dust and smoke and fragments. Pieces showered about, some missing Roy by inches only, and throwing up the water in great fountains of silver spray.

Roy's heart missed one—or was it two?—beats. The sun that shone so glitteringly upon the lake had withdrawn, in that one instant, its promise. A feeling of physical sickness overcame him.

He knew he was too late.

The ground had been staked, and work on the claim begun!

CHAPTER VI

His canoe drifted nearer.

"Yer goin' to land?" bawled one of the men, emerging from cover, and making his way to the edge of the cliff.

A little to the left the latter sloped downward at a less acute angle and formed a miniature beach, from which a rough landing-stage had been erected. Roy noticed that the wood of this construction remained still green and fresh.

He tied his canoe to the jetty and stepped ashore. At the top of the slope the two men awaited him. Both were French half-breeds; one broad and squat, with a leather-coloured face and black beady eyes; the other tall and lank, with high cheek-bones, and an almost toothless mouth. As Roy advanced up the newly-worn path he observed that their expressions were not too cordial.

"Howdy, stranger!" said the squat man as he drew near. "Prospectin'?" he went on to enquire.

Roy nodded.

"Something like that," he admitted quietly.

The tall man grinned unpleasantly. "I guess there's nothin' around here that isn't staked," he remarked, and there was something in the quality of his tone that caused Roy to look at him sharply. The man met his glance for only a fractional moment before turning his eyes somewhat uneasily towards his companion. Roy decided that the latter was the stronger man. Probably, also, the bigger crook.

The latter, ignoring Roy, started to slouch in the direction of the blasting operations. Though uninvited, Roy had no hesitation in following.

From an area of possibly twenty yards square the ground had been stripped of earth and moss, exposing the rock beneath. By far the greater proportion of this uncovered surface was a dull dark grey, but running through it inland from the cliff-edge like a vein, was an irregular streak of white, tinctured by dull smears of red.

At a point nearest the cliff a shallow trench had been hewn, and, where the seam hardened, blasted.

Jumping into the trench, the squat man picked up a piece of loose quartz, examining it closely. As he did so his black eyes grew triumphant. Inspection completed, he passed it, without a word, to his companion, who, less reticent, exploded into a torrent of hysterical French, exultant and jubilant.

"What is it?" demanded Roy, holding out his hand for the specimen.

Unthinkingly, and anxious, perhaps, for someone to share his triumph, the man passed it over.

It needed but the most indifferent glance to recognise the cause of excitement. Dotted in gleaming particles over its entire surface, plain to the most casual inspection, were specks of fine gold that ranged in size from infinitesimal particles, to easily detachable nuggets the size of a pin-head.

And almost every piece of rock detached by the blasting charge held similar evidence of the almost incredible richness of the claim.

To Roy the sickening disappointment to his hopes was sheer agony. That this was the identical spot which was his objective he had no shadow of doubt; his map had been too carefully drawn, the position indicated too clearly for mistake to be possible.

There was a significant silence as he turned the specimen listlessly in his hand, and he looked up to find the two half-breeds regarding him curiously. Their faces still held the triumph which the result of the blasting charge had brought, but added to this was a quality of malice, a gloating relish that quite obviously was entirely personal.

"How long has this claim been staked?" Roy demanded curtly of the squat man.

The latter, whose name Roy discovered later to be Oulette, unhooked the half-remains of a Caporal cigarette from its resting-place behind his ear, lighted it, and spat. In the way he did this, even as in the deliberation with which he expelled a mouthful of smoke, was considered belittlement of his visitor.

"A month," he said at last, the corners of his thin mouth twitching to a smile.

As well as he was able Roy choked down the anger that each moment threatened to overwhelm him. But, if they have no other virtues, the English Public Schools and 'Varsities at least teach self-control.

"Who staked it?" he went on to ask.

Came again that deliberate pause which, in itself, was insult.

Oulette jerked a coarse thumb over his shoulder, indicating a point some distance away where the branch of a tree, stripped of its bark, was erected with a pyramid of stone as its support.

"There's the Discovery Post," he said shortly.

Without a word Roy strode over to the point indicated. There he found that a flattened surface had been whittled from the apex of the post. Upon this had been burned with some red-hot instrument:

DACRE MINE

JAKE BRINE AND JOHN DACRE.
Cinnamon Creek.

June 1, 1923.
M.C.

the two terminal letters standing for "Mineral Claim."

As one dazed he stared at it. *Dacre* Mine! *Jake Brine!* He read the words over not once, but many times. Even then his brain seemed unable to grasp their full significance. And yet, amid his shock and the chaos of his thoughts, he knew definitely, if subconsciously, that this was no mere coincidence of casual prospecting; that through his association with Dacre, Brine had had exact knowledge to guide him in making for this particular location.

That the 'breed had made direct for what subsequently had been registered as the Dacre Mine, Roy knew enough of the ways of prospectors to be assured. Every indication went to prove it. Prospectors set out, usually, the first week in May, returning to the "city" just before "freeze-up" about the beginning of October. Yet this claim was staked on June 1st, with Brine back in Cinnamon Creek—whither, obviously, he had returned to register the property and report to his partner—by the second week in the month. Working out the dates in comparison with the time the round trip would occupy showed unmistakably that the 'breed must have come direct to Jackfish Lake, staked the claim, and gone straight back again. Coupled with the name given to the claim these facts showed conclusively that this had been his definite objective.

Roy turned from the discovery post and rejoined the two half-breeds, who, with sneers they took no trouble to conceal, were watching him narrowly.

"Satisfied?" asked Oulette carelessly.

For a moment Roy hesitated. At that moment he longed for nothing so much as to lash out with fist and feet in a raging, tearing, all-in fight with these ill-conditioned curs. He realised, moreover, that whichever way the battle went, however hardly he himself might be bruised and maimed, the upshot would bring the only anodyne capable of appeasing the sense of outrage and humiliation that possessed him.

But he realised also that however gratifying to himself, such a course would be immeasurably more so to the two 'breeds. First to "put one over him" by forestalling him on the claim, and then to "beat him up" would be the very climax of delight. At least they should not have that satisfaction. Later, if it was possible to get a bit of his own back he'd be there with both hands. Situated as he was at that moment, however, obviously the only thing to do was to keep a stiff upper lip.

"You seem to have got hold of a pretty good property," he said with indifferent interest.

The lanky breed, Le Fevre, by name, nodded in mock appreciation of disinterested tribute, his red eyes lighting in derision.

"It sure is," he assented, showing his toothless gums. "Lucky, too! A guy gave Jake Brine a pointer dere might be something here, and he just pulled up stakes right away an' came straight to de very spot."

Any lingering doubt that his own forestallment might, after all, be due to unfortunate coincidence was dispelled finally by the words, no less than by the attitude of the men. By some means Dacre had obtained information thought to be possessed only by Mr. Coniston, and with characteristic promptitude had proceeded to turn it to his own advantage. Knowing his father's ex-partner as he did, and bearing his dismissal from the firm in mind, Roy could imagine the joy with which the latter had greeted this dual chance of wealth and revenge.

To have put up any sort of protest would have been to play directly into the hands of the enemy. The only thing to do was to accept failure as though unconscious of defeat, and make his get-away with as much dignity as he could assume. The question of reprisal could be left for later consideration.

Hands in pocket, and followed by the two ’breeds, he strolled casually down to his canoe.

“You hittin’ the breeze?” enquired Oulette.

Roy nodded. “Yes,” he said.

“Guess he’s going right back to Cinnamon Creek,” hazarded Le Fevre with his toothless grin.

The man’s tone and expression both contained so much of malicious triumph that, though momentarily, Roy dropped his mask of indifference.

“Why should I go straight back?” he demanded angrily.

As though dismissing the subject as one not to be taken seriously, Oulette stretched out a muscular brown arm, and with a single effort thrust the canoe into deep water.

“Because, this trip, you’ve lost out,” he said.

CHAPTER VII

It was over, with failure, blank and humiliating, as the result.

How had it come about? How had the information that led up to the debacle been acquired? This was his first, and chief, preoccupation.

He puzzled over the question for some time before solution came. Suddenly he sat bolt upright on the thwart of the canoe, and the hand that guided the tiller trembled.

If Dacre had obtained access to the safe to steal the bonds, what had there been to prevent him examining the map at the same time? But if so, why had he not actually stolen it?

By this time he was well out into the middle of the lake. Left to follow its own direction for a few minutes, no harm could come to the canoe.

With his free hand he pulled the map from his pocket, and then, releasing the tiller, spread the map out on his knee. He examined it closely, minutely, but could detect nothing to further his suspicions.

Still unsatisfied, and avid for proof, he produced the small reading-glass that he had brought with him for the purpose of lighting fires should anything go wrong with his matches, and with it he scanned every square inch of the map's surface.

And as he looked his mouth hardened, and the blood drained from his face, leaving it bleak and whitened. There it was, the indentation of the pencil where the map had been traced, plain and unmistakable!

He sat for a few moments inert. What was to be done? That his failure had been through no fault of his own in no way lessened the calamity. Nevertheless, he knew as well as he knew his own name that failure would mean the end of his father's bank, probably of his very life. And, illogically, at the back of his mind was the thought that somehow, and in some way, he had let the old man down.

In this depression of spirits, and with his engine running at half-speed so as to prolong the time before confession of failure would have to be faced, he retraced his way.

It was in the long stretch of the beautiful but treacherous river that connects Elbow Lake with Separation Creek where additional disaster fell.

His engine, part of which was below keel-level, struck a submerged rock and stopped. In unshipping it, he dropped it into the river. And, until it has been stripped and reassembled, the petrol engine that has been under water is a very dud engine indeed.

He managed to haul it into the canoe at last, a matter of considerable time and difficulty. This done, he cast about for some landing-place where repairs might be effected.

At first sight the situation seemed to offer but small prospect. As far as could be seen the reeds grew so thickly that, laden almost to the gunwhale as he was, it would be impossible to force his way through. The only thing was to paddle to Elbow Lake and land there.

It was hard going. Although practically there was no current, the sheer weight he had to propel rendered progress both slow and difficult.

And then, after an hour's backbreaking work, on the right bank of the river he caught sight of that which pulled him up abruptly.

Excepting for a tuft left at the pinnacle, the branches of a tree that shouldered its crest high above its fellows had been docked for a distance of fifteen or twenty feet down the trunk, until a point was reached where two stouter branches projected parallel with the river, and at opposite sides of the same point in the trunk. Apart from their extreme ends, where again a tuft had been left, these branches had in turn been docked; and, lower down, the parent stem had been cut in a similar way, thus leaving as a landmark a rough cross which in the clear atmosphere of the North could easily be seen for several miles.

Roy hesitated; puzzled. These "Lobsticks," as they are called, have always some definite meaning. They may indicate a trail through the woods, a convenient camping ground, good fishing or hunting; often their exact significance is known only to the Red Man who fashions them for the guidance of his fellows.

In this case, there being no rapids within measurable distance, Roy knew that no portage was indicated. In the hope that the sign might point to a camping ground, with hard sand upon which to strip his engine, he used his paddle to pole cautiously through the reeds in the direction of the Lobstick. Greatly to his surprise, however, there was no sign of a beach. Instead, the reeds continued even to a point past where they merged into the trees, the branches of which, a moment later, were directly overhead. He saw, then,

that he had entered the mouth of a narrow reed-choked stream, which, from the river, had been entirely obscured from view.

It came to him with a strange thrill that in all probability he was the first white man who had ever forced a passage through this opening. The Grassy River being employed only as a thoroughfare from lake to lake, and having no beaches whereon to camp, it is almost unknown for a prospector to land there.

As he progressed farther he found that the stream widened. At last came a passage of clear water which broadened gradually so that he could use his paddle with all the play he needed.

Mile after mile he journeyed down this unknown and uncharted waterway, a white intruder into the carefully guarded secret of some wandering band of Indians. For, in spite of the Dominion Government, there are still many Red Men who prefer the free life of the woods to the confined restrictions of the Reservation.

Wider and wider grew the stream with every mile he covered. As the hours passed, almost unnoticed in his excitement, he was amazed to discover that it opened at last into a lake, broad and clear, the banks of which were lined with the inevitable spruce, fir, and tamarack, with here and there a birch to lend variety, and, perhaps, additional beauty. And—a blessing of price to those whose lives are passed amid these comparatively inhospitable regions—as far as his eye could travel the shores were bordered by a shelving beach of firm white sand.

He paddled diagonally across the lake, choosing his point of landing at random. It was four o'clock now, and he had had no food since breakfast. He determined to land and make this his camping ground. With ill tidings as cargo there is but little need for haste.

By the time he had eaten his meal and put the engine to rights the sky had become overcast and gloomy. A quarter of an hour later he was assailed by one of those sudden squalls peculiar to the district, which, though soon over, are yet violent in the extreme. At the first rain-blast Roy made a dash for the shelter of the woods.

The trees, at first thin and straggling, clustered the closer together the farther the beach was left behind, until the branches all but met overhead. Fortunately, he had had the forethought to include a ground-sheet with his equipment, and at what he hoped was a sheltered spot he spread this upon a flat, moss-covered rock, and laid down to await the passing of the storm.

Through an opening in the trees he could see the lake being lashed and riven by rain that descended, not in drops, but in solid ropes of water which the apparently impenetrable network of leaves, branches, and foliage overhead were powerless to resist. It was but a little time before a thin trickle of rain from a branch six feet or so above his head began to fall upon the rock whereon he lay. Some peculiar arrangement of the branches conspired, indeed, to transform that particular portion of the foliage into a kind of conduit into which a quite considerable proportion of the rain that fell upon the surrounding branches became diverted.

From a trickle the flow developed to a steady drain, as if from a slightly turned-on tap, and as this descended always on the same spot, the moss which covered the rock became gradually washed away, exposing the hard stone beneath.

It must not be supposed that while the storm continued to rage Roy took any particular notice of this phenomenon. He was far too busy with his own acute discomfort to have time for outside matters. It was only when the storm had ceased, and the rocks dried out—as in that rare atmosphere it does with incredible rapidity—that any peculiarity of the exposed section of the rock occurred to him.

A stray sunbeam, filtering through the leafy roof overhead, shone full upon the bare patch. Washed clean and dry by the rain, one portion of the uncovered rock shone white as marble. And here and there about its surface glittered the yellow of gold.

For a moment he stared at it fascinated, spellbound. This was just Fate's method of rubbing in his failure. When he came to examine it—to pan it as in Cinnamon Creek Harry Pullen had shown him how to do—he would find it was not gold at all, but just the mica for which the precious metal is frequently mistaken. Having so badly missed his one great chance of fortune, it was not likely that by an incredible chance like this another would be thrust haphazard within his grasp.

He approached nearer, his heart thumping the blood into his head so that the region below his waistline felt cold and empty. He went down on to his knees to make closer investigation. He found that about half of the uncovered surface was of the usual dull grey rock formation; the remainder with a clear line of demarcation between the two, of dull white quartz. It was from this latter whence came the glittering of gold—or mica.

He produced his reading-glass, and through it examined the quartz minutely. Certainly the yellow that showed so prominently didn't look like

mica. He chipped a piece of quartz with his prospector's pick, to find that the underneath side shone richer still. He compared the loose piece with one smaller that actually contained mica, a specimen lent him by Harry Pullen for just such purpose of comparison. And the longer he looked from one piece to the other the faster the blood poured through his veins, the louder drummed his ears. For in relation to the mica sample his own freshly-hewn quartz was as sun to gaslight.

He took further samples, beat them in his mortar, and, going down to the lake, panned the resultant powder. The water washed and drained away, the rotary movement of the pan stilled, the sediment that remained was *gold*—and in view of the small piece of quartz sampled, of a weight per ton almost unbelievable in quantity.

As if under hypnotic influence, he staggered back to the rock, and though to the best of his knowledge there was no living soul within a hundred miles, he replaced the moss upon that portion of it the rain had laid bare.

It was his one regret that it was too late to drive in his location post and direction stakes. That should be his first task in the morning, and as soon as this was done he would hit the breeze to Cinnamon Creek and register the claim. There should be no mistake this time.

Then, exhausted in body and mind, he fetched his blankets, and guarding his riches with his very body, threw himself on the rock, and within a minute was asleep.

But not, however, before he had marked on his map the exact spot in the Grassy River where was the Lobstick, and had made a rough sketch of the lake, and the location of his find.

He was so dead tired, so utterly outworn, that, in his sheltered position beneath the trees he was unaware of the renewal of the storm; a storm of wind the violence of which to some extent kept the rain at bay, so that none fell upon him to awaken him from sleep.

But the gale was lashing the lake to tempest, and hurtling among the trees so that those that were young and vigorous bent like whips beneath its impact, and those from which age or shallowness of soil had drawn the living sap, so that their suppleness had gone, and left them barren and brittle, gave way, and crashed to join those other windfalls that previous storms had felled.

Towards early morning, one of these that was larger than the rest, one that, creaking and protesting, had from the beginning withstood the buffeting of the storm with ever-weakening resistance, gave way at last, and fell, and in falling struck Roy so that the unconsciousness of sleep passed into an insensibility that was deeper still.

When next he awakened he was close upon eight hundred miles from the Lobstick Claim.

CHAPTER VIII

He was not, at first, fully aware of his surroundings. All that he knew was pain, excruciating pain, in a head that seemed somehow not altogether to belong to him; or rather, as if the head to which he was accustomed had gone, replaced only by a pain.

He lay for a few moments debating the problem in what little he could reassemble of his mind. Dimly he remembered turning in for the night on the shore of the unnamed lake, but so faintly did his brain function that it was more of a subconscious impression than any definite memory. Nevertheless he seemed to be aware of a terribly jarring concussion that had transformed him instantaneously from healthful sleep to the blankness of oblivion. As to the cause of the phenomena, or indeed if it actually had occurred at all, he was uncertain. He did not even know if he was, or whether time and space existed. All that definitely he was conscious of was that where once his head had been was now only a pain.

Then, a moment, or a million years later, something cool was laid on the pain—which it occurred to him must have taken material form to receive it—and at the same time, or later, or sooner, a voice—if it was a voice—and from some incredible distance away, murmured something he could not understand. After which he remembered nothing further for a period of quite uncertain duration.

His next glimmering of consciousness was more clearly defined. The pain in his head had subsided to a curious numbness that rendered his thoughts more instinctive than of any ordered process. A nurse was bending over him, and though faintly, he felt himself able to speak with some coherence. His first question was to ask where he was.

The nurse, a motherly body of about forty, would have none of it.

“It’s rest you want, and sleep, not back-chat,” she said decisively. “Drink this and away back to dreamland.”

As he was supremely indifferent to where he was or what had happened to him, and even that minute lapse into consciousness had tired him unutterably, he swallowed the draught she held out to him, and sank immediately back into oblivion.

He spent the next few days in a curious alternation of semi-consciousness and inert sleep, and in his dreams, fantastic and grotesque, he was subjected to visitation by things weird and of extraordinary shapes. Sometimes these were human, more often they were grotesquely animal; at other times they were a terrifying combination of both. But in whatever shape they appeared, always they were distorted and menacing. Overshadowing all, and distractingly ubiquitous, was the ever-present consciousness of some vital purpose unfulfilled; something that clamoured unceasingly for consummation, an urge that spurred him to a lesser, but more personal degree, during the brief and intermittent periods of his awakening.

But as day succeeded day, and although that knowledge of unfulfilled purpose was ever present, his sleep became less troubled, and his waking moments clarified and grew longer until at last the blessed morning dawned when he awoke to full knowledge of his individuality and surroundings, and was able to look about him with an interest quickened by the novelty of a renewed captaincy of soul.

And as always his Scotch nurse was by his side, and when she saw that he smiled into her eyes, she smiled back gravely into his.

"You'll likely be better," she said.

"I'd likely be better still," said Roy uncertainly, "if I had some slight idea as to where I am and what's happened to me."

"You'll take your extract first," said Nurse Graham, "and then maybe I'll have a wee crack wi' ye."

She brought him a cup of beef tea, and having disposed of it, he felt better and stronger. Although still weak as a child, his brain was clear.

"And now, Nurse," he said, as she straightened his pillow, "please tell me all—all about myself."

"You were found lying on a rock 'way back in Northern Manitoba," said Nurse Graham. "There'd been a braw storm i' the night, and a dead tree had fallen across your heid."

"That was nice for me," remarked Roy appreciatively, but with a sharp pang of disappointment that his uncharted lake was not so positively unknown as he had thought.

"Who was it found me?" he enquired interestedly. "And how did I come to get here? And incidentally where *is* here?"

Nurse Graham's fine eyebrows rose in a gesture of surprise. "To think you don't know you're in the General Hospital at Winnipeg!" she exclaimed.

Roy half raised himself in bed, and then, the effort being too much for him, sank down once more amongst the pillows, a movement that aroused Nurse Graham to indignant protest.

"You'll lie prone," she cried, "or I'll leave you to puzzle things out for yourself."

"But *Winnipeg*!" exclaimed Roy. He made a rapid mental calculation. "That's—that's—close on eight hundred miles from where I was found."

She nodded in grave confirmation. "You were found by two Indians who were coming down to the Hudson's Bay Post from their trap lines," she said. "Owing to one of their squaws being taken sick, and having to be nursed well before they could leave her, they were over a month late. They brought you down in their canoe to Pickerel Landing, where you were put on the steamer that carried you to Cinnamon Creek. A doctor who examined you there diagnosed you as a hospital case, and there's no hospital there. However, one of the trappers who was coming down to Winnipeg offered to look after you in the train. An ambulance met you at this end—and here you are."

Roy was silent. As reconstructed by Nurse Graham, and fitting as it did the vague impression of a sudden and violent passing from sleep to stunned insensibility, his immediate history produced only a feeling of intense thankfulness for an escape which, considering the circumstances, bordered almost upon the miraculous; a gratitude that was lessened hardly at all by the sheer bad luck of his accident.

"How long have I been here?" he asked at length. The question was extremely relevant. So far as his father's position was concerned, time was the essence of the contract. Whatever help he could give must be provided before the issue of the bank's balance sheet in January. The fact that "freeze-up," which would render prospecting impossible, might be expected any time after the first week in October, still further limited his scope.

"Close on a month," replied Nurse Graham.

He stirred uneasily, his heart pounding apprehensively. A month, with a gold mine of incredible richness unstaked, free to be claimed as his own by any passing prospector who might happen upon it! He turned with pathetic eagerness to the nurse.

“Do you know if the Indians reported exactly where they found me?” he asked anxiously.

She nodded. “Lying on a rock on the bank of Grassy River not far from Elbow Lake,” she said.

Involuntarily his eyes lighted, and his blood coursed more freely through his veins. Due in all probability to one of those curious prejudices that are so incomprehensible to the white man, but to which the free Indians are so prone, his rescuers had deliberately given incorrect information. It might well be, he reflected, that, regarding the uncharted lake as their own domain—perhaps the only sheet of water as yet unencroached upon by prospectors, and as such an almost virgin trapping ground—they had been careful to conceal its existence. From what he had been able to learn of the Red Man, Roy’s only cause for wonder was that they had not left him, the one alien who shared their knowledge, to die where he lay. That even had they perceived evidence of gold-bearing quartz they would trouble to stake and register the claim he did not for a moment believe. For money in actual coin or bills, and in small quantities, the Indian is avid; potential wealth, in whatever quantity, means nothing to him at all.

So far so good. Up to now the delay was not serious. Neither would his father be worrying; he had expected to be some weeks without news. If he himself could get back to the lake straight away, stake his claim, and return immediately to Cinnamon Creek and register, the probabilities were that all would yet be well.

“What about my canoe and gear?” he asked the nurse, who shook her head doubtfully.

“I know nothing about them,” she said decidedly. “You came here in an ambulance from the Union Station, and all you had with you was what you were dressed in.”

“No money?” he enquired.

She shook her head again, this time more vigorously still.

He sighed dismally, reflecting that the Indians had not gone without payment for their day’s good turn. Thinking, probably, that his death was only a matter of time, they had, as it were, scooped the pool while the going was good. Fortunately, he had still a substantial sum standing to his credit at the Canadian Bank of Commerce at Cinnamon Creek; more than sufficient, at all events, to provide a fresh outfit.

His glance wandered reflectively about the ward, coming to rest eventually on the night table at his side, upon which were two pieces of white quartz. They were those he had chipped from the vein at the time of his discovery.

His eyes narrowed. Something not quite in order here.

He beckoned to Nurse Graham.

"Those pieces of quartz," he said, indicating the two specimens with a hand that had grown lamentably thin.

Nurse Graham eyed them dispassionately.

"What about 'em?" she enquired.

"There should be three pieces," he said. "There's one missing."

She nodded reflectively.

"That'll be your friend," she said. "Maybe he slippet a wee bit in his pocket."

Despite his weakness Roy heaved himself upright.

"My friend?" he repeated. "What friend? I've no friends in Winnipeg."

She put a determined arm about his shoulders and lowered him to his pillow.

"Dinna fash yerself," she said sternly. "Any more o' that and I'll fetch matron to ye."

She was on the point of turning away, but he called after her excitedly, and thinking, probably, it would be better for his state that he should be humoured, she turned reluctantly.

"What friend?" he demanded, as once more she stood over him. "I tell you I've no friends here. What's he like, anyway?"

"A sleek-haired man with big white teeth an' store clothes—an Englishman by the name of Walker."

"*Dacre!*" Dacre had been here! The nurse's description, even with its national economy of words, was clear-cut as a cameo. Roy was not in the least deceived by the name; Dacre would cover his tracks if at all possible.

The nurse saw how excited her news had made him, and, her mouth pursed severely, pressed a thermometer between his lips, and rested capable fingers on his wrist. Though seething inwardly with questions, the

obstruction of the instrument rendering speech impracticable, he was forced to remain quiescent. He had the sense to perceive, moreover, that Nurse Graham's patience was about worn threadbare. She wouldn't stand much more of it.

"Just answer me one or two questions, Nurse," he pleaded, "and I promise to be as quiet as a lamb." And then, seeing that she hesitated between indignation and expediency, pressed his point. "It's really important that I should understand," he urged desperately, "how he came to know that I was here, and what he said."

After holding the thermometer to the light and finding the result less distressing than she had feared, she yielded his point, though with reluctance.

"He said he'd seen the report of your accident and arrival here in Winnipeg in the *Free Press*," she explained. "That he is an old friend of your father's, and could he see you. On the strength of that we said he could, and he came two or three times."

He watched her narrowly. "Tell me, Nurse," he said at length, "while I was unconscious, was I delirious? What I mean is, did I talk?"

Nurse Graham moved her hand backward and forward from the wrists in dismissal of the obvious.

"Did you talk!" she protested. "Did you *rave*!" Momentarily her face grew stern. "And what's more," she added, "if you go on as you're doing now you'll rave again before you're many hours older."

"Just tell me this, and then I'll lie quiet as a sleeping child," he pleaded. "What was it I raved about?"

Her tone was indifferent. "Oh, gold, and lakes, and claims, and quartz. Something about a bobstick or a lobstick, or some such name. And about brine or swine, and acre or dacre. It was all of a jumble, but most of it was 'gold' and 'claim.' "

"And Mr.—Walker—was here when I was talking like that?" he asked tensely.

"Yes," she said. "Two or three times."

CHAPTER IX

In building upon immediate release from hospital, Roy was doomed to disappointment. As is not uncommon with cases of concussion, the promise held out by the clarity of brain and vigour of body that marked his first return to consciousness was not borne out by subsequent progress, a condition not improved by anxiety caused by his suspicion that Dacre had learnt considerably more from his ravings than had been possible in the case of the disinterested Nurse Graham.

For some weeks every slow and painful mounting of the ladder of recovery was followed automatically by sudden relapse. It is tribute to the natural hardiness of his constitution, however, that not one of these relapses reduced him to the condition in which he had been before the upward grade commenced. Thus, for every five steps mounted he slipped back four, and necessarily it took some considerable time before the top rung of recovery was reached.

It was well on towards the end of July before finally he was discharged. Before he left the hospital, and in order to hasten his immediate departure for Cinnamon Creek, he wired to his bankers for money with which to buy locally as much of his equipment as was practicable, provision which, in view of the fact that the train from Winnipeg ran only on two days of the week, subsequently he was thankful to have made.

Infuriating as was the delay, however, when later he came to look back he realised that it had meant all the difference between the success and failure of his future operations. And for this reason:

Returning down Portage Avenue from a shopping expedition to the big Eaton Stores, he ran full tilt into Tony Clarges.

Immaculate to the minute as ever, the Englishman was no longer fitted out in the stage property prospector's outfit that had so adorned him on the occasion of their meeting at Cinnamon Creek. This time his suit was of Savile Row, his linen from Duke Street, and his shoes from Bond Street. His manner, however, was as diffidently shy as ever.

"You're not exactly looking as if you'd just come back from your holidays," he remarked after they had exchanged greetings, and regarding Roy with some concern.

Roy told, then, of all that occurred since their last meeting; suppressing, however, all details of his discovery. Neither did he think it necessary to mention who had jumped his claim on Jackfish Lake.

"I say, what frightfully bad luck!" exclaimed Tony with genuine sympathy. . . . "Are you doing anything for the moment?" he went on to ask.

"Not immediately," said Roy; "not, in fact, until I catch the train back to Cinnamon Creek to-morrow morning."

He noted appreciatively that Tony's breeding would not permit him to enquire why, considering the loss of his interests in the North, he proposed returning to the frontier town, though naturally he must have been curious. Instead, he brightened visibly.

"Why not come back with me for a drop of lunch at the Fort Garry?" he said cordially. "In fact," he added, with unusual decision, "you've jolly well got to. If the Murrians knew I'd seen you without bringing you together, I should probably get fired."

Roy's heart missed a beat.

"The Murrians!" he said quickly. "You don't mean to say they're in Winnipeg?"

He was to discover later that once his shyness was overcome Tony Clarges's sense of humour was one of his most prominent characteristics.

"A stout man, Mr. Murrian!" the latter pronounced judicially, ignoring the question, "with an unusually fine judgment of character, and an unerring instinct for genius."

"Is he here?" repeated Roy.

"My employer and his daughter are at present guests of the Fort Garry Hotel," said Tony solemnly.

"I accept your invitation," Roy said promptly. Then, as they passed down Main Street in the direction of Broadway, in which splendid thoroughfare the hotel is situated: "But what's this employer stuff?" he enquired.

Tony braced his shoulders proudly.

"I'm no longer on the dole," he said. "On the contrary, I'm the original Main Guy in the get-on-or-get-out-division of the World's Workers."

"Which means . . .?" questioned Roy.

“That I came back from Cinnamon Creek in the capacity of private secretary,” pronounced Tony. “A most astounding piece of luck for me. And the old chap’s one of the best,” he added.

“And—er—Miss Murrian?” Roy said tentatively.

“Perfectly charming,” said Tony promptly and sincerely. There was so little reservation in the reply that quite unaccountably Roy was conscious of a curious sense of relief.

Nor when he reached the hotel was there any question about the sincerity of his welcome. The old man took three quick strides across the room, and seizing both Roy’s hands in his, wrung them with extraordinary vigour.

“Isn’t this just great?” he said enthusiastically. “You’re as welcome as a bride at a wedding breakfast.”

If not so exuberant, Nell’s greeting was equally cordial. There was a light in her eye as she put her hand into his, indeed, that caused Tony, who was far more observant than his diffident manner would seem to indicate, to glance at her curiously, and from her to Roy. And to those who could read the signs, what he saw written on the face of his brother Englishman was unmistakable.

She sat back quietly on the window-seat, regarding her father and Roy as they chatted. Beyond an occasional word where it seemed necessary she took but little part in the conversation. To Roy it seemed that she was a little quieter than when last he had seen her.

Her smile was just as ready, her vitality, if anything, had quickened during the weeks of their separation. But whereas before this had been effervescent, reaching out in impartial and impulsive fellowship to those about her, now, though just as vividly alive, it was as though her personality reacted in the direction of a spiritual reserve which lent her an added dignity.

As is the case with so many of the modern hotels in North America, the windows of the suite were of stained glass. Thrown into relief against this rich background, the soft clear colouring of her face, the vivid scarlet of her lips, and the earnest violet of her eyes created almost the allusion of some mediæval figure, symbolic of that spirit of womanliness without which there can be no beauty. And as from time to time their glances met her eyes rested upon his with a serenity that almost was a recognition. His heart went out to her then, and never afterwards was it in his own keeping.

The American’s concern at Roy’s appearance was obvious, and he made no bones about saying so.

“You look a pretty sick man,” he said gravely, after scrutinising Roy’s features with a frank concentration the latter found somewhat embarrassing. “What have you been doing to yourself?”

“I’ve just come away from a couple of months in hospital,” Roy replied; and hesitated. Ever since Tony had told him of the Americans’ presence in Winnipeg he had been debating with himself as to whether it would not be advisable to confide the full story of his disappointment, and subsequent miraculous find. Even while considering the question, however, he had wondered that the idea of doing so had ever occurred to him. To all appearances his position now would seem to call for added caution rather than unsolicited confidence. And yet, somehow, the bond which the events at Tom Long’s had created seemed to have become strengthened to a point where his trust in the sympathy and good faith of these new friends was absolute. He knew that this hard-bitten, hardheaded American business man would no more take advantage of whatever information he gathered than he himself would dream of—say—cheating at cards.

With no more foundation, then, than this sublimated intuition, his trust in them was entire and whole-hearted. Why then, since speech could do no harm, should he remain silent? At the worst his own interests would not be prejudiced; at the best he would obtain practical advice in a difficult situation.

And while these thoughts passed through his mind the American was regarding him as keenly as if able to read his thoughts. That in however modified a form this actually must have been the case was evidenced at last by his placing a reassuring hand on the younger man’s knee.

“Get it off your chest, son,” he said quietly. “I guess it won’t harm you any, and it will just tickle me to death to have your confidence. Whatever it is you want; sympathy, advice, or just cold cash, it goes with me.”

Roy smiled rather bitterly. “The request for cash may come later,” he said, “but just now what I need most is advice, and plenty of it.”

The American’s keen eyes lightened.

“Shoot!” he said laconically.

Whereupon Roy gave a categorical account of all that had transpired since their last meeting; of his having been forestalled on the original claim; of his discovery of the new and richer property; of his accident and subsequent rescue; of his sojourn in hospital; and lastly, of Dacre’s visit

when he himself was raving in delirium, and the consequent abstraction of the piece of high-grade quartz.

To all of this the American listened without comment, though from the keen attention with which he greeted it, and the smothered ejaculations which from time to time escaped him it was evident how closely he was concerned.

“Where did you say the claim was you came out from England to stake?” he demanded, when at last Roy came to a stop.

“Jackfish Lake,” said Roy.

“Have you got a map showing the exact location?” the other asked briskly.

Since the loss of his kit Roy had carried practically all he possessed on his person. He produced the map from his pocket, and spread it out on the table.

“That’s the spot,” he said, pointing with his pencil.

For a moment the American gazed at the point indicated without speaking. Then he turned to Nell, who from her perch on the window-seat had followed all that transpired with eager interest.

“Come here, Nellie,” he said, and when she had joined them at the table: “Just show Mr. Coniston here the exact location of the property Dacre wants me to buy,” he instructed.

Without any hesitation the girl pointed to the spot which Roy previously had indicated.

Although as he turned once more to the latter the American’s manner was quiet and restrained, obviously it was only with difficulty that he held himself in.

“Doesn’t that beat the band!” he exclaimed at last.

“I don’t quite follow,” said Roy. “And what exactly does it all mean?”

“Mean?” Expression and tone were both ironical. “Mean?” the American repeated. “It’s pretty damned easy to see what it means. It means that having jumped your claim, Dacre came and asked me to buy a half interest in it.”

Only half understanding, Roy gazed at him blankly for a moment. “Apart from the fact that he stole the claim, do you mean he had the gall to approach you to buy it—after what occurred in Tom Long’s?” he demanded.

Mr. Murrian laughed shortly. “No, my lad,” he said decisively. “Dacre’s not quite so crude as that. It’s only this minute I’ve learnt who it is I’m dealing with. Up to now the negotiations have been with the lawyers who first put it up to me.”

Roy went back to his seat, and crossing his legs comfortably, lighted a cigarette.

“Do you mind telling me the whole circumstances?” he asked quietly. “I’ve a reason for asking that I’ll explain later. . . . You’ll be interested,” he promised, after a pause.

Following the other’s example, the American took his seat and lighted a cigar.

“Sure,” he said. “A guy blew into my bedroom at the hotel in Cinnamon Creek, and introduced himself as Julius Mien, the lawyer. He said was I interested in a gold-mining proposition. I told him I was interested in anything that made a noise like real money. He pulled three pieces of quartz out of his pocket that showed so much free gold they made me blink. I told him that samples meant nothing in my young life.”

He paused, and with one sweeping movement shifted his cigar from one side of his mouth to the other.

“From that moment Mien started in to use the ring. He said he welcomed all an’ any kind of investigation, but that until after the report of the inspection was received his orders were that the name of his principal wasn’t to be disclosed.”

Roy began to see light. “That was pretty clever, anyway,” he murmured.

“Clever!” The American waved his hand in dispassionate appreciation of a master mind. “Say,” he said, “I always heard that Englishmen were slow, but when it comes to a crooked deal, believe me that guy Dacre’s so swift he meets himself coming back.”

“I’ll confirm that statement in a few moments,” observed Roy.

The American nodded. “I studied the proposition for a minute or two, looking for the catch, but for the life of me I couldn’t find it. For all I knew there might be every reason for secrecy; it often happens that a man’s so badly in debt for outfit and supplies that he keeps any claim he’s happened on under his hat for fear his creditors put in a garnishee. Then an idea happened along that sort of lightened the load of thought. It struck me that beyond the few hundred I’d have to pay the engineer for doing the job, an

inspection bound me to nothing. ‘When do I know who I’m buying this from?’ I asked Mien. ‘When you pay over the money,’ says he. ‘In the meanwhile the engineer’s got to give an undertakin’ not to disclose the name on the location post at the claim!’ ‘Will you swear an affidavit before my own lawyers that the sample you’ve just shown came from the same claim my engineers ’ll inspect?’ I asked him. He said he would. ‘Very well,’ says I, ‘I’m prepared to negotiate on condition I get a fifty-one per cent. interest. In other words, that I have control. If I’m dealing with people who’re too shy of publicity to come into the open I’ve got to protect myself, and that’s the only way I can do it.’ He agreed on the condition that besides the forty-nine per cent. interest retained by his principal, and apart from the purchase price of my holding, and which was to go towards development of the property, twenty thousand dollars in cash should be paid to his client on the date the agreement was signed.

“This being reasonable, I agreed. I sent a wire to Dave Peters in Montreal, and he came up right away and made the inspection. He reported that the claim was one of the richest properties he’d seen in years. As what Dave says goes with me, I agreed to meet the principal at Barney Moor’s office right here in Winnipeg to pay over a hundred and twenty thousand dollars; a hundred thousand for my holding, and twenty thousand in cash to the vendor.” He paused. “An’ the date that was to be done is to-day,” he added calmly; and paused, smiling grimly.

“And now I find,” he concluded, “that the guy I’ve been dealing with is the crook who separated me from fifty thousand dollars in cold cash a year or two ago for a claim not worth the powder to blow it to hell.”

“I can tell you something else about Dacre that might interest you,” said Roy quietly. He felt for his reading-glass, and going to the table held it over the map. “Do you see those marks?” he asked shortly.

The others clustered round; even Nell left her seat at the window to peer over Roy’s shoulder, and his heart beat faster for the contact.

“The map’s been traced,” said the American decisively, after minute inspection.

“He did this piece of work the same time he opened my father’s safe and stole five hundred thousand dollars in Bearer Bonds,” explained Roy. “That accounts for his quick trip from London to Cinnamon Creek and, as a direct consequence, Brine having staked my claim before I got there.”

The American drew his breath from between pursed lips in a long single-note whistle.

"You've certainly said something," he observed emphatically, looking at Roy steadily from eyes that were keen and clear. As he had weighed up his man at first sight, possibly this special scrutiny may have been for the purpose of confirming his original judgment. "I take it you're handing me the right dope?" he said at last, slowly.

Upon which Nell, who had returned to her old vantage point at the window, said gravely: "If I were Mr. Coniston, I'd refuse to answer that question."

Her father's leathern face flushed under the veneer with which the hot northern sun had marked it. Reproof from one whose intuition he held as second only to his own experience was bitter in exact ratio as to how far it was deserved. In this case he felt that he had laid himself open to what, in his code, was the unpardonable sin of ingratitude.

"I ask your pardon, Roy," he said frankly, for the first time using the Christian name. "I'll take that question back."

Flushing in his turn, Roy shot a glance of thanks towards the girl, one she returned with calm and unsmiling frankness.

"Thank you, sir," he said simply. "I'm neither misrepresenting nor withholding any part of the story. Dacre repaid twenty years of kindness and long-suffering on the part of my father with slackness, ingratitude, and robbery. Robbery to the point of ruin," he added.

The American looked up sharply. Roy noticed, too, the quick questioning in the eyes of the girl.

"Ruin?" repeated Mr. Murrian. "Do you mean that literally?"

"So literally," said Roy gravely, "that unless before Christmas I can stake my new find, and sell an interest in it for a substantial sum, my father's bank will close down for good."

There was no mistaking the sincerity of the statement. Without, for a moment, making any comment, the American paced the floor with slow and contemplative steps. He pulled up at last in front of Roy.

"Bad as that, is it?" he said, looking first at the boy, and then withdrawing his eyes to examine intently the ash of his half-smoked cigar.

"As bad as that," confirmed Roy.

The American threw his cigar truly and directly into the empty grate. There was something in the action that seemed to summarise the man's character. It was as though, having received the call to action, his first thought was to disregard inessentials; to brace himself for the fight.

"Have you any reason to think Dacre is after your second claim?" he asked quietly.

"None beyond the fact that he listened with considerable interest to my delirious ravings, and then stole the sample of high-grade," said Roy. "Of course there may be nothing in it, but I can't afford to take any chances."

With the faculty for immediate decision that is the sign-manual of the successful organiser, the American seated himself at a small writing-desk and scribbled a telegram, an action to which the fact of his employing a code-book gave special significance. When he had finished writing he handed the form to Tony Clarges.

"Have that sent off Western Union at once," he said.

CHAPTER X

"About this new find of yours," he resumed as the door closed behind Tony.

He picked up the two samples of high-grade and examined them closely through the reading-glass. He wetted his finger, and rubbed it over the side of one whereon the gold was not evident. It was apparent that the result satisfied him.

"How wide is the vein?" he asked.

Roy shook his head. "I couldn't tell you," he said. "I don't know how far it runs back from the lake even—it might peter out altogether for all I know. I'd intended to do more stripping in the morning, but my accident, of course, prevented me."

The American balanced the sample contemplatively in his hand. "It looks pretty good to me, all the same," he said slowly. Suddenly he looked up, keen and alert. "See here, son," he said briskly. "I owe you quite a bit—everything to me, in fact, that's worth a hoot—my daughter's life." There was genuine emotion in his rugged voice; the hand that held the quartz was not quite steady; the keen eyes showed a suggestion of moisture. "But that's all done with, and I guess you won't want to be reminded of it," he added.

"No, please!" urged Roy uncomfortably.

"That's all right, then. I guess we understand each other, anyway. I only want to say that if I thought you wouldn't start in throwing rocks if I made the suggestion, I'd say that any amount in dollars up to seven figures you wanted to save this here bank of your dad's is yours. Even then the obligation would still be on me."

The offer was made with a sincere and whole-hearted acknowledgment of irreparable debt. At that time in his career Roy had not gained experience sufficient to enable him to realise the fundamental simplicity of the best type of American. Afterwards, when he came to understand, though he lost none of his appreciation for the simple splendour of the offer, he was able to look back upon it with less surprise.

"Believe me, Mr. Murrian," he said, "although I thank you in all sincerity and gratitude, I'm sure my father wouldn't wish me to accept."

“That old British pride of his, I expect,” said the American grimly. “That kind of help being ruled out, then, we’ll come down to brass tacks and me buying an interest in the property—that is, if it’s as good as it looks. From what you tell me, and for the money to be of any use, I take it you’ve got to get it quick.”

“Before Christmas,” said Roy.

“That’s so, I guess,” the American confirmed. “If you beat it for the lake right now, I’d have to send an engineer to report after you’d come back and registered the claim, and it would be ‘freeze-up’ by the time he got there. Even then it would take a considerable time to clear the snow before starting in to strip the claim so’s to enable him to get a line on its value.”

The same thought having occurred to Roy, his face fell. For the life of him he couldn’t see a way out.

The brisk voice of the American broke in upon his thoughts.

“So the only thing to do,” he was saying, “is for me and Tony to come up with you right now. There ain’t many men on the North American continent knows more about the possibilities of a claim than me. With three of us at work I shall be able to get the hang of the situation pretty quick, so’s I can judge just what’ll be a fair offer for a share. Also, we shall be able to stake more ground. The Manitoba Mining Laws allow only three claims for each man. With three of us that’ll mean we can register nine claims.”

At this point a small voice broke in from the window-seat:

“Twelve,” it said.

Her father swung round on his heels, his face blank.

“What’s that?” he barked.

“Twelve,” repeated Nell. “You’ve forgotten my stake.”

A second, and the American’s face cleared. “Sure,” he agreed heartily. “I’d forgot that for a fee of three dollars you can give power of attorney to stake on your behalf.”

And the same small voice said: “Guess we’ll save that three dollars.”

“Save nothing!” exclaimed Mr. Murrian. “How do you mean, save it?”

“I’m coming with you,” said Nell.

With a smothered exclamation the American strode over to the diminutive figure curled up in the window-seat; shook a large, vibrating

forefinger beneath a small, but impertinent nose.

"You're *not*!" he shouted, and in the very volume was weakness self-confessed. "You'll NOT! You'll hit the freight right back to Knoxville, and bed down with your Aunt Maggie till the deal's all through. . . ."

She raised her eyes, and met Roy's glance of repressed amusement with the smile of complete confidence.

"I'm glad he isn't quiet," she said. "In all my life he's only refused me about three times, and each time he's been very quiet about it. When he shouts I know I've got him. He only makes a noise to drown his own weakness." She tilted her face upwards to her infuriated parent. "Which day do we start?" she asked.

Driven back on his defences, the American turned in wild appeal to Roy.

"Talk to her!" he said. "Tell her it isn't a woman's job. Mosquitoes, sleeping out, portages." He waved his hands. "Tell her it's impossible."

"It's impossible," said Roy dutifully, but without conviction, for his heart thumped wildly at the possibilities her presence on the trip engendered.

"Do you hear that?" her father demanded in spurious finality. "It's impossible! It's a pipe-dream! Can it! Put it right out of your mind!"

Nell smiled amicably: "Which day do we start?" she repeated.

For a moment her father regarded her more in anger than in sorrow. She met his glance with a friendly smile. For perhaps thirty seconds their eyes held. Then with a despairing gesture he gave way.

"If you've made up your mind," he said, "you'll come, and that's all there is to it. Buy yourself a big hat, a shirt, and a pair of breeches. And big boots, up to the knees. Boots with corks."

"You know you'll be all the better with me to look after you," his daughter said confidently. "And this afternoon Mr. Coniston can come and help choose my outfit." And perhaps the only gleam of comfort vouchsafed her father throughout that clash of arms was the fact that quite legitimately he was able to veto the suggestion.

"Can't be done," he said shortly. "Roy's coming with me to Barney Moore's."

Roy started. "Do you want me to be there to meet Dacre?" he asked.

“I want you to be there to meet Dacre,” confirmed the American. “There’s the surprise of his life waiting for that crook right there in Barney’s office.”

And so, when about three o’clock, the two presented themselves in the big office block on Portage Avenue, it proved.

Barney Moore was a good type of Canadian lawyer; aggressive, and with a practical working knowledge of mining laws and conditions. Though for the moment he made no comment, he raised his eyebrows when he saw that the American was not alone.

“Shake hands with Mr. Coniston, Barney,” said the latter as they were shown into his office. And then, explanatively: “I’ve brought him along because he’s interested—in Dacre.” There was that in his voice which suggested to the lawyer that his client was not altogether favourably impressed with the second party to the proposed contract.

“Who told you it was Dacre you’re dealing with?” he asked. “I thought it was to be kept quiet until you met here to sign up?”

“Nobody told me,” said the American. “I just—know.” He walked up to the desk; produced cheque book and fountain pen.

“You got the contract made out?” he asked shortly.

Moore touched a foolscap envelope at his side. “Right here,” he said. “All ready for signature.”

“What are your charges?” asked the American.

The lawyer made a deprecatory gesture. “Time enough for that, Mr. Murrian,” he said genially.

The American’s voice was curt and direct. “Not for me there isn’t,” he said. “I want to pay right now.”

Moore looked at him curiously. The average Canadian speculator is not, as a rule, in too great a hurry to part with real money for lawyer’s fees. In addition Barney had known his client long enough to realise that there was something in the wind he himself had not yet got on to.

“Fifty dollars,” he said.

Murrian scribbled a cheque, blotted it, handed it over.

“So whatever happens,” he said as he did so, “you won’t be prejudiced.”

Before the more than ever mystified lawyer had time to reply, his clerk came in to announce that Dacre and "another gentleman" had arrived.

"Who is the other gentleman?" asked the American, turning to the lawyer.

"You can search me," said Moore resignedly. "I thought you and Dacre's lawyer got everything fixed up, and that just the two of you were meeting here to sign up. Instead of that you bring"—he indicated Roy—"this here stranger, and talk about 'whatever happens,' after which Dacre blows in with *his* little bodyguard. So, as I've just said, you can search me." He shrugged his shoulders, and picking up the cheque, dropped it into a drawer by his side. "Well, anyway, I should worry," he concluded resignedly.

Dacre's entry—accompanied by no less a person than Jake Brine—was as smooth and debonair as though relations between himself and the American were, and had always been, of the most pleasant and straightforward description. It was as though he had neither occasion for qualm nor cause for regret concerning any previous transaction between them. Immaculate white teeth gleaming, with meticulously cultivated moustache and with one white hand outstretched in greeting, he advanced briskly into the room.

And then he saw Roy.

CHAPTER XI

Instinctively he must have realised the definite hostility of the forces ranged against him, and in consequence of Roy's presence, how much more formidable his task. It is tribute to his sheer effrontery that only momentarily did his sangfroid desert him. Nevertheless, he checked his stride, the genial smile became fixed and rigid, and for a fraction of time his glance wavered.

No doubt the presence of Jake Brine was additional embarrassment. Murrian could not imagine how the man came to be guilty of such error in tactics as to introduce to the signing of a business partnership the attempted murderer of the daughter of the other party to the contract. If the insult had not been so bitter it would have been humorous. At that time, however, he did not realise how fast under the thumb of the half-breed Dacre had become. And as a matter of fact the latter had insisted upon being present.

Nevertheless, both the American and Roy were conscious of a sneaking appreciation for the way in which the man adjusted his bearing to meet the situation. In the space of time occupied by half a step across the room he had pulled himself together; settled his line of conduct. So far as he was concerned, bygones were not so much bygones as wiped completely out of recollection.

"Afternoon, Moore!" he said to the lawyer. "Afternoon, Mr. Murrian! I hope I shall be able to hand you a straighter line of goods this time than I was deceived into putting over on our last deal." He paused, his eyes lighting with a simulation of surprise and pleasure as they rested upon Roy that was a masterpiece of impromptu histrionics. "And that the son of my old friend and colleague should be here to witness the signing of our deed of partnership is both pleasant and appropriate," he added heartily.

"And is it," enquired the American levelly, "equally pleasant and appropriate that you should bring your hired gunman with you for the same purpose?"

Dacre smiled a deprecatory smile.

"Jake is here by his own wish," he said with an assumption of dignity not wholly ineffective. "He asked to come knowing that you would be present. He wished to ask your pardon, humbly and sincerely, for what occurred in the restaurant at Cinnamon Creek."

It occurred to Roy that whatever flame of remorse was searing the bosom of the half-breed was hardly reflected in his demeanour. Having left the shelter of the door, he had sidled into the nearest corner, and from this point of vantage, his flat, loose mouth compressed into a sneer, was glaring truculently at the American.

"I was drunk," he growled. "Mad drunk. I was that full of home-brew I had the rats."

No reply of any description being vouchsafed to this, Dacre took the explanation further.

"I feel it better," he said, his highly cultivated voice losing much of its assumption of confidence, "to make this explanation and apology for the reason that Mr. Brine is associated with me as vendor of the property."

"What I should describe as a highly suitable partnership," remarked the American quietly.

Dacre glanced at him sharply.

"Not that it need make any difference to you," he said hastily, a reassurance to which the American displayed immediate reaction.

"No," he agreed, "it won't make any difference to me. For all I'm concerned you're at liberty to associate with any crook you like."

His tone was so definite and uncompromising that, watching him closely, Roy saw the suspicion on Dacre's face harden to apprehension.

"My dear chap," he said with a rather uneasy laugh, "I should always be careful on that score; if not for my own sake, at any rate for yours."

The American raised his eyebrows. "Why for my sake?" he demanded.

This time Dacre's face quite obviously paled.

"We're to be partners, aren't we?" he said aggressively.

For a long instant the eyes of the two men clashed. In that glance, keen, searching, and coldly censorious on the part of the American, ingratiating and fearful on the part of the other, might have been read the epitome of the character and mental outlook of each.

"We are *not*!" said the American at last.

The last remnant of colour faded from Dacre's already blanched face. He put out a hand gropingly, as if seeking support. From the corner where the half-breed cowed came a snarl as if from an angry wolf.

“Do you mean,” Dacre stammered, “that you’re not going to come through?”

Before Mr. Murrian could answer the quiet voice of the lawyer interposed.

“Mr. Murrian can hardly mean that, I think, after giving me such definite instructions as to the terms of the deed,” he said rather coldly.

The American turned slowly, regarding the lawyer dispassionately.

“This discussion is entirely between myself and Mr. Dacre,” he said. “Having fulfilled your instructions, and—forgive me—having received your fee for that service, your part in the matter is at an end. Incidentally, if you object to the use of your office I will cut short the interview by merely repeating my determination to withdraw finally and irrevocably from the suggested purchase of the controlling interest in the property under discussion, and take my leave.”

To Roy, as an entirely disinterested spectator, it was as though he was present at the progress of some tense drama that was fast working to its climax. In the grip of human emotion that possessed each character who walked the stage; in the heat of passion the situation had aroused; it seemed that there was something of such intense dramatic power as to give the scene a dynamic force that rendered it almost unreal. And yet he knew that never had there been sensation more definitely alive.

The lawyer bowed his head in acquiescence with the point of view expressed.

“Please continue, Mr. Murrian,” he said.

“I mean,” said the American, turning once more to Dacre, “that I will enter into no partnership or agreement of any kind with you or with anyone remotely connected with you.”

Dacre had backed to a chair, into which, feeling its position with his foot so that not for an instant would it be necessary to take his eyes from the American, he slowly lowered himself. With a short laugh of derision he took his case from his pocket, and selected and lighted a cigarette. Then, in a sudden gesture of irrepressible rage he closed the case with an upward sweep of his wrists, as though snapping his fingers in the face of his enemies.

“And I was told,” he said sardonically, “that Tom Murrian’s word was as good as his bond.”

“You were told the truth,” said the American. “My word is as good, and better, than my bond. I contracted to buy a controlling interest in a claim you led me to believe was yours.”

Dacre’s brows contracted viciously, and his eyes narrowed.

“Well?” he said.

“You lied. The claim was one you stole from Mr. Coniston. I’ll have no dealings with stolen property, nor with the thief who stole it.”

Although Roy’s presence must have acted as a warning to step warily, it was yet apparent that it was not yet impressed upon Dacre that his path towards easy money was irrevocably closed. It was not within his mentality to conceive that a hint of dishonour in the conduct of the other contracting party would lead a business man to withdraw a deal that seemed likely to put money into his own pocket. All was fish that came to Dacre’s net, and the fact that they had been caught by illicit means, or from preserved water, did not in the least detract from their sweetness.

It was characteristic, too, that his rage at that moment should have been directed more towards the one whom he himself had injured rather than towards the direct cause of his undoing. His veneer of polish was gone as he turned to Roy, replaced for the moment by the crude savagery of lust for gain.

“It’s you I’ve got to thank for this, you canting pup!” he shouted. “You think you’ve won out on the deal, but before you’re through I’ll make you wish you’d never been born. I’ll hound your father into bankruptcy as I’ll hound you into the gutter.”

The upbringing of the Public School does not bring the British boy into contact with the sheer crudity of the more elemental emotions. It is his code that the deeper his feelings the less should they be revealed. Whether these principles make for strength or weakness is irrelevant. What may be said with truth, however, is that unquestionably the training renders him supremely uncomfortable when brought into contact with rawness unrestrained.

Thus (and however human his relief that the man who had robbed and betrayed his father should suffer such decisive check) Roy’s chief feeling in relation to the visible result of that defeat was one of almost painful embarrassment. It was the American who relieved the situation.

“And before *you’re* through, my friend,” he said quietly, “I’m going to see you behind the bars.”

Throughout the more strenuous portions of the interview Roy had maintained a very close watch upon Jake Brine. He had good reason to be aware of the half-breed's insensate brutality, and he did not for a moment believe that alcohol had been the mainspring of the latter's savagery on the occasion of the scene in Tom Long's restaurant. Ever since his first entry into the room, then, he had watched with increasing apprehension the signs of cumulative ferocity in the half-breed's attitude. Though he was hopeful that the presence of the lawyer, and the formal environment of a business office would have the effect of checking any outbreak, he was not out to take any chances.

Nor, apparently, was Murrian, for Roy noticed a suspicious bulge in the coat pocket into which his hand was thrust with such apparent carelessness.

But so far as physical violence was concerned they had no need for worry. The 'breed was out to make trouble all right, but not at that particular moment. They were twelve storeys up; escape would be difficult. When Jake Brine was out for a killing he liked to choose his own setting. In addition, experience had taught him some small respect for Roy's direct-action methods.

He rose heavily to his feet, his face working convulsively. Like Dacre his rage seemed directed more actively towards Roy than against the American.

"Mebbe you're for the woods," he said. "They're lonely, them woods is, and the lakes run deep. All sorts of accidents happen in the North, and a guy that gets lost takes more'n a bit of finding."

There was hatred and menace indescribable in the words. Even with the self-possession his recently acquired experience had brought, Roy was conscious of a momentary coldness in the region of his waistline. He met the half-breed's gaze steadily, however. His lip curled.

"The only thing I have to fear," he said contemptuously, "is a shot in the back from a coward."

CHAPTER XII

Roy and the American returned to the Fort Garry Hotel to find that Nell had made her purchases; was, in fact, waiting to display herself in what she described as her "hick outfit."

Clad in khaki shirt, Bedford cord breeches, and knee-high boots, and in her favourite position against the richly-coloured background of the stained-glass window of the sitting-room, she looked, Roy thought, like some delicately limbed boy, yet essentially and inherently feminine.

"You sure do look the real honest-to-God prospector," remarked her father, regarding her proudly through huge horn-rimmed glasses.

"I feel more like the first turn at a vaudeville show," said Nell. "Guess I shan't feel at home till the newness has wilted some, and there's the real scent of the pines and wood-smoke about me."

Roy smiled his understanding. There is something in the rich clean scent of "the woods" that clings to stained and crumpled garments long years after they have become deposed by the broadcloth of the city; a scent which, encountered unexpectedly, germinates and makes green the ever-present yearning of which, once one has known that strange and brooding lake and rock and stunted forestland that is the North, one is for ever conscious, and which the passing of the years seems to make but more poignant.

Though but a cold and callous mistress, who yields no favours to reward the love of man but hardship and laborious days, once to have come beneath her sway is to love the very fierceness of her cruelty, and, maybe, to crawl supplicant to her beckoning, so that, cradled to her frozen bosom, one may find rest at last.

"The Indians have a proverb," remarked Roy, "which says: 'Once you have drunk of the Waters of the North, you will always come back.' "

"In some ways—but not many"—said Mr. Murrian, "the Indians show horse sense." He paused, his eyes far away and reminiscent. "Guess they're right there, though," he added.

It appeared that Tony Clarges had accompanied Nell on her shopping expedition. "The real British aristocrat, believe me," pronounced Nell; "wouldn't even discuss leather breeches with the sales-girl. Left it all to me."

Tony grinned. “After all,” he argued, “it’s you who’ll have to wear ’em.”

There was something cheery, Roy thought, in the entirely frank and unembarrassed camaraderie existing between Nell and this young Englishman. His shyness once overcome, she found his sense of humour delightful to explore. And although she continually poked fun at his ultra-British manners and outlook, it was all in the extremity of good humour, and always she took care to say nothing that might hurt his feelings. She found the more enjoyment in the exchanges in that more often than not Tony gave as good as, if not a shade better than, he took.

Roy was interested to observe, also, how absolutely Tony was in the American’s confidence, and how closely he had identified himself with the latter’s interests. As Nell said, “Once you got on to it that when Tony said ‘darnce’ he meant dance, and that when he spoke of ‘grarss’ or ‘glarss,’ he was referring to such everyday objects as grass and glass, he was almost human.”

The party bought as much of their equipment as was practicable there in Winnipeg; the canoes, engines, and the major portion of their provisions they were obliged to leave over until they should reach Cinnamon Creek, into which hustling metropolis they pulled about ten o’clock on the Thursday morning following.

It was not until they reached Hudson’s Bay Junction on the journey down, where there was time to scuttle across the track for coffee and pie at one of the “Eats Parlours” adjacent to the station, that Roy discovered that Jake Brine was on the same train. Roy himself was standing on the track outside the entrance to their coach when the half-breed lurched past on his way back to his own compartment, a bottle of bootlegger’s whisky displayed with undue prominence on his hip. Beyond a malignant scowl, however, he passed by without demonstration. Nevertheless, his appearance caused Roy some slight uneasiness.

“I don’t like it,” the American declared when Roy told him of the half-breed’s presence. “Of course it may be just coincidence, his boarding this particular train, but on the other hand—it may not.”

The presence of a stranger in a frontier town is a matter of greater moment to the inhabitants even than is a newcomer to an English country village. In the latter case the sole inspiration for gossip is the type of curiosity that is engendered by social stagnation; in the former the interest is quite frankly mercenary. There is the ever-present possibility that the stranger may have money.

From the moment of his arrival, therefore, is inaugurated an entirely spontaneous policy of espionage, and it is a particularly close watch he has to set upon his words and actions if his business is not to become a commonplace of the community. Nor are these hardy frontiersmen shy in claiming his acquaintance; or, contact once established, of intensive cross-examination concerning himself and all his works.

Each member of the party having had previous experience of this peculiarity, it was realised that to obtain knowledge of their plans it would be quite unnecessary for Dacre to resort to spies. Every visit paid to any store in the "city" would be the subject of general discussion in that universal rendezvous and social exchange, Tom Long's Restaurant, particularly as in their walks abroad they seemed to meet every single inhabitant of the place many times daily.

Thus the frequency with which they encountered the half-breed was in no way abnormal. It was the places where these meetings occurred which gave them to think.

The order for their equipment was divided between two of the local stores; the food and tobacco from one; canoes, engines and tools from the other. When they went to the first, Brine was hanging about outside. The afternoon they visited the hardware store, there he was again.

As Mr. Murrian paid the bill at the former the proprietor enquired where the goods were to be delivered. Roy was about to answer when he felt a gentle kick on his ankle. He checked himself and, considerably intrigued, waited for the American.

"Why, as to that," the latter drawled rather uncertainly, "I can't rightly say."

"Are you going all the way by canoe, or do you take the steamer to the Landing?" the storekeeper asked. "If so, you'll want the stuff delivered to the boat."

"I guess the goods won't get dry-rot by staying in your store a few days," observed the American carelessly. "We'll pick 'em up just when we're ready to pull out."

Three minutes after they had left the store, from the shelter of a convenient doorway they saw the half-breed enter.

"Get the move?" the American asked. "He wants to find out if we take the *Cree Indian* on Saturday, or if we go by canoe. If we go by boat, he's got us fixed; he needn't bother to keep track of us in the interval. If we move off

by canoe, he's got to keep in touch twenty-four hours a day in case we give him the slip."

"You think," enquired Tony in his quiet voice, "that Dacre really *did* get a hint of a new discovery from Roy's delirium?"

The American smiled grimly, and his voice was unusually grave. "Sure I do!" he said. "Roy's bug-house talk, *and* the samples of quartz, put him wise. Now that he thinks we've double-crossed him over the claim he stole from Mr. Coniston, he's out to make trouble. If he can strike the new discovery for himself, so much the better; if not—well, he's going to camp on our trail anyway." He paused, and a troubled look crept into his eyes. "That's why I hate the notion of Nell being with us," he added gravely.

"Then why let her come at all?" enquired Roy shortly, at which the American regarded him pityingly.

"Say, you give me a pain in the neck," he said. "What she puts over is that if there isn't any danger there's no reason to leave her at home. If on the other hand there *is* danger, she wouldn't let me go alone on a bet. So she's got me coming and going," he wound up, his voice a curious intermingling of irritation and admiration.

When Roy himself tackled Nell on the subject, her attitude confirmed her father's statement, and was all the more effective because he himself was reluctant to believe that the expedition ran any risk of molestation. This was the twentieth century, when, in a country as cultured and highly organised as Canada, such things simply don't happen.

In opposition to this belief, however, was the fact that the unwisdom of confiding their destination to a soul would render abortive the despatch of a search party in the event of their failure to return. As no one but themselves knew even of the existence of the place they were making for, the chance of finding them would be negatived from the start.

This was the spirit, then, in which he begged her to give up the idea of accompanying them. As she picked wild raspberries from the patch of unoccupied land that separated the main street from their "hotel," he approached Nell for the second time and begged her to give up the idea.

She was a slim, almost fragile figure in her blue linen frock and wide-brimmed hat, a creature of delicate beauty for whom greater men than the English undergraduate had laid siege with every weapon of wealth and position. Yet, even in his humility, and while his heart throbbed its protest that she was so far above his reach, deep down within him he seemed to be

aware in her of a note that responded to his own appeal. It was impalpable and undefinable, but the very thought set his heart to a wilder beating, and caused some hitherto unknown pulse to throb so that for a moment his breath came but haltingly, and he found difficulty in speaking. And when at last he gained grip upon himself he saw that she was smiling into his eyes, and that the smile was one of great understanding.

And then, quite suddenly, her eyes drooped, and a deeper flush travelled upwards from her throat to lose itself somewhere beneath the shadow of her hat. As cover for this initial shyness she held out an upturned hand, in the soft pink palm of which reposed a half-dozen rather wilted raspberries.

"Have a berry?" she invited.

The incongruity of the anti-climax struck them simultaneously. Both broke to laughter, his a silent tremor that shook his whole body, hers a delicious gurgling chuckle that was sheer delight. And then, her flush deepening, she flung the fruit away.

"Dad will be waiting for us down at Tom Long's, I guess," she remarked. "And I'm ready to eat that Chink out of house and home."

He fell in behind her until the beaten path between the raspberry patch reached the high board-walk of the street. As they passed side by side along the narrow hollow-sounding way:

"There was something you wanted to say to me?" she invited.

"Yes," he replied.

She shot a quick upward glance at him.

"Well, I'm right here," she said.

"It's just—just——" Now that he had to put his ultimatum into words he found it difficult to express. Once her mind was made up, he was by no means convinced that she would yield without a struggle not less relentless because conducted without heat. "It's just," he went on, "that your father and I think it better that you should not come to 'the woods' with us."

She half paused in her stride.

"What's it to do with you, anyway?" she enquired gently, and from this very quality he perceived that there was to be no quarter. Even without the imputation of impertinence the question would not have been an easy one to answer. As it was he was obliged to hedge, which, as the first move, placed him at a disadvantage from the very beginning.

“That’s not quite the way I should have put it,” he said quietly. “What I intended to convey was that your father has decided it is not advisable for you to come, and that, to be frank, I quite agree with him.”

“It’s a little late in the day to break the news, isn’t it?” she suggested.

“I’m afraid it is,” he admitted frankly, for if at all possible he wished to avoid giving a reason for the change in plan. “But you can easily slip up to Prince Albert from Hudson’s Bay Junction, and so get into the States without having to trundle all the way back to Winnipeg.”

She stopped dead so that the shudder which ran through her whole frame might the more effectively be perceived.

“Can you beat it?” she enquired of the world at large. “Two full-grown men want to turn me into a quitter just because there’s an odd chance that a half-breed might get a bit gay with his gun.” She regarded him coldly. “And one of the men who wants his own daughter to show a yellow streak they used to call ‘Dead-Shot Murrian’ ’way back in the Yukon. The other”—her eyes searched his contemplatively—“had no hesitation in facing the gun of the same ’breed he now wants me to run away from like a scared rabbit.” She paused, and when she spoke again her voice held a softer note. “And he wasn’t even armed,” she added.

Roy looked as uncomfortable as he felt; any allusion to his action in the restaurant had always this effect. In addition, Nell looked so perfectly lovely in her indignation that he found speech difficult. However, he managed a reply eventually.

“It isn’t a question of any yellow streak,” he said. “It’s simply that this venture of ours isn’t a woman’s job. Why,” he went on after a brisk cudgelling of his imagination, “the very first stage after we leave the boat is a sixteen-mile portage—mostly through muskeg.”

She regarded him pitifully.

“If you’d seen the places I’ve hiked over on the Tennessee mountains,” she remarked, “you’d put up a better argument than that. But, of course, that isn’t the real reason,” a statement so true that, without deliberate lying, he was unable to contradict it.

“I’ll get Mr. Murrian to speak to you,” he said weakly. Nell smiled.

“You don’t need to,” she said significantly. “Guess he’ll get to hear my viewpoint anyway.”

A few minutes later Roy followed her into Tom Long's. Here they found her father and Tony Clarges installed in one of the box-like compartments that lined one side of the long room. The American greeted them amiably, cocking an enquiring, not to say anxious, eye at Roy, a look to which the latter replied with a resigned shrug of his shoulders. Guided by the gesture, which by ill-chance she caught, Nell hurried her guns into action.

"What's the bright idea in commissioning Roy to break the news that you don't want me to come up to the woods?" she enquired coldly. Her father glancing rather helplessly at Roy for guidance, she broke in again: "I've listened to him already," she said severely. "It's *you* I'm waiting to hear from."

Then, swiftly, the American's attitude changed. His manner became suddenly decisive.

"Right!" he said shortly. "I'll say my piece right now. You're not coming." The words were so clear-cut and definite as apparently to leave no room for argument.

It may have been that her father's refusals of anything she wanted had been so infrequent as to teach her that when actually he put his foot down the decision was as well-founded as it was unalterable. Now, in the face of this latest ultimatum the two pairs of eyes, the steel-hardened grey of the father and the dew-drenched violet of the daughter, clashed in a long and silent duel. It was the woman who was first to speak.

"I guess you think it's too dangerous for a girl," she said.

"Guess again and you'll guess wrong," said her father. "I say you're not coming, and, in this case, what I say goes."

It is a tribute to her *savoir-faire* that in the presence of the others she accepted the decision without argument. If, momentarily, her lip quivered, at least her disappointment was not communicated to her voice, as for the remainder of the meal she chatted easily on indifferent and everyday topics.

And when, the meal finished, the quartette filed out of the screen-doors and on to the blazing side-walk, the first figure their eyes rested upon was that of Jake Brine. He was framed in the door of the drug-store opposite as though, having made a purchase, he was upon the point of leaving. A little way down the street, hanging aimlessly about, were two other figures whom Roy had no difficulty in recognising as Oulette and Le Fevre, the French half-breeds who had greeted him at the claim on Jackfish Lake, a circumstance he communicated at once to his companions.

The American, who since his ultimatum to Nell had been unusually silent, was quieter still for the remainder of the afternoon.

The entrance to the stairs leading to the bedrooms at the hotel was directly from the street, a door at the bottom communicating with the vestibule where newcomers booked their rooms; this door in turn having an entrance from the street.

Allowing Nell and Tony to precede him up the stairs, the American turned to Roy, who was immediately behind him, and motioned him to pass through into the vestibule, and himself followed close behind.

"Any message for me?" he demanded of the proprietor, a fat clean-jowled New Brunswicker who appeared to spend his life perched on the high stool behind the hotel register, chewing plug tobacco and gazing stonily into space.

His jaws not pausing in their rhythmic rotation, Jabez Perry stretched a long, rather podgy arm to the rack at his side, and produced a coarse cream envelope of the Western Union Telegraph Company, which with silent detachment he handed to the American.

Mr. Murrian took it, tore it open, scanned it hastily, smiled grimly but without comment, and put it in his pocket. When he turned to Roy, however, there was a gleam in his eyes that previously had not been there.

"I'm not quite sure in my mind that three of us are enough for the job," he said without preliminary.

"No?" said Roy enquiringly.

The American's eyes narrowed. "No," he said at last. "Somehow I've a hunch that the more there are of us the healthier the trip we'll have. I've a notion that Dacre means to start something. I double-crossed him pretty badly over the claim he swiped from your dad, and it's left him high and dry for funds. He's got to have money."

"What about the bonds he stole?" suggested Roy. "He'd find it pretty easy to raise money on them."

For a fleeting moment he thought he detected a gleam—was it of amusement?—behind the American's eyes. The impression was so transitory, however, and even presuming it ever had existed, was replaced so quickly by the former grave alertness, that he dismissed the idea almost before it had time to take root.

"You must remember," said the American, "that though those are bearer securities, that doesn't prevent them from being traced. Also, Dacre has no idea of what steps your father may be taking to recover them. It's all very well for Dacre to put up the bluff that in the event of his arrest he'll spill the beans about the bank's position. Whatever harm that might do your dad, Dacre himself would still be behind the bars. It seems to me that he'll have to wait quite a while before he can cash it on that little deal. If he negotiated through a fence he'd be bled of about fifty per cent. of their value and at that be laying himself open to blackmail."

His manner was so definite, he so obviously knew exactly what he was talking about, that Roy had no hesitation in accepting his view.

"He's out for big money, is Dacre," the American resumed, "and just for the moment there's such a blamed thin wall standin' in the way of his gettin' it that he's pretty near crazy. He can't raise money on the bonds, and he hasn't enough cash to develop the claim so he can start producing. And"—his voice was grimly ironical—"it's me that's the cause of the trouble. Everyone in the mining game on both sides of the border knows that Tom Murrian is out to buy mining properties, and that he buys only the best. So, of course, when I agreed to take over part of Dacre's interests, he had it in all the mining papers for a boost for what he had left. What'll jar him good and plenty now that I haven't come through is that everyone'll think it's a dud claim, and that'll put his stock 'way down among the half-portions. Besides, it holds him up; the time of year's against him. By the time he could persuade any worth-while man that Tom Murrian was bonehead enough to let a good paying proposition slide past him, and had arranged for engineers from Montreal and New York to survey the property, freeze-up would've come, which would mean holding up the whole business until May or June of next year. By that time probably he'd have to get in touch with fresh buyers."

He spoke, as it were, not so much to convince Roy as to put into sequence his own hitherto unclassified impressions. Having sorted them to his satisfaction, his expression cleared.

"You can take it from me," he said with finality, "that Dacre's got to have money. He's proved already that he's not particular what kind of a crook game he plays to get it. And that's what he's after right now; a property he can sell for what it'll fetch, just to get money enough to pay men to work on the one he swiped from your dad." He paused, his eyes hard: "And the only claim in sight that'll fill the bill is the one he heard you speiling about when you were delirious in hospital," he said definitely.

“But how does he know it isn’t staked already?” demanded Roy.

“First,” snapped the American, “because you were carried from the ‘woods’ unconscious; secondly, because you were unconscious all the time before you were taken from Cinnamon Creek and so unable to do any registration; and thirdly, because he’s had a scout outside the Registration Office since the minute we landed to see if you registered a claim—a big, fair feller named Oley Olsen, the only trapper in the district who sets his traps out of season an’ gets away with it. A crook from ’way back.”

The statement was made with such apparent surety of knowledge that Roy could not help but be impressed, as also he was by the care and thoroughness of the American’s reasoning. Somewhere at the back of his mind, too, was the conviction that even now the old-timer had not told all he knew.

“And you don’t think that if it came to a scrap we three would be able to cope with the opposition?” Roy suggested.

“I guess a bit of help wouldn’t come amiss.” With a gesture of confidence, almost of affection, the American laid his hands lightly on the younger man’s shoulder. “I’m not as young as I was,” he went on, “and if it came to a rough-house I might let you down. And you two haven’t the experience of the ‘woods’ to cope with a bunch of crooks who know every move on the board. It isn’t so much guts we want—you’ve all of that there is and then some—it’s wood and water craft and knowledge of the wild that’s goin’ to count.”

“What about asking Harry Pullen to come along?” suggested Roy. He had taken a fancy to the fair-haired teamster, and knew him to be reliable.

“On the other hand,” argued the American, “the more we have with us the more there’ll be to share up with if we have luck.”

“You can’t have it both ways,” observed Roy, but with a mental reservation to look after the Canadian’s interests in the event of the trip proving successful. “In any case I think we might hire him without necessarily giving him an interest.”

“That’s the idea,” agreed the American. “Hire him. Offer him seven dollars a day, and if you make the deal he’ll be a bright boy to have along with us.”

Accordingly Roy made his way to the little green-painted shack off the main street which the teamster shared with a wife and innumerable terrier dogs. Harry was at his midday meal when Roy appeared, and though clean

as a new pin was still in the faded blue overalls without which no one in Cinnamon Creek had ever seen him.

CHAPTER XIII

He greeted Roy heartily, presented him informally to his wife—a rosy, pleasant-faced woman—as "a friend from the Old Country" and waved his table-knife invitingly to a seat at the table.

"Moose-steak," he said. "Out of season, but not too bad, and deep apple pie an' ice cream."

Everything about his welcome was so simple and unaffectedly pleasant, the meal both looked and smelled so appetising, that Roy accepted the invitation gladly. He knew, too, that Harry would take it in the nature of a compliment if he did so. And though he would rather have broached the object of his call away from the presence of Mrs. Pullen, Harry was so curious on the subject, his cross-examination so keen, that at last Roy had no alternative. And though Harry looked grave, Roy was glad to observe that after a quick glance in his own direction Mrs. Pullen continued placidly with her meal.

"But who's to look after the hauling, with me 'way back in the woods?" Harry demanded. "An' feed the hosses an' all?"

"Who looks after them when you're on vacation?" enquired Roy.

"Ike Woods," admitted Harry.

"Then I suggest Ike Woods," said Roy.

"A wee holiday up North'll do you good," Mrs. Pullen remarked to her husband, though how it was possible for Harry to be better than he was at that moment she would have found it difficult to explain. "An' a holiday with seven dollars a day to put in your pocket'll do you more good still," she added sensibly.

Harry jerked a work-worn thumb in his wife's direction.

"She's the doctor," he said. "What she says goes with me. When'll we start?"

"Within the next few days," said Roy, and until after Mrs. Pullen had cleared the table and the two were left to their pipes, went into no further details. Then, however, he felt it only fair to put his cards on the table.

"I think it right to tell you," he said, "that the reason Mr. Murrian wants you to come with us is because he thinks there may be danger."

Harry sat up alertly.

"Danger?" he repeated. "What is your stunt, anyway, and what danger do you figger on?"

"We're going to locate some gold I found last time I was there," said Roy. "Dacre and Jake Brine have got wind of it, and we've an idea they'll follow."

"And jump the claim?" enquired Harry, cocking a wise eyebrow. He paused. "Say, you can't make me mad at the thought of havin' a crack at that 'breed," he went on calmly. "I've been layin' for that son of a gun ever since he started his gun play that night in Tom Long's. And before that. I've got a .303 rifle that fires a bullet that'd be tickled to death to find a good home in his carcase."

Roy got up. "I hope there won't be any need to use it," he said. He walked to the door, Harry Pullen following. "About starting," Roy said, as he was about to step out in to the little garden path. "Probably it'll be late Saturday night or in the small hours of Sunday morning. We're not keen on letting Brine know when, or how, we pull out. We're leaving him to think we're going down to Pickerel Landing on the *Cree Indian*. We've told Finley at the store to stand by to load up on Saturday afternoon, but haven't told him where for. We want to leave Brine and Company guessing."

Harry nodded comprehendingly.

"Sure," he said. "If you can make a good get-away so's he don't see you go, he mayn't ever catch sight of you till you're back."

The next few days the party left the hotel as little as possible, and then only to go across to Tom Long's, at unlikely hours, for meals. By this means they avoided Brine, whom they caught sight of but once, and of his partners not at all. Of Dacre himself they had caught no glimpse since leaving him in the lawyer's office in Winnipeg, though by no means was that to say he was not in the district.

Their only other outside essay was when they saw Nell off by train on the Friday evening. Since recognising her father's ultimatum as irrevocable she had been unusually quiet and subdued. Not sulky, or as though the decision rankled; it was more as if she was disappointed at missing a pleasant, and, possibly, exciting holiday.

However, she packed her trunks without demur at her father's bidding, and left the hotel in livelier spirits than she had shown since the decree of exile had been pronounced.

Departure of the Winnipeg train was a bi-weekly event at which practically the whole city attended. Here might be seen Sergeant Wells of the North-West Mounted, in the full splendour of scarlet jacket and Stetson hat, the steel burnishers on his shoulders shining like silver, as though he attended a full-dress parade. Here also was Malet, proprietor, editor, proof-reader, compositor, advertising canvasser, and circulation manager of the *Cinnamon Creek and North-West Frontier Star and Tribune*—a single-sheet contribution to the literature of the ages which made double-headlines of some such soul-stirring events as "Bob Graham returns to City after Two Months in Woods. Says Moose Plentiful at Sandy Lake," and in its society news would inform a gasping population, "Cookies at Mrs. Hector V. Stanton's Afternoon Social like Mother used to Make." Without the news garnered during his twice weekly adieu to the Winnipeg train his organ would have been shy of many of its brightest features. At this function would be found assembled every trapper and prospector who happened to be "in," their wives and families, the proprietors of the three hotels, the Hudson's Bay factor, and all the storekeepers.

As well attempt to chain the wind as propose to retain secrecy of one's departure from Cinnamon Creek.

Roy had wondered, with what amount of hope in his speculation may be guessed, if at the moment of departure, and by the warmth of her good-bye, Nell might not display some small discrimination in his favour; if by some fleeting look or extra pressure of the hand, some subtle intonation as she voiced a hope of their future meeting, she might not show some small response to the love in which he held her. For even in that inner sanctuary of the spirit which in man or maid is the last stronghold to capitulate, he could not but admit that he loved her. Indeed, far from denying his benison, he gloried in it, and with a sense of immeasurable achievement, and thanks to the high Gods, he knew that, whatever the future, there never would be for him any other woman but Nell Murrian.

But she gave him never a sign. As clad in a smart tweed suit warranted to resist the grit and grime even of a track as casually laid as the one from Cinnamon Creek to Winnipeg, she stood on the step of her coach, she was by far the coolest and least concerned of their small party. For all the occasion appeared to trouble her she might have been going away for the half-day instead of upon a journey of several thousand miles. To brace himself to meet the bitter disappointment he knew would overwhelm him once her train pulled out, Roy tried to tell himself that her indifference was

assumed, was merely a self-defensive armour against betrayal of her real feelings.

But even as he told himself this he knew that it was not true. Even for a woman her manner was too natural to be assumed.

The kiss she gave her father was equally casual, more like a good-night caress than as preliminary to indefinite separation. Her handshake with Harry Pullen, Tony, and himself was but a formal edition of her attitude towards her father. It expressed friendly feelings and good-fellowship; the pang of parting was not there at all.

And as the train pulled out of the station the American watched it disappear down the long straight perspective of rails until it was but a dot upon the horizon. His expression was one of bewilderment; in his eyes a look as if he had suffered a hurt as unexpected as it was undeserved. At last he turned and looked blankly from Roy to Tony and from Tony to Roy.

"Well, what do you know about that?" he exclaimed. "It's not like Nell to go off that way! Guess she's peeved at not coming with us."

"I expect that's it," said Roy.

He got little sleep that night, however, through wondering in what way he could have hurt her. To go off like that . . .

It was a silent trio that met for breakfast at Tom Long's the next morning; Mr. Murrian and Roy because they were preoccupied with Nell's coldness, Tony because he was not much given to promiscuous conversation anyway.

Towards the end of the meal, however, Mr. Murrian looked up.

"I'm giving it out to-day that we're going down to Pickerel Landing by the boat," he said. "Then, an hour before she starts, and while all the folk are at supper, we'll call round at the store, collect the gear, and slide off. It's pretty long odds we fail, but there's just the chance we'll give Jake Brine and his party the slip, and be able to make our get-away without his getting wise to it."

"How're we going to get all the stuff down to the river without them knowing?" enquired Tony, speaking for the first time.

"The engines are all in good running order, and clamped to the canoes already," explained the American. "Harry'll take his team round to the yard at the back of the store, load it up, and drive down to the river, where Mrs. Pullen'll be waiting to drive it back to the stables. We'll have launched the

canoes, shipped the cargo, and got away out of sight around the bend of the river before you can say 'knife.' In the meanwhile I'm hoping that Brine and Company will've booked their berths on the *Cree Indian*. It'll not be until the last minute they'll know we're not travelling by it. Then they'll have to get off to find out if we're still in the city. They won't be able to send any of their party on ahead to wait for us at Pickerel Landing, because for all they'll know we might not be pulling out for a week or more." He observed his two companions keenly from under shaggy brows. "How does that strike you?" he enquired at last.

"It looks pretty good to me," admitted Roy, in all sincerity.

And so, probably, it would have been had it not so happened that when Harry Pullen called at the store with his team, a half-breed boy, who had been playing about among the loose straw and packing-cases on the waste ground at the back, had, at first sight of the Canadian, concealed himself, with every appearance of haste, behind one of the crates, and from this point of vantage watched him load up and pull out towards a part of the river bank some considerable distance from the jetty to which the *Cree Indian* was moored.

Thus it was that hardly had the two canoes which held the adventurers disappeared around the bend of the river before a third, and larger one, that carried four passengers, put off from the Indian Reserve on the opposite bank of the river.

Travelling smoothly and well, Roy's party made a regular speed of about seven miles an hour. The engines of both canoes were on their best behaviour, and they travelled all through the night without a break.

After the heat of the day the evening was beautifully cool, and with a gentle breeze that dispelled the possibility of mosquitoes. Harry Pullen, knowing the river, steered the first canoe, with Tony Clarges prone among the baggage amidships as companion. The American guided the following craft, with Roy sitting smoking in the bows. Somehow or other no one seemed inclined for conversation.

At that part the Saskatchewan is a wide and beautiful river. Only at rare intervals along its banks was there any clearing in the scrub that grew to the water's edge. Occasionally, in places that rose above the surrounding country, the rough log cabin of some more than usually courageous homesteader might be perceived, and, as the day wore on to dusk, and from thence to moonlight, a glimmer from one or other of these homely habitations could be seen twinkling through the trees.

Every now and again they passed islands; uninhabited, and with stunted trees growing sheer down to the beach. And as the sun sank beneath the waste of waters, leaving the whole western sky one all-embracing curtain of gold and silver and saffron, other islands in the far background stood out in dark silhouette against the flame like some superbly executed stage setting.

Occasionally, from the near bank, came the cry of some restless bird, or, more often, the sudden splash of a rising fish, the sounds coming at such intervals as only to accentuate the prevailing stillness.

It was a night to live for; a night to dream. And Roy, pulling contemplatively at his pipe, dreamed and dreamed. And always his dreams took the same direction, were dominated by just one small figure who was yet large enough to cast a spell upon his whole future—Nell.

Whenever he concentrated his thoughts upon her, tried mentally wholly to envisage her, maddeningly she eluded him. Though actually he could have picked her at first glance from out a crowd a thousand strong, though she was photographed with irrevocable clarity upon the retina of his consciousness, when he came mentally to look upon her picture, it was to find it grown hazy and uncertain. To-night, the more the eyes of his soul attempted to focus her image, the more maddeningly it eluded him, until at last, his forehead damp with perspiration and his heart pounding beyond control, he was forced to abandon the effort.

His mind went back, then, to her manner when they had seen her off at the station. What was the cause of it? Why was she, usually warm-heartedly affectionate, so calmly casual; so indifferent, apparently, to the fact of parting? As he knew her the attitude was so unlike her.

He realised, too, from her father's silence and preoccupation, that he was equally at sea. The comradeship and understanding between himself and his daughter was so complete it was no wonder the girl's indifference hurt him.

Roy speculated as to when he would see her again; what her attitude would be when that meeting took place. Certainly he would not be able to undertake the journey to Tennessee until, in success or failure, the business of their present mission was disposed of. Neither his time nor his actions were his own. Whatever his own desires, his father's business claimed him irrevocably, and nothing must be allowed to stand in the way of its fulfilment. But assuming success? He allowed his imagination to take flight, for a moment, upon rose-coloured wings.

Much as they were tempted to do so, the party decided unanimously against landing on one of the islands to cook a meal. While to the best of their knowledge they had made their get-away unobserved, there was always the chance that they were mistaken, in which case, and if the fact of their departure reached Jake Brine in time, the half-breed would have two courses open to him. Either he could pack his party and their gear in the *Cree Indian* as far as Pickerel Landing and wait for the party to appear, or he could follow by canoe and pick up news of them from crafts he happened to meet *en route*.

It was to gain as great a start as possible, in case the second of these contingencies occurred, that the party determined against a halt. Their engines were new, and running with unusual speed and smoothness. If, unobserved and unreported, they could reach the stretch of Grassy River where was the Lobstick that was their guide, and turn into the stream that led to their destination, no trapper or prospector in the North would be able to track them.

Thus, then, they contented themselves for refreshment with biscuits and sliced cold bacon washed down with hot tea from thermos flasks.

A further matter for speculation was whether to disembark at Pickerel Landing, and tramp the sixteen-mile portage to Athapapuskow Lake, or, disdaining the saving of some sixty odd miles of water passage to the same point, continue round the long, narrow arm upon which the settlement was built.

Discussing the question with Harry Pullen, the American decided in favour of the latter course. At their present rate of progress they would reach the Landing about three in the afternoon, just about the time the *Cree Indian* would get there. Thus, in the event of the opposition having come by steamer, the probability was that if the first course was undertaken the two parties actually would meet; indeed, owing to all transport across the portage being provided from one source, probably the two parties would be required to negotiate the portage in company. Again, on account of the bulldog flies prohibiting the horses being worked by day, thus occasioning a delay of some hours before a start would be possible, actually time would be saved by continuing the journey by water.

And so, thus it was arranged.

They continued their pleasant but uneventful journey all through the night. Dawn came up in a sheet of rose and gold that tipped the woods with flame and made a pageant of the eastern sky. Morning came, and in the early

hours, away to their left rear the *Cree Indian* appeared from Cinnamon Creek, her grotesque stern-wheel creating a miniature maelstrom at her wake, high funnel belching clouds of odorous pine-log smoke. A little later it passed them. The event was slightly earlier than they had expected, but they knew that a halt to discharge cargo at the Hudson's Bay Post in Cumberland Lake would delay the bigger boat a full hour. Nevertheless the steamer would reach Pickerel Landing quite a little time in advance of themselves.

About nine they passed from the river into the broad stretch of Cumberland Lake, just in time to see the steamer pulling into the jetty that immediately faced the low, whitewashed residence of the factor. Later in the forenoon it caught and passed them again.

About three o'clock, directly to their left, appeared the cluster of low, log-built shacks that constituted the settlement of Pickerel Landing, with the *Cree Indian* busily discharging cargo at the jetty. To avoid observation they kept as close to the opposite shore as was practicable.

But as they reached a point almost immediately opposite the Landing, the American, scanning the landing-stage through a pair of field-glasses, stiffened suddenly in his seat. Then he leaned over and took the tiller from Roy, at the same time handing him the binoculars.

"Have a peek through these," he said quietly. Roy noticed that his face was pale beneath the covering tan.

Once focussed, the glasses showed up the shore with extraordinary minuteness. On the wooden jetty was a group which quite obviously consisted of the occupants of the nearby cabins. Excepting, that is, for the smaller figure, who, clad in khaki blouse and breeches, was in the act of being helped into a canoe.

His breath came more quickly, and his heart fell to pounding violently against his ribs.

"Is it?" demanded Mr. Murrian curtly.

Roy turned and regarded him, dazed and wide-eyed.

"It *can't* be!" he gasped.

But as, shaping a course so as to cut across their bows, the stronger, high-powered canoe grew nearer, and the small figure kneeling in its bows fell to waving a white but diminutive handkerchief, he saw that he was wrong.

It *was*—Nell!

CHAPTER XIV

Kneeling in the bow of the canoe, her back against the forward thwart, she looked more than ever like some smiling irrepressibly impudent boy. Even from some little distance away it was easy to perceive that all traces of disgruntlement had left her. Roy thought that never had he seen her quite so radiant.

Her canoe, steered by the hobbledehoy son of the bunk-house proprietor, drew alongside. Her father regarded her with a lowering scowl.

"Hello, dad!" said Nell, rising, preparatory to transshipment, to full kneeling position.

"Say, what d'ye think you're doing around here?" demanded the American sternly.

Nell's face fell, but not appreciably.

"I don't think we'll go into family matters before strangers," she said reprovingly. She indicated her grinning pilot with a gesture. "Look how red Charon here's gone." She gave Roy a friendly little nod, but after their glances met her eyes fell—it seemed to him rather hurriedly. "Besides, we don't want to make Roy uncomfortable," she added.

By this time "Charon" was busily transshipping her small baggage. Amidships Roy made space for its reception—prepared, too, a comfortable seat for his passenger. When all was ready she handed her pilot a five-dollar bill and stepped from one canoe to the other as expertly as a trapper.

"And that's that!" she said, sinking into her nest with a sigh of satisfaction. And then, over her shoulder to her father: "Let her go, skipper!"

Obediently, but with scowling face, the American acquiesced, the slight delay in getting the engine to function enabling Nell to exchange greetings with Tony Clarges and Harry Pullen. The latter, as hired conductor to the party, expressed no emotion at her sudden arrival; nor did Tony, beyond a friendly wave, indicate the slightest evidence of surprise.

The American said darkly, when once more they were under weigh: "You'll tell me right now what you're doing here!"

She turned on him a serious and reproachful face.

“Honest to goodness, you didn’t think you were going to leave me behind?” she enquired.

“I *sure did*!” said her father with considerable emphasis. “It was an order that you were to go right back to Aunt Maggie. I put you on the train for that purpose. What I want to know is, why you didn’t stay put?”

It appeared to Roy that never in her life before had her father addressed her so sternly.

“And leave you to take the trip with no one to—mend your socks!” said Nell.

“For Heaven’s sake,” shouted the American, “talk sense. It’s no use handin’ out a line of talk like that! You came here to mend no socks nor anything else. What you came for was because you’d ding-busted well made up your mind to, and that’s all there is to it.” Words failing him, he paused. Then, perhaps not so loudly, and with a hint of curiosity: “What I can’t figure is how you managed to flag the train, and then make the grade to get here before us?”

“I made love to the conductor,” Nell explained. “He promised the engineer should slow up at the first section-hut where there was a trolley car. He did, and I propelled myself back to Cinnamon Creek. I stayed the night at the hotel, and bribed the boss not to tell anyone I was there. I saw you pull out, from my window. Then I boarded the *Cree Indian*—and here we are!”

Annoyance at her defiance apart, it was apparent that the American was both proud of the ingenuity and enterprise displayed and, in his heart, delighted to have her with him, a pleasure the reassurance that her coolness at parting had been entirely assumed did nothing to modify. Thus, though he grumbled continuously until, rounding the arm that is the barrier between the river and Athapapuskow Lake, they crossed the broad stretch of water to one of the islands with which the lake is jewelled, and there cooked their evening meal, his usual good humour reasserted itself.

With the good sense that was one of her characteristics, Nell had bought a tent from the hotel proprietor in Cinnamon Creek, and thus there was no difficulty with her sleeping arrangements.

During the next few days, and though they kept a keen look-out, they observed no sign of being followed. Once or twice, at the portages, or when for one cause or another they stopped their engines, it was almost as though, however dimly, the faint throbbing of another engine was discernible, but this might easily have been prospectors crossing the lakes from one shore to

another. On one occasion, too, when they were camping for the night, Roy observed to pass them well out in the lake a paddling canoe that seemed to contain four figures, and which an hour or so later returned in the same direction from which it had come. Roy once, and the American again, had noticed this, and the occurrence was disturbing.

And all this time, and through all the small hardships and privations inseparable from life in the North, Nell was the ideal girl. So far from being surplus ballast, as in his grumblings when she rejoined them her father had described her, and apart even from her cheeriness, she was a distinct and definite asset to the party. She insisted on pulling her weight every time and all the time.

At the portages, those supreme tests of adaptability, temper, and fitness generally, she proved pure gold. Arrived at the first, which because it avoided not one but two distinct rapids was over half a mile in length, she demanded with a firmness that heeded no argument to bear her burden with the rest. Four times each way was the journey made—four miles in all—for two miles of which they were but as beasts of burden. And when at the finish, and with the canoes launched, loaded, and re-engined, they sat down to the inevitable bacon, potatoes and corn, her smile was as ready and as spontaneous as it had been before the first load was transshipped. An excellent test of character, and of that old-fashioned but inestimably valuable quality which is known, vulgarly but expressively, as “guts.”

But that she possessed unusually fine courage was demonstrated one day in a fashion which rendered the verdict unshakable. It was a day of portages; no fewer than four in the morning and three in the afternoon had been negotiated. Though, mercifully, the majority had been measurably short, the sheer labour of packing and unpacking was exhausting, almost, as the actual carrying.

At last, about four in the afternoon, came still another portage. At the first glance of the familiar yellow Fire Commission Notice on the river bank that denoted the point of landing, and the sight of waters swirling and tumbling away amid the rocks ahead, the American swore profoundly. Then, his lips compressed ominously, he stopped the engine and reached for the paddle, but to Roy’s surprise made no movement to turn in to the bank. It was an inexcusable course of action that followed, and one for which during the remainder of the trip the American never ceased to reproach himself. But as they told each other afterwards—knowing better than to say it to him—he was not so young as he was, and portaging is a back-aching business.

For a long moment his glance searched the rapid ahead. To his discerning but rather unpractised eye it appeared by no means so steep as others, and that there was a fairly wide passage between the rocks. He turned to Roy:

"Care to take a chance?" he demanded.

Not understanding in the least what was intended, Roy said "Sure."

Nell remained silent.

The next thing Roy was aware of was that Mr. Murrian was unshipping the engine. That accomplished, he started paddling ahead, but so gently as only to keep the bow of the canoe in the right direction. The current, momentarily increasing in strength, supplied the motive power.

A hail from the other canoe, from the bow of which Harry Pullen was gesticulating wildly with outflung arms, arrested Roy's attention. He was on the point of directing the American's notice to what quite obviously was a warning, when his thoughts were diverted suddenly elsewhere.

The skill with which the American guided them into the first, and comparatively wide channel, was masterly. Where lay the snag in this particular rapid, however, and one of which naturally he knew nothing, was that at the very brink of the fall two jagged rocks were concealed by but a few inches of water.

Unladen, and guided with more than average skill, even had contact been established it is possible that the sheer weight of water sweeping like an avalanche between the rocks might have carried them to safety. Even with rent sides, and because an empty canoe is unsinkable, they might have managed to hang on until smooth water was reached. But laden with stores as they were, a touch from either of those submerged rocks would have meant death to the three of them; they would have been pounded to pulp before ever they reached the bottom. And even had there been a vestige of life still remaining, never would they have reached smooth water.

The two rocks did not directly face each other; one was some ten or twelve feet nearer the descent than its fellow. With cold apprehension the American saw the first. Desperately, and by leaning so far forward and outward as almost to be prone across the thwarts, he fended off with his paddle, and the impetus carried the canoe directly towards the other and sharper rock, which only at that instant was perceivable. And Mr. Murrian, with the stump of a broken paddle impotently grasped, was facing the other way.

Neither he nor Roy had remembered that a spare paddle was in the bows, nor had they noticed, the moment the mad enterprise was decided upon that Nell had freed it from all surrounding encumbrance and placed it instantaneously ready to hand.

As the canoe swung helplessly about she, whose keen eyes had perceived the second and greater danger, was standing swaying precariously to the mad dance of waters, her paddle held electrically poised. And at the exact moment it caught the weed-slippery rock in the one crevice where it would hold, with every millimetre of muscular power the virile young body contained, and with the canoe sliding pitifully from under her feet at the strain, she fended. Sullenly checked, inch by inch the canoe swung around into the channel. With a dive forward that was near to bringing them to total shipwreck, Roy gave her the help to regain her balance without which she would have been cast overboard to her death.

Ten seconds later, waterlogged, they were in smooth water, and making for the bank. As Roy, the last, stepped out, the canoe sank from under him.

"Gosh!" said the American, and took Nell in his arms.

"Gosh!" said Nell, broke away from her father, and kissed Roy on the lips.

* * * * *

In the next three or four days they traversed exactly the same route as Roy had done previously until, on the morning of the fifth, they passed out of Sandy Lake into the stretch of Grassy River wherein was the Lobstick that was their guide.

"It's on the left, about three miles down," announced Roy, pointing to the map he had marked. He turned in his seat amidships and by the aid of the glasses scanned long and minutely the broad stretch of lake behind them. On all that smooth surface no sign of craft of any kind. With an indrawn breath of relief he turned once more to the American.

"Let her rip, sir," he said confidently. "We can't miss the Lobstick—it shows up for a mile or more. And I don't think there's any chance of Brine catching us now. Even if they've followed us we shall we well into the stream and out of sight before they can even get into the river."

"Good!" said the American, and switched on his engine—a means of progress they were not long destined to enjoy.

Actually they found that last three-miles stretch a tedious business, the shallow water and submerged rocks forcing them to ship their engine and use the paddles. Eventually, however, on rounding a bend in the river, there, at last, was the Lobstick standing sentinel, high above the surrounding green. Automatically all paddles were stilled; the American, bow-man in the leading canoe, raising his in grave salutation.

"Let's hope," said Nell, turning her head to face Roy, who was steersman, "that that is the finger-post to fortune."

Roy returned her glance with a long direct look into her eyes.

"I'm hoping it will be the finger-post to more than fortune," he said quietly—so quietly, indeed, that the American, busy once more with his paddle, was unable to overhear. Which may, or may not, have been Roy's intention.

For the first time since she rejoined them Nell held his glance fearlessly.

"What's money, anyway!" she said at last, and her face crimson, turned away.

The reply, so spontaneous, and yet so staggering, struck him as with a veritable typhoon of happiness. "What's money, anyway!" And with his now exact knowledge of her direct and uncompromising nature, he read in those three words an invitation the exact meaning of which he was almost afraid to interpret.

Glowing, vibrant with the surge of happiness that possessed him, he had to struggle with a temptation that was keener than any he had yet encountered. Flagellate himself for cocksure vanity as he might, he knew that whether they found gold or not, he had but to ask her love to have his own returned in full measure. Why not, he asked himself, clinch the bargain, here and now? He had but to lean forward and whisper a few ardent words into the ear turned so provocatively away from him to have given a benison he knew would last until his life's end.

And after all—why not? Her father had money—loads of it. The old man's love for his daughter was so all-embracing, so much a part of the air he breathed and of the food he ate, that there was no single fault of which she could be guilty but for which he would ransack the chambers of his heart to find forgiveness. Also, and more practically, he would find him—Roy—a job—and so that in no way should Nell suffer, a good job at that. If that should happen he would work his fingers flesh-bare to make good.

And then, suddenly, came reaction. If he was to wear his love he had first to win it. He would accept no charity that was offered only that his wife should know no material want. That she, for her part, would consent willingly to share any life so that they might be together he had absolute confidence. But, paradoxically, he felt that until he had made good he would not be worthy of the sacrifice.

The fact that the success of their present venture would be as stupendous a piece of luck as ever had happened in an industry the history of which is but an alias for the Goddess of Chance herself did not, he thought, affect the issue. He understood human nature sufficiently to realise that in any endeavour it is the result only that matters. He knew himself, and others, sufficiently well to understand, also, that the fact of success coming easily would diminish neither his satisfaction nor his self-respect.

And in the meanwhile, apart from his distaste for the idea of trading on the American's parental love, was the question of his own father. Failure would render marriage out of the question. Clear-cut and unmistakable, his duty then would be to take the first boat home to range himself alongside the banker to face, and if God willed, overcome, the difficulties with which that stout fighter was beset. He reflected grimly, also, that in view of what his father had confided as to his financial position, to be in any way effective any intervention vouchsafed by Providence would have to be both prompt and liberal.

While these thoughts engaged him he had been steering mechanically with his paddle, taking but little heed of the objects that glided so slowly by on either side. He was roused eventually by the occurrences of two simultaneous events.

One was a small hand that, guided from behind her back, rested once more for a moment with incredible lightness upon his knee, and a voice that whispered, apparently, to the river itself, so much was her head turned away from him, "I understand, old man."

The other was the raucous shout of the American: "Here's the Lobstick all right, but where in Sam Hill is the stream there's been all this talk about?"

CHAPTER XV

Roy laughed.

"Pole straight through the reeds," he said. "You'll find the passage all right."

A matter of some difficulty, as it proved. With the progress of summer the reeds had become both tougher and thicker, and progress was maintained by but a few inches at a time.

The moment came, however, when they seemed to be poling literally through the trees. Then gradually the reeds thinned out, rendering passage less difficult. Finally water, narrow but unencumbered, loomed ahead, and they were able to use their paddles. The two canoes were bow to stern now.

"For the love of Pete!" the American said, mopping the perspiration from his forehead with a large red handkerchief. "A man could pass along that stretch of river every day for donkey's years and have no notion of any stream being hereabouts."

Harry Pullen, in the bow of the other canoe, laughed shortly.

"There are prospectors in Cinnamon Creek who know the Grassy River like a kid knows its mother's lap," he said, "and there's not one as knows a thing about this." He glanced at Roy in mingled resignment and appreciation. "And now a guy from the Old Country comes along an' puts it all over us by showin' us the way," he said. Suddenly a fresh thought appeared to strike him, for, momentarily his face grew keen. "An' even you was only just in time, believe me."

"How's that?" enquired Roy, somewhat startled by the suggestion.

"In another few days they're establishing a seaplane survey from Cinnamon Creek to map the district an' report on forest fires," said Harry. "Slim Peters, who was flyin' in France durin' the war's been kep' on by the Provincial Government for the job. Guess it won't be long now before this stream and the lake beyond'll be recorded on the aerial photographs. Then, if there's time before freeze-up, there'll be a rush of prospectors hereabouts bigger'n you can shake a stick at."

The American allowed his hand to rest for a moment on Roy's shoulder.

“If what you say about the claim’s the right dope,” he said slowly, “you’re as lucky as a tramp at a free-for-all picnic.”

“I sure am,” agreed Roy fervently, with a side glance at Nell, who blushed.

Once the depth of water permitted, the engines were started, and thus their advance was considerably more rapid than had been Roy’s upon his previous visit.

Their progress was marked by only one incident. On turning a bend in the stream after about three-quarters of an hour’s travelling Roy, who was steering the leading canoe, avoided only with difficulty a craft proceeding in the opposite direction—a birchbark canoe paddled by two Indians, with a third and younger one in the bows.

The encounter was so unexpected, the approach of the Crees had been so silent, that for the moment all he could do was to stare dumbfoundedly into their faces, a glance they returned in none too friendly fashion.

Instantly the American shut off his engine. He was anxious to find out all he could concerning the lake, and a certain air of habit in the demeanour of the strangers informed him that they were well accustomed to the neighbourhood. He shouted a friendly greeting, holding his hand up as a sign for them to stop. The Indians, however, made no response. The eldest, a squat, flat-faced, middle-aged Cree, muttered some remark which, judging by the sympathetic growl that came from the other two, was not too complimentary, and with the stolid apathy of his kind swept aside from them with a couple of vigorous paddle-strokes and continued his journey.

“Those ginks don’t love us any too well for being here at all,” remarked the American, gazing after them doubtfully.

Nell looked up quickly.

“Do you blame them?” she asked. “From their viewpoint we’re just butting in on their private estate. Probably we’re the first white folk who’ve ever passed out of Grassy River. Now they know their secret’s going to be given away, and that probably there’ll be a rush of whites that’ll drive them from their own camping ground for good. . . . You can’t expect them to fall on our necks,” she concluded, after a pause.

“In that case,” said Roy, “why did they take me down to Cinnamon Creek when they found me lying unconscious? They must have known I’d be back again as soon as I was well enough to travel. Why not just leave me and let it go at that?”

"You can search *me*?" said the American, thoughtfully.

Nor was Harry Pullen, whose knowledge of the Indian, like Sam Weller's of London, was extensive and peculiar, able to throw much light on the question.

"Lookin' for an Indian's motive is like seekin' for fleas in a huskie," he remarked. "There's no difficulty in findin' one all right, but its dollars to doughnuts it ain't the one that's the cause of his trouble. So far as takin' you to Cinnamon Creek's concerned they might've figured on your peggin' out before recoverin' consciousness, and only wanted you out of the way. For all they knew you had friends not far off who, if you didn't show up, would be able to figure out pretty well the spot where you'd disappeared. They know that when there's a white man missin' there isn't a trapper or prospector within a hundred square miles who won't down tools an' help put the country through a fine tooth-comb until he's found."

Roy raised his eyebrows. "Is that really the case?" he asked.

Harry spat into the stream with considerable swiftness and vigour; it was one of his methods of imparting emphasis to a conversation.

"You bet your sweet life it is," he said decisively. "It's the law of the North. We'll rake the ashes of hell's fires before we'll give up the hunt. White or Red, alive or dead, the missing's *got* to be found."

Roy must have looked as dubious as he felt, for Harry eyed him sharply.

"You're thinkin' of the millions of square miles of forestland hereabouts that's never been trodden by man," he said quietly, "an' figgerin' that a guy wanderin' promiscuous an' at large is goin' to take some findin'. Such thoughts is natural, but erroneous. Within a week either way, everyone who'd been on the route taken by the missin' man's questioned, an' then the lake shore's examined for landin' places. Ten to one they find his canoe. Once they get to where he's landed its easy as kiss-me-hand trackin' through the wood. Anyway, easy or not, sooner or later find him they will. In our case, of course, its different; I don't think we'd ever be found; we don't leave any tracks. Even knowin' this, the Indians who found you didn't want a landin' party explorin' inland from any point too near the openin' of that stream. Nor do those we've just passed," he concluded decisively.

"The seaplane patrol'll open the country out, anyway," remarked Mr. Murrian.

Harry nodded.

"Sure," he said. "And somehow I'm not sorry that we shan't have the full responsibility," a sentiment with which the others were in whole-hearted agreement.

"Then presuming that Jake Brine and party meet that canoe and question them," enquired Tony, who hitherto had spoken as little as was his custom, "you don't think the Indians will tell them where we are?"

Harry shook his head.

"It's hard to say," he said undecidedly. "So far as the Indians are concerned, now that we know the secret it's the same as if all the whites in the Dominion know it. If Jake Brine offered 'em a big wad of money they wouldn't tell him—that's their nature. Big money frightens 'em. If he puts up some fool amount like seven dollars fifty or nine dollars fifty-five they'll maybe grab it with both hands and open their mouths as wide as he asks 'em."

"Then let's hope they don't meet," said the American, "and in the meantime don't let's worry about it."

He started the engine, and a minute later both canoes were on their way. Half an hour later they passed out of the stream into the lake.

Throughout the trip this was the moment to which Roy had looked forward with such a mixture of hope and fear. Hope, because he knew his discovery would then be within measurable distance of realisation; fear, of being unable to locate the exact spot in that monotonous shore-line where previously he had landed so casually.

"Guess you'd better take over the tiller," said the American, and though his voice was quiet and restrained there was in it a note of excitement that was unmistakable.

So far as Roy could remember they had passed from the stream into the lake at just about the same point as he had done on his initial trip. He remembered, too, how, tired with paddling, he had made for the nearest point of landing—half-right diagonally across the lake. He recollected how, within easy distance of the shore, he had paddled a couple of hundred yards or so parallel with the beach in order to find a landing-place suitable for his purpose.

Now, anxious not to overshoot his objective, he steered his course at an angle slightly more acute than was strictly necessary. Then, skirting the shore, he narrowly scanned the bank. The sand gleamed white in the sunshine, the background of trees a solid wall behind them, leaving but a

narrow ribbon of shingle between woods and water. And the point at which he had landed, he remembered, was wide enough almost to merit the name of beach.

At last, at a point where his hopes had lessened almost to vanishing point, the shore seemed suddenly to stretch further into the lake, while the woods behind, retaining still an almost military precision of front, left a wider margin of shingle.

It needed only a further fifty yards of paddling to convince him that his quest was ended. With an unconsciously dramatic gesture he swung his tiller over, and as soon as the canoe was at right angles to its previous course, having shut off the engine, he commenced to unclamp it from the stern.

"Right here?" the American asked quietly.

"Right here, sir," said Roy confidently, and allowed the canoe to ground gently on the yielding sand.

Protected by his high boots the American clambered ashore. So that Nell could disembark without fear of a wetting, he pulled the canoe still further up the shingle. A moment later Roy joined them on the beach.

The American regarded him critically.

"Sure enough of your ground to beach her entirely?" he asked. "Or do you first want to make sure?"

"Pull her in," instructed Roy confidently, and together they hauled the canoe high and dry. Within ten minutes the other craft, which had followed them closely, was lying alongside their own.

Then, and only then, did Roy commence to walk up the beach towards one of the larger trees. Arrived within ten feet of this, he paused to indicate a blackened ring of moss, at the base of which the roots sloped upwards to the bole.

"That was my camp fire," he said.

"It sure looks like it," the American admitted.

Without a moment's hesitation, and followed closely by his companions, Roy struck directly inland through the trees. Twenty paces sufficed before he stopped to point out a flat moss-covered rock, across which was stretched a fallen tree. A patch of dead moss some nine inches square showed brown against the green with which the rock was covered.

Roy stooped and brushed it aside.

In the pale marble-like surface thus exposed glittered pin-points of glinting yellow.

“There you are,” he said quietly.

CHAPTER XVI

There was a tense dynamic pause, each one of them staring fixedly at that fateful patch of quartz.

In the midst of this silence Roy felt a very small hand steal into his own, and after a faint pressure, withdraw. With a quick sideways glance he saw that though her eyes were fixed upon the point of common interest, her face was wrapt with thoughts that were coloured with a gold which, though the most precious influence in life, is yet unnegotiable at the banker's grille.

It was her father who broke the silence, and after his usual formula.

"Well, what *do* you know about that?" he enquired of the world at large, and went down on his knees to examine the find.

He had brought with him from the canoe the tiny pick, without which your true prospector is never seen abroad, and with it the iron pestle and mortar and shallow aluminium "pan" which are its complement. He chipped a couple of good-sized pieces from the rock, ground them in the mortar, poured the resultant powder into the pan, and making his way to the beach, proceeded carefully and methodically to "wash" the sample.

As he held the pan a quarter of an inch below the surface of the lake so as to allow whatever movement of water there was to carry off the topmost deposit, no hand could have been more steady; nor, as withdrawing the pan at last he swished what water remained against the sides in such fashion that it carried off with it, as by a tide, the lighter residue of stone. This left exposed against the pan the heavier gold, which, when he gathered it together, was in quantity sufficient to fill a small salt-spoon.

He regarded it for a moment with eyes wide open, and all but incredulous. At last he turned slowly to Harry Pullen, whose face was pale and awe-stricken.

"Did *you* ever see anything like that?" he demanded.

Harry nodded. "Yes," he said slowly at last, "in the Geological Specimen Room at the University of Manitoba. But not in real life." He spat, with calculated emphasis, into the lake.

"If that vein holds," said the American, "holds for only twenty yards, there'll be enough gold to build a house with the bricks."

“And in the meanwhile,” remarked Tony Clarges quietly, “what about having a meal?”

The American turned and, rather boisterously, clapped him on the back.

“Go to it, son!” he said. “You cook the meal while I out the location posts. We can fix them this afternoon. Then we’ll get busy stripping, and see what comes of the vein.” He turned to Roy. “Soon as we find that out I’ll tell you the price I’m prepared to pay for my share. Then you can cable home.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Roy, and turned and walked off by himself. Nell, after an instinctive movement to accompany him, which was as instinctively checked, followed him with her eyes until, his hands behind him, he paused, gazing as though unseeingly towards the further bank of the lake.

He was glad to be alone; to collect his thoughts into something like sequence. At that moment he was suffering from the reaction of discovery, a period of calm which was so opposed to his real exultation that, but for the eyes he knew were watching him, he would have sung—flung his arms abroad in a wild and delirious dance.

Paramount was the inextinguishable comfort of the thought that he had made good. Doubting him, his father had yet been forced by circumstances to despatch him upon a more than doubtful quest. And now, in spite of the forestalling of his first effort, of bodily calamity, and outside intrigue, he had made good.

As he cast his mind back over the period since he left England he recognised with a sense of humility how miraculously, in spite of original catastrophe, good luck had worked for him. His first meeting with the Murrians had been a piece of colossal good fortune; the breakdown of his engine on the return journey from Jackfish Lake a gift from Providence. And yet despite all this was the conviction that, tested, he himself had proved not unworthy of his gifts. Looking back, he recognised that but for the fact of the half-breed having flourished his revolver in the face of Nell Murrian, her father would have had no opportunity of stepping into the breach the loss of time caused by his accident had occasioned. Nevertheless, and even apart from this fortuitous circumstance, he felt honestly, and not altogether without the inward glow which is the reward of service, that at least he had done his job.

Wonderful and incredible as all this was, and resembling more the fifth act of an old-time Drury Lane melodrama than real life, it was through him that the family fortune was saved. Unless something wildly unforeseen

occurred, within a week he would be in a position to cable funds sufficient to put his father beyond the reach of financial worry for all time.

He turned slowly and looked back to the three figures grouped about the fire, which by this time was crackling merrily. Tony was poking the contents of the frying-pan with a freshly whittled stick; Harry Pullen, judging from the regular rhythm of axe strokes that came from within the skirt of the woods, was helping the American to cut location stakes. Nell, quietly and without movement, her hands loosely clasped in front of her, was watching *him*—Roy.

Thus their eyes met.

He called:

"If you'll bring the tackle," he said, "we might be able to get a few trout."

She nodded, and went to the heap of baggage that, awaiting the erection of the camp, was piled in an orderly heap; picked out a couple of lines, and joined him at the water's edge. They pushed the smaller canoe into the water, and he paddled a hundred yards or so out into the lake. She, lying back amidships, faced him.

Her face was unusually flushed, not so much, perhaps, by the hot sun of the North as from a less tangible but more spiritual glow that seemed to warm and quicken her very being, its radiance reflected in her eyes.

He busied himself with lines. When they were thrown out he turned to her.

"Nell," he said gently, and with entire directness, "will you marry me?"

She looked at him, her eyes full of laughter that yet was very tender.

"Don't you know I will?" she said.

Roy threw back his head and laughed for the sheer joy of her. He looked towards the shore. Tony was tending his cooking, his back towards the lake. Her father and Harry Pullen, well covered by the trees, were still busy about their work.

He slid from the thwart on to his knees, reached forward and took both her hands in his.

"You're going to rock the boat something awful," murmured Nell in a very small voice.

"Then it's lucky we're both good swimmers," he said. . . .

"What I like about Tony," said Nell at last, "is that he's such a perfect little gentleman. Twice he's walked sideways back to the grub-box like a crab, rather than cast his eyes over here. He simply can't move for us." She glanced about the wide expanse of lake, smooth as a table in the afternoon heat, and without even a water-bird to break the glassy solitude. "We *are* sort of occupying all the view, aren't we?" she asked.

"You've occupied all *my* view since first I set eyes on you," said Roy firmly.

He levered himself back to the thwart and reached out for the paddle.

"What about our little old trout?" enquired Nell.

Roy laughed, and seized each line, both of which for some time had been swirling agitatedly in a succession of swift dives and rushes. He pulled them in to find a good-sized fish hooked neatly upon each. Without a word, and with intense care, he detached them, and when he turned to Nell a speckled trout lay writhing and gasping in either hand.

"I don't think I feel like killing anything just now, Nell," he said dubiously.

She smiled tremulously.

"Neither do I," she said simply.

Roy handed her one of the fish.

"Put yours back," he said, "and I'll do the same with Herbert here. We'll consign them to the lake as hostage to the future—and your father," he added rather grimly.

Together they dipped their hands in the lake, the trout struggling frantically. Then Nell said "Go!" and, both relaxing their grasp, the fish dived wildly to freedom.

"You don't need to lose any sleep about father," remarked Nell calmly as they paddled gently back to the beach.

Roy's arm remained poised in the middle of a stroke.

"What's that?" he asked sharply.

"He was saying only last night that you were about the slowest thing that ever came down the pike," said Nell. "Said he didn't hold it against you; he

guessed no Britisher was ever fined for speeding, but that it'd make things more comfortable all round when you got down to brass tacks."

He regarded her in amazement. With the ostrich-like viewpoint of the lover he had had no knowledge but that his love for Nell was inviolably secret to everyone but himself. That it had been discussed openly between Nell and her father was slightly disconcerting. And to be accused of slowness!

"It hardly occurred to me that he would welcome the attentions of a . . . pauper," he said quietly.

She leaned forward and took his hand, her eyes filled with sudden tears.

"Guess father knew why you didn't speak just as well as I did," she said softly. "Not that it would have mattered a hoot. What he said was only to poke fun at *me*."

"Then you don't think he'll object?" exclaimed Roy hopefully.

"Don't be silly!" said Nell.

They got back to the beach to find the dinner waiting, the three others lined up expectantly beside the fire.

"Welcome to our city," said the American. "I'll do the stern parent stunt after I'm fed. I never turn down suitors on an—before a meal. My doctor says it's bad for the digestion. Or was it complexion? I forget."

"If I'd anything on my hip, Miss Nell," said Harry, "I'd drink your happiness."

The American grinned.

"Guess you're no old-timer to come out on a party that had all the earmarks of a betrothal trip without being heeled," he remarked scornfully.

"There wasn't no bride-to-be when we set out," Harry reminded him.

"Nor more there was," admitted the American. "Still, it's always as well to have a shot in the locker, just in case."

He fumbled in his pack for a moment, and produced an imperial quart of whisky, in which Nell and Roy were toasted with heartiness and sincerity.

"And now," said the American when the ceremony was completed and the meal cleared, "we'll get busy pegging out the claims. Three each, we're entitled to by the Provincial Mining Laws; twelve in all. That'll make a fair-sized property. If I'm not mistaken, the rock itself, apart from the quartz,

will run up to twelve or fifteen dollars a ton. Worth milling, anyway. You, Harry, and you, Tony, get busy marking out the claims and cutting more location and direction posts. Roy and I'll strip all we can from the vein. I'm all for figuring out how wide she runs, and where to."

By the time the light was beginning to fail a considerable amount of work had been accomplished. Four of the claims had been adequately staked, and posts cut for the remainder.

From the original vein the American and Roy had cleared a good thirty yards length of moss and earth, exposing the bare rock and quartz. They found, to the delight of the American, that the latter, which ran almost in a straight line from the beach, widened in places to a width of five or six feet. True, it narrowed again towards the limit of the stripping to only six or eight inches, but there was no reason why it should not re-widen.

In any case, and presuming a normal depth, the claim must of necessity prove of almost illimitable wealth, though until proper pick-and-shovel work could be employed, and perhaps blasting, it was difficult to gain more than an approximate idea of its value.

As they were following the cleared strip on their way back to the beach, the American, his eyes fixed steadily on the vein, paused in his stride.

"To-morrow," he said, "while the others are finishing their staking, we'll strip the other way—in the direction of the lake. If what I think's the case turns out correct I wouldn't call Henry Ford my uncle."

"Why, what do you mean?" enquired Roy.

"I've a notion that this here is only the tail end of a vein that runs right under the lake. Of course, until we can sink a shaft we can only get a general idea, but I shouldn't be surprised if I'm proved right." He paused. "Anyways," he said definitely, "I've seen enough right here this afternoon to know we've got a lallapalusa of a property. After we've had some eats we'll get right down to figures." A hail in Nell's clear young voice informing them that the "eats" were spoiling for attention forbade further discussion for the moment.

It was as jolly a meal as could well be imagined. As might be expected, everyone was in the highest spirits. Even Tony Clarges came out of his shell, and responded to the universal clamour that he should sing. And if his rendering of the Eton Boating Song was inclined to be somewhat throaty, at least it lacked nothing in sincerity.

And then, when each had contributed his quota to the common fund of entertainment, the American broached the question that Roy was most anxious to have settled. Now that he had gained, as it were at a single stroke, the woman of his heart and his father's freedom, his one desire was to cable the money that would relieve that gallant fighter from the strain of cumulative anxiety.

"What I don't want," the American stated, "is anyone buttin' in on us. This claim's not going to be put on the market. I've all the money that'll be wanted for development, so we can afford to keep it in the family."

Roy nodded acquiescence. The suggestion came as a considerable relief. The idea of a strange, and possibly antagonistic element having any say in the administration of what, even by now, was so near to him, had been the one cloud in a sky that otherwise loomed wholly fair.

"I figure the proposition this way," the American resumed. "It'll be best I think, to divide the interest into sixty-fourths. Roy here, as owner and original discoverer, takes half; that is thirty-two shares. Nell and I, as providing the working capital, take ten shares each, twenty in all. That leaves twelve still to be disposed of. Of those Tony takes eight as manager of the mine—only, of course, if the proposition appeals to him—and we give the remaining four to Harry because he's helped us, and because he's all kinds of a good scout." He paused, glancing from one to the other of the faces about the fire. "How does that strike you?" he demanded.

There was silence for a moment, none of them quite knowing how to put their thoughts into words. Then, as it seemed up to him, Roy spoke.

"For myself, sir," he said quietly, "I think your offer is fairness and generosity itself, and I agree most gratefully."

Nell said nothing, but moved a shade nearer to Roy, who collected and retained her hand.

Tony Clarges said:

"I don't know the first thing about running a mine, but if you think I'm the one to take charge, I'll put all I know into the job. If I let you down it won't be for the want of trying. As for the shares, I've no claim on them—you're paying my salary, and that's all, and more, than I've any right to expect. Thank you very much indeed, sir."

Harry Pullen said in a kind of ecstasy:

“Seven-dollars-fifty a day for a joy trip, an’ a six per cent. interest in a mine that’s goin’ to make the Bank of Montreal look like a small-town Thrift Club! Ber-lieve me, Mr. Murrian, I’m all there with both feet and me ears back!”

The American beamed on one and all impartially.

“That’s fine and dandy!” he said approvingly. “Jake with the levers up. Roy, I’ll talk to you again before we hit the hay. Now we’ll sing again.”

And over the incense of the aromatic pine and cedar fire they sang all those old songs which, in whatever backwater of the odd corners of the world men of Anglo-Saxon blood may meet, sooner or later are almost certain to be heard, for, whichever the country of origin, common ties and a common sympathy have made them the impartial heritage of all.

“Home, Sweet Home”; “Annie Laurie”; “Swanee River”; “Massa’s in the Cold, Cold Ground”; “Old Folks at Home”; “John Peel.” And in addition, Nell sang Southern Negro melodies in a voice as sweet and true as the note of a tuning-fork, and which seemed to find a special corner in Roy’s heart, and there to nestle for all time.

Over the far shore the moon shone with a luminous intensity that translated the world to silver, and cast across the dark mystery of the lake a glittering road of light which might well have led to the gates of heaven itself.

And all about them were quiet sounds that filled the night with melody; the faint movement of tiny creatures of fur and feather within the woods; the caressing lap of water on sand which the moon had transmuted to spun gold-dust. And at intervals the mournful lingering cry of the loon, without which no northern night can pass.

About ten o’clock the tents were put up, Nell retiring to hers at once. A few moments later Tony went to the one he shared with Harry; and then, yawning prodigiously, the latter bade good night also. Thus the American and Roy were left alone. It seemed to the latter that Mr. Murrian had set himself deliberately to sit the others out. Once they were alone, he lost no time in coming to the point.

“About the cash for my share in the claim,” he said slowly.

“Yes,” said Roy quietly, though his heart quickened in its beat.

“My proposition is this,” the American went on in business-like tones. “As soon as the claims are registered I’ll pay you five hundred thousand

dollars in cash for all the shares except your own."

"You mean," demanded Roy, astounded at the magnitude of the offer, "that in addition to leaving me a full half-interest you'll pay me half a million dollars for the remaining half, which you'll then allot as we arranged?"

The American nodded. "That's the general idea. How does it go?" he said.

Roy did not speak until he had regained full command of his voice. "I think," he said at last, "that it's the most absurd and unbusiness-like suggestion I ever heard in my life!"

"That's my limit." Mr. Murrian's voice was firm—even, perhaps, a shade hard. "I don't say you couldn't get more, mind," he went on after a momentary pause. "If the property's what I think, probably you might. But there's the risk the quartz may peter out, in which case you wouldn't get anything like it. On the other hand, even if the vein runs from here to Hudson's Bay you've got to *show* 'em, and the big money in New York who've never seen a gold mine except in their dreams are apt to get a pain in the neck when it comes to paying out stacks of dollars of big denominations. I don't say you won't convince 'em in the end, and that if they don't freeze you out in the meanwhile—which they'd hate not to do—you won't get big money. But it'll take time—rafts of it—an' from what you tell me you want money bad, and you want it quick." He ceased speaking for a moment. "What I want you to understand," he resumed at length, "is that I'm taking a chance. I'm backing my opinion to the extent of five hundred thousand dollars that claim's what I think it is. If it isn't, I lose out. Not much, of course, because there's a few hundred thousand dollars' worth of gold right in sight, even if the seam conks out. But even that'll cost good money to gather in. And so," he ended definitely, "my first and last offer's a clean half-million."

And so saying the American filled and lighted his pipe, after which, with his arms about his knees, he gazed with expressionless eyes into the heart of the glowing ashes.

For a long moment Roy watched him dumbly. Then, unable to contain himself longer, he burst out.

"If you'll forgive the impertinence, sir, you're talking through the back of your neck," he protested. "It isn't the *smallness* of the offer I'm complaining about, it's the absurd generosity that's so amazing!"

When, quickly, the American looked up, his face had miraculously cleared.

“Then you accept?” he asked.

“With the utmost appreciation and gratitude,” said Roy fervently.

“That’s all right, son!” rejoined the American practically.

CHAPTER XVII

From the moment when his future father-in-law rolled himself in his "flea-bag" to the time when his deep and regular breathing told Roy that he was asleep was somewhere in the neighbourhood of a minute and a half.

With Roy, however, sleep was difficult. Due, probably, to the magnitude of his success reacting upon a brain stimulated to subconscious excitement by previous anxiety, he was vividly awake. It was all so stupendously complete. The bank saved, his own financial future assured and, far above the more material triumphs, with love as crown and summit of his dreams. Surely he was beloved of the gods!

He grinned at the thought. He had little belief in the gods. These things were ordered by a higher power than a few disreputable and unclad chimeras of the imagination of decadent Greece, and to that Higher Power he was intensely and reverently grateful.

Still he could not sleep. Through the tent opening he could see the iridescent pathway of the moon a'shimmer on the surface of the lake; the animal stirring in the woods had multiplied a little with the passage of the night and the dying down of the fire.

And then, quite suddenly, it was as though these sounds grew somehow more definite and yet, in some unexplainable way, more furtive. More than once a twig snapped with a harsher, but more muffled note than could be caused by one of the smaller animals. It was more as though the sound was caused by unusual weight being brought to bear upon those that had fallen already than of twigs or small dead branches snapped from the trees by some light creature forcing its way through the undergrowth.

He raised himself on his elbow, listening intently.

For a moment only was dead silence. Then, again, that muffled sound of dead wood cautiously pressed down. Instinctively he glanced across at the American, but that middle-aged financier, healthily tired from unwonted physical exertion, was very much asleep.

Roy was lying across the tent, which was one of those roof-shaped affairs that are erected by threading the apex through a branch resting upon two forked sticks, the sides being pegged down in the ordinary way.

Although, as already has been written, the front end was open, the back was closed, the flaps tied together with tape.

Without getting out of his blankets, and with entire absence of sound, he levered himself round so that by separating the canvas between the knots of the tape he could see inland into the woods.

Owing to the flooding of the moonlight his vision extended to a considerable distance, though the dark contrasting shadows rendered sight deceptive. He lay, his eyes to the cavity, for an appreciable time, alert and motionless.

And then again that ominous muffled crack. Louder this time, it seemed, and closer.

He turned his glance intently towards the place from whence, so far as he could judge, the sound had come. Was it a human figure, or merely a shifting shadow that seemed to glide with incredible stealth from the shade of one tree to the shelter of another? Waiting, this time with heart's action accelerated, came the sound again, fainter and more stealthily even than before, of twigs pressed to earth by human footsteps. And followed again that stealthy gliding shadow.

Without further hesitation he allowed the cavity to close, and loosening himself from the blankets, stole to the entrance. The second tent was but some ten or a dozen feet away, but he knew that if his suspicions were correct he could easily be seen passing from one to the other by anyone watching from the concealment of the woods. Lowering himself prone, therefore, he literally wormed his way to the other tent, not regaining the upright until he was within its cover.

Very cautiously and quietly he awakened the slumbering figures. As befitted his training, Harry Pullen was alert and listening within a second of Roy touching him. Tony was slower to arrive at complete consciousness, but keen as tempered steel as soon as he had gathered what was afoot.

"Are you sure?" enquired Harry in a whisper. "It's easy to mistake in these woods, 'specially if you lay awake an' get a touch of the rats!"

"I'm as sure as makes no matter," said Roy. "And I haven't let imagination get the better of me, either." He made a gesture indicating the rear of the tent. "Have a look for yourself."

Obediently Harry made a spyhole between the flaps, and, silent and motionless, looked out upon the woods. Presently, faintly and cautiously,

came the sound of trodden twigs. Roy saw Harry's prone body stiffen to sudden rigidity. He held up a warning hand, and then turned.

"It's Jake Brine and Company all right," he whispered. He glanced keenly across at Roy. "The question is, what's to do?"

"I don't see what there is we can do," replied Roy. "The woods are free to all. We may know they're up to no good, but they're not breaking any law."

Harry Pullen smiled grimly.

"This isn't Regent Street, London, or Main Street, Winnipeg," he said. "In the North, if there's a guy laying for us, we don't go and see a lawyer about it. We call his bluff, an' if he don't throw in his hand we know he's out for gun-play. Then we kinder get palsy in the trigger finger same as he's got himself."

Without another word he rose to his feet and strode out of the tent. Somewhat bewildered, the others followed.

"Stay put for a minute, you boys," instructed Harry quietly over his shoulder, and because their presence might embarrass him, they obeyed.

Without any attempt at concealment Harry made his way to the edge of the wood. There, leaning carelessly against one of the larger trees, and so that as great a portion of its surface came between himself and the woods, he shouted:

"Oh, you Jake Brine! Oh, you Jake Brine! Come right here, and maybe we'll find you a bed."

Barely had the harsh intonation of the challenge died away before the shot came. From his position in the lee of the tent Tony could see the flash of the discharge among the trees. The bullet struck the tree against which Harry was leaning, throwing off splinters, and then ricocheted into the woods.

To this day no reason for the discharge of the shot has ever been discovered, nor who actually fired it, though the probability is that it was Brine himself. Judged from every practical standard it was one of the maddest acts conceivable. Had it proved fatal, whoever was responsible must have known that sooner or later the murderer would be brought to justice, and that that justice would be short, sharp, and essentially to the point. Owing to the sparse population of an area of such stupendous size, that is absolutely necessary; otherwise life would be rendered impossible. It

is a tribute to this benevolent, but incredibly far-reaching administration that serious crime is so rare.

Blind rage in a personality malignant and wholly undisciplined it was, in all probability, that pressed the trigger; rage at the mere discovery of their presence, at the sheer mockery of the challenge, at the memory of the humiliation in Tom Long's restaurant, and later, in the office of the Winnipeg lawyer.

Whatever it was that led up to it, the result was instantaneous. Within a moment, the American, red-eyed with sleep and clad in pyjamas composed of most of the primary colours, was outside his tent, demanding explanation. Framed in the entrance of the other tent, her hair an aureole about her face, and an old khaki sweater modestly about her shoulders, the arms tied beneath her chin, appeared Nell.

Roy had just time in which to shout curt instructions to get back between her blankets and stay there until further orders, before Tony darted off into the woods. A few strides, owing to the other's haste causing him to stumble over a concealed root, and Roy was with him.

"Come back, you idiot!" he urged. "You're simply playing into their hands."

The face that Tony turned to Roy bore upon it the same fighting stamp that had been so evident the night he fought Jake Brine in Tom Long's restaurant. There was no shyness there, or diffidence; only a white-hot urge to come to grips with the coward who, himself under cover, had shot at an unarmed man.

"Why, you fool, you're not even armed!" cried Roy.

"I'm armed enough to tackle a swine like that!" said Tony, from between set teeth. He pointed: "There he is, beating it between those trees!"

Sure enough, dimly but unmistakably a man's figure could be seen retreating as rapidly as the nature of the ground permitted, and, a little to his right, and again to his left, two others.

"Hark forrard!" yelled Tony, and burst into pursuit, Roy and Harry Pullen directly at his heels.

In those thick trees, intertwined too closely for the moon to penetrate, the chase had not lasted fifty yards before all were hopelessly at fault. Just at first their quarry could be heard crashing through the thick woods, but hearing was the only sense by which their progress could be traced. Even

that, as they themselves reached the thicker wall of trees, was drowned by the sound of their own advance. Simultaneously all three came to a halt.

"No bon!" said Harry Pullen. "We've as much chance of catchin' 'em as a whale has of learnin' hockey." He stood, his steel-wire body as calm and unagitated from the sudden and violent exertion as that of an athlete in training. From the pocket of the slicker he had hastily put on before leaving the tent he produced and lighted a cigarette. "The trouble now is how to get back to camp," he said, for even in the short distance they had traversed, by no means had a straight course been maintained, and in that dense growth, and the sky obscured by foliage, without a compass the difficulty of regaining a given point is considerable.

"Guess we'd best holler," he suggested. "If old man Murrian hears he'll give us a lead."

They yelled in unison, and a moment later, and from the direction they least expected, came an answering shout, which, repeated at intervals on both sides, enabled them at last to regain the camp.

They found the American, an ulster over his hectic sleeping-suit, boiling water over a small fire he had kindled. Assisting, and clad adequately in a raincoat, her hair a glorious confusion of spun gold about her shoulders was Nell, who cast an anxious eye over Roy as they came into view.

"What in Sam Hill is it all about, anyway?" demanded the American. His manner displayed no sign of nervousness, only intense irritation and resentment.

"Your old friend Brine taking pot shots at the camp, I guess," said Harry Pullen quietly.

"The hell you say!" The American's mouth grew suddenly grim. "Then I'll say you're a bunch of doggone fools trailin' after a pack of gunmen without bein' heeled yourself. What was the big idea, s'posing you'd caught up with 'em? How did you figure you were goin' to cope with their gats?" . . . He turned to Harry Pullen, as the most experienced. "What do you think you are, anyway?" he demanded sternly. "A bunch of kids playin' Boy Scouts, or 'Settlers an' Redmen,' or somethin' funny? Don't you know there's a . . ."—he waved a large hand to indicate Nell—"a girl in your charge?"

Instantly Tony took the onus upon himself.

"It's entirely my fault," he said quietly. "Roy did all he could to prevent me following, but I wouldn't listen. Then when I'd started off I expect he

followed to see that I didn't make a bigger fool of myself still. Then Harry came to look after the pair of us."

The American's face softened. This frank shouldering of blame appealed to him; besides, what genuine man of his country was ever known really to censure courage? He pushed a mug of steaming tea into Tony's hands.

"Look at here now!" he said shortly, but in a mollified tone. "In every organisation, of whatever kind, there's got to be a boss. In this outfit, except for Harry here who's hired by me, I'm the only one who knows one hoot about the mining game. Besides, I'm the oldest, so I'm in charge. From now on what I say goes. . . ." He looked from one to the other of the younger men. "Get me?" he jerked out at last.

Ashamed of their earlier precipitation, each one of them acquiesced. They recognised that even if lacking somewhat in chances for individual enterprise at least it would be the better wisdom.

"Good?" The American nodded a grizzled head. "You can take your first orders here and now." He hesitated a moment, thinking; and then turned to Harry. "I suppose there's no doubt but what that bunch of gunmen were Brine and Company?" he demanded.

Harry nodded. "Sure," he said confidently.

"How do you know they weren't just Indians tryin' to scare us off their preserves?" the American asked.

"Because in the woods there was never an Indian yet who wore anything on his feet but moccasins," stated Harry, "and the bunch of crooks who bombed us out to-night wore prospectors' boots."

Mr. Murrian jerked a quick sideways glance at him. "How do you know that?" he asked shortly, to which the other smiled a tight-lipped smile.

"Because in breakin' a trail through woods there's as much difference between the footsteps of them as wears boots an' them as wears moccasins as between the sound of a bull moose an' a timber wolf," he asserted. "One's just a blind crunch an' the other's a kind of muffled crackle. I've heard both kinds oftener than you can shake a stick at, an' I know."

"That sounds pretty good to me," agreed the American after a moment's thought, and turned to include the others: "We'll take it, then," he continued, "that Jake Brine's put one over us. Likely those Indians in the boat snitched on us like Harry said they would. That bein' the case, we can take it we're

not included in the wide circle of those they love. That visitin' card left in camp to-night proves it."

"Sure," agreed Harry Pullen, and spat contemplatively into the fire. "They're out to jump the claim, an' beat it back to Cinnamon Creek to register before we can stop 'em," he added decisively.

The American's jaws came together with a snap that left his lips a thin vicious streak across his face. His eyes, visible by the leaping fire, shone hard and pitiless. Thomas Murrian had not snatched fortune from that clamorously conscienceless area the Nebraska Goldfields to be scared from the biggest clean-up of his life like a mongrel huskie chivied from a cabin door.

"Well," he said acidly, "there's nothin' to stop 'em doin' it! Except us, that is! An' if we stand for it we'll deserve all we get." Momentary anger at the insolence of such aspiration, and from such a source, overcame him. "We'll teach those 'breeds where they get off at before we're through," he said, and turned back to his tent. When he returned a moment later he carried three heavy-calibre Smith and Wesson revolvers. "I'd a hunch somethin' of this sort might happen along," he said, distributing the weapons, "so I brought these to help out—bought 'em in Cinnamon Creek the day we started."

Tony turned to him:

"What about your own, sir?" he enquired anxiously.

The American's right hand, resting with apparent carelessness in the pocket of his raincoat, made a rapid movement behind the cloth, where it formed an ominous projection.

"You don't think I blow about the Nebraska mines without somethin' on the hip what can't be contained in a bottle?" he asked mildly. "This little old gat and me've been inseparable since Mrs. Adam hired her first milliner"—and he produced a worn, but serviceable Colt.

He stared into the glow of the fire for so long then, without speaking, that Roy was tempted to break in. A glance at the rugged, thoughtful face dispelled the idea. Obviously there was some pretty deep planning going on behind those rather strained features. At last the older man broke the silence:

"That Brine's a fool to put us wise to his game just for spite," he observed slowly. "Of course, he threatened what he'd do when I turned Dacre down in Lawyer Moore's office in Winnipeg. But I put that down to hot air. However, now he's shown his hand it's up to us to make a hurry-up

job of stakin' these claims, followed by a high-speed run back to Cinnamon Creek to register. . . . What do you say, Harry?" he demanded, turning to the Canadian.

"I'll say you've said somethin'," returned Harry quietly. "Bed's always looked so good to me I've never been known to want a sleepin' draught, but until I see the clear title to these claims I guess I'm goin' to desert my old hobby. From now onto that identical moment my two middle names are Wakeful Willie!"

"No need!" The American's voice was emphatic. "Turn and turn about in four-hour spells. I'm takin' the first watch—to-night."

And though they pleaded with him to permit the guard to be shared equally between the three of them, he was resolute to take his share. He was going to pull his weight in the team, he said—"an' there's no guy here big enough to stop me."

Which, though said with a twinkle, was backed nevertheless by resolution unshakable.

CHAPTER XVIII

The night passed quietly enough, so the American reported, when in the early hours of a perfect morning he aroused the others before himself turning in to rest.

Whilst Roy and Tony were bathing and dressing, and afterwards over breakfast, the former observed that Harry Pullen did not take his usual part in the preparations. Instead, he hovered as though aimlessly about the outskirts of the camp, and no inducement of the meal could bring him in.

When Tony, who was the first to finish, got up, Harry beckoned him over.

"Seems to me," he said quietly when the other joined him, "that if those three 'breeds want to rush the camp there's no partic'lar reason for 'em to choose night time to do it. With the cover of these trees to protect 'em, an' with us in the open, daylight's the best for the job. Apart from that, they'll guess we'll keep a watch at night. What we've got to do, though, is to watch all the time."

Not being given to a superfluity of words, Tony thought for a moment before replying.

"How long do you think we'll be before we're through with the work and so able to get away?" he enquired.

"If it comes to a show-down, to-morrow at the latest," replied Harry quickly.

"How do you mean, a show-down?" asked Tony.

"Can all the strippin' work," said Harry, his voice decisive and business-like. "Once we've staked the claims all reg'lar an' accordin' to law, there's the whole police force of the Dominion to see as nobody swipes 'em. . . . To lay claim to property registered in another guy's name'd be like walkin' into the Bank of Montreal an' sayin' it's yours. Once we've the title, we can hire labour to do all the strippin' an' trenchin' that's needed; what we're doin' now in that direction's like tryin' to put hell out with a squirt. The thing to do is to leave one of us back here to look after the camp, an' all the rest be all out for the stakin'. When that's done, beat it hell-bent-for-election back to Cinnamon Creek to register."

There was something so clear-cut and decisive in the Canadian's manner that, coming from a source usually so casual and easy-going, it was all the more impressive. The sheer horse sense of the suggestion was undeniable.

"We'll talk it over with Mr. Murrian as soon as he wakes," said Tony. "In the meanwhile I'll stay here while you beat it across and get some breakfast."

When Harry's suggestion was put to the American the latter agreed at once. "The sooner we're out of here the better," he said. "Furthermore, I'll have a gang of men at work on the claim within a week of registration to stop that bunch of 'breeds high-gradin'."[1]

By the late afternoon all the claims were staked, and the party returned to the beach for supper, tired out, but entirely satisfied with the day's work.

A close watch had been maintained throughout the day, but without sight or sign of the half-breeds. And if by no means lulled to false security by their immunity, the adventurers had begun to speculate seriously if, rather than run the legal and bodily risks of an attempt to jump a claim already staked, the invaders had thought it wiser to prospect the new territory for themselves, in the hope of finding a property to which they might lay legitimate claim.

Thus, though the question of an immediate departure was mooted by Harry Pullen, and supported by Tony Clarges, it was agreed in view of the general fatigue to defer the start to Cinnamon Creek until the following morning—a decision, incidentally, which was to have far-reaching consequences.

"But as it's no use fallin' at the last fence," the American said decisively, "we'll take watches to-night same as we arranged. Roy"—at the moment on duty—"can quit at nine, an' Harry'll take over till one, when I'll go on till five. Tony, havin' been on watch all day, can sleep. When my own tour's ended I'll give you the call, an' we can be on the water by six."

In view of his employer's broken rest of the previous night Tony protested almost to the point of mutiny, but the arrangement had to stand. As Harry Pullen said: "Compared with the boss the laws of them there Meads of Persia were just tentative suggestions, once he's made up his mind."

Roy did not find the time of his vigil hang heavily. There is something in the atmosphere of the North that rules monotony out of the scheme of things. Apart from a healthy and animal fatigue that food and the minimum of rest dispelled immediately, he hardly knew what it was to feel tired. And

though except for the supreme excitement of re-discovering his claim, each day since they started out from Cinnamon Creek had been only a replica of its predecessor, his interest in all that went on about him remained unquenchable.

He had not been on watch many minutes before there was a soft footfall behind him, and turning, he saw Nell. She came up to him, and without speaking, rested her hand against his shoulder, and gazed contemplatively into the tangled woods that faced them. As he slipped his arm about her he felt her slender body shiver slightly as though from cold.

"It's time you were hitting the hay, young lady," he said solicitously. "We're starting well before sun-up, and after that there won't be much rest until we get to Cinnamon Creek."

Under her tan the face she turned to him looked, he thought, a shade paler than usual, and her eyes were slightly troubled.

"There'll not be much sleep for me to-night, anyway," she said quietly.

There was a note of repressed nervousness in her manner that was quite foreign to her usual sunny *insouciance*, a suggestion of strain that in all their relationship he had never before observed.

He made no comment for a moment, wondering how best to deal with it. Would it be better, by dismissing it with a smile, to induce her to do the same, or was it something that went deeper than a mere surface mood, and which to brush aside would bruise something of the fine bloom of their mutual understanding? At the thought of treading roughshod over sacred ground his heart quickened to apprehension, and his face was grave as her own, as he looked down at her.

"What's troubling you, Nell?" he asked, his voice quiet and even. And then, as she hesitated: "I don't want to butt in on things that even to me—or perhaps especially to me—you would rather not put into words. But in case I can help—well—like the village policeman who got the job of resident guardian to a big country house, 'I'm here if I'm wanted.' "

To his relief she broke into a little laugh. Her hand slid from his shoulder to rest in his own in a gesture of confidence.

"My trouble," she said, "is that I don't know what my trouble is."

"I get the idea," Roy nodded understandingly. "All overish it makes you for to feel," he quoted. "I'm like that myself sometimes, and then—you'll observe my native refinement!—I've found the cause to be less mental than

—er—physical. In your case I think it's with sitting too long in a canoe without exercise. I suggest that you run up and down the beach for an hour or two at full speed. Nothing like a bit of brisk exercise to induce a correct functioning of the gastric juices," he added professionally.

Her mouth set in lines of mock offence, and momentary the dance of her eyes dispelled the shadow from her face. She shook her head.

"Nothing like it!" she said. "Since we landed here I've had enough exercise to tone up the system of the star boarder at the Home for Incurables. . . ." She hesitated, her face again in the shadow, and he felt her hand contract nervously in his own. "I don't know why—I can't explain"—she spoke with unusual gravity, and yet with rather shy deprecation—"but I've a hunch we're not going to get away from here without trouble. Trouble with a capital T. . . ."

At this point, of course, he might have attempted to re-establish her usual poise by breezy masculine logic. It came to him, however, that such an attitude might appeal to her as a rather coarse attempt to superimpose the material over something which, though outside his own understanding, was yet very near to her. And in addition he knew examples of subconscious warning so definitely authentic that no one but fools would disbelieve. And finally, to laugh at what so obviously distressed her would merely be caddish. His hand closed upon hers, and he drew her more closely to him.

"I hope you're wrong, old thing," he said. "Everything is so wonderful now that . . ."

She broke in: "Perhaps we've had things our own way too much," she said quietly. "It may be there's a test coming . . . to prove whether we're worth while." Her small teeth closed over her lips as if she found difficulty in keeping a grip on herself. "Anyway it's *something*," she said with deep conviction. "It's not the first time I've had this certain-sure feeling of something coming that if I didn't put up the fight of my life against was going to knock me cold, and always trouble has come. And brought a gun with it, too," she added ruefully. She paused, her brows puckered to a reflective frown. "I've won out all right in the end," she resumed, as though for self-consolation, "but only after things have looked so black there hasn't seemed any prospect of getting through."

And here it was that Roy made the one comment that could have brought comfort.

“What’s a fight, anyway?” he said. “We’re together, and that’s all that matters.”

He felt her slim young body press closer to his own, and the face upturned to his smiled with something of his own whimsicality.

“There’s always that, of course!” she said with a lightness that covered real depth of feeling.

“But,” he said, “why trouble trouble ’till trouble troubles us? On the face of it, the absolute happiness of the present makes my wildest aspirations of the past seem like a wet Saturday in the slums. Just think of it! I’ve discovered a mine that’s going to make Henry Ford’s annual income look like a dago’s pay-envelope; I’m saving my father’s business, and with it his life; and I’ve found a girl compared with whom Cleopatra and Helen of Troy were just daily helps. Also, we’re leaving here to-morrow and . . .”

He broke off, his face, a moment ago so tender and joyous, stiffened suddenly to alertness, his eyes fixed intently in an effort to penetrate the trees which the night transmuted to a solid wall of shadow.

“*Listen!*” he said under his breath.

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[1] Stealing high-grade quartz.

CHAPTER XIX

The two stood silent and motionless. So faint that a month ago it would have been inaudible to his city-bred ears, the intermittent sound of cautiously distributed footfalls came now to his more accustomed hearing distinct against the silence.

“Slip back to camp and warn the others,” Roy instructed under his breath.

Standing as they were under the fringe of the trees, Nell made no sound on the firm sand as she stole away to do his bidding. The first of the party she aroused was her father, and while he scrambled into some sort of covering, she went across to warn Tony and Harry. It seemed only a few moments before all three were assembled under the lee of the tent. Then, the position made clear, the American turned to Nell:

“Get between the blankets, and stay put until we come back,” he instructed shortly, and there was that in his manner which impelled obedience.

They found Roy in the place where Nell had left him. As they came up he motioned them to silence, and pointed to the right, from where, by listening intently, they were able to hear the sound of movement among the trees.

The American’s first thought was to distribute his party, for until some definite move was made by the raiders they themselves could take no active steps. For any positive knowledge they had to the contrary the intruders might merely be wandering Indians investigating unwelcome disturbers of an area hallowed immemorially to the Red Man. Again, even presuming they were Brine and his party, to open fire would prematurely expose their own position, and thus place themselves at a disadvantage. It would be better to wait for a lead from the enemy.

And that was instantly forthcoming. Suddenly, stabbing the darkness with spear-points of crimson, two shots rang out, the detonation of the discharge profaning the brooding silence of the woods like the wanton shattering of a shrine, and they heard the bullets whine past them in the direction of the camp. Came then four more shots in quick succession, and judging from the flashes, from points slightly removed from the previous

one, though whether from different guns, or if from the original aggressors who had changed their position, it was impossible to determine.

Almost simultaneously with these second shots the fire was returned; by the American first, a fraction of a second later by Harry Pullen, and then by Roy and Tony. Each aimed for the flashes, or where, in the deceiving darkness, they imagined those flashes to have been. At which, a moment later, came the undisguised crashing of heavy-shod feet through the trees.

"Attaboy!" yelled the American, and set off in sure-footed pursuit, the others following according to their capabilities. It was Harry Pullen, who, though appearing to exert himself the least, yet made the most consistent progress. Indeed, as the most experienced in night travelling through closely-woven woods it was he who took command of the party.

And in the conditions that prevailed the need for a directing mind was urgent. Under foot was inches deep in tinder-dry twigs and smaller branches which drowned entirely the progress of their quarry. Thus, time after time it was necessary to call a simultaneous halt, so that the direction of the fugitives might be ascertained. This point decided, off the party would go again, crashing and blundering between the closely-woven trees.

Roy found the chase one of extraordinary excitement. He had ridden to hounds since childhood, and revelled in the thrust and clamour, the high adventure of that prince of sports. But no burst in the hunting field had ever given him the exhilaration of this wild night chase through the stark and brooding woods.

In places, never more than a few yards apart, where windfalls formed a breast-high fence between the trees, and in others where these were stacked one upon the other in a solid impenetrable wall, as though by instinct he was able to find the handiest method for their negotiation. And with the excitement of the chase was added the inspiration of danger—the pulsating romance of those snake-tongue flashes, the jar of detonation, and the occasional drone of speeding bullets.

All the conditions were against the pursuit. While the claim-jumpers could choose their course, and thus were able to take the line of least resistance, and by turning off at an angle evade the more formidable obstacles, the pursuing party, with an ever-shifting objective, found themselves confronted by a succession of hindrances it was impossible to avoid. Thus both time and distance were lost.

Yet in spite of the continual dodging and swerving it seemed to Roy that whenever the quarry turned to one side it was not long before the divergence was redeemed by a commensurate swerve in the opposite direction, and thus the main line remained staple.

As far as Roy could gather they were making a wide semicircle, a course which would bring them eventually once more to the beach. Exactly at what point, however, he was unable to determine. He knew, however, that more than one of the short headlands which scalloped the shore into a succession of tiny bays would intervene to shut out any sight of their own camp.

The thought caused him an unaccountable twinge of uneasiness. Within shut-in woods acceptance of loss of touch was a matter of course; out in the open the absence of communication was far less natural. It was, of course, Nell of whom he was thinking, and it came over him how rash and foolhardy they had been to leave her utterly without protection. He wondered what exactly she was doing—if she was nervous. Hardly, he thought. Anxious, yes, but only for the safety of her party, but even in the face of her premonition with no trace of panic. He realised her fine courage too well to imagine that.

Still, it was a pretty rotten position for a girl to be alone on a beach hundreds of miles from the nearest habitation, and with a running gun-fight between her own party and a bunch of utterly unscrupulous gunmen within measurable distance.

The thought of what would be her fate if the chase became transformed suddenly into a stand-up exchange of shots in which the devil looked after his own caused the hot perspiration, with which violent exertion had bathed him, to be transformed suddenly to the cold sweat of apprehension. Facing the issue clearly, he admitted frankly that the odds would be against his own side. Though both the American and Harry Pullen were handy with a gun, Tony Clarges and himself would be little or no use in a scrap where the order was long-range shooting. Also, he was handicapped by not knowing how many the opposition numbered. Few or many, however, to be handy with a gun would be part of their profession.

If he had been given his choice at that moment he would have gone straight back to the camp. Not on account of any fear for himself—there was nothing he wanted more than a chance to get to grips with the murderous brutes who, for the second time, were all out to rob him. His point of view was an uneasy suspicion that in entering into this wild and one-sided chase his party had fallen into a carefully-prepared trap.

He determined that if it came to open fighting at least there should be one survivor on the side of the angels. Never limpet to rock as he would cling to cover. At any cost there should be one champion to stand between Nell and this bunch of half-breeds.

As he made his decision he noticed that, quite suddenly, the trees had begun to open out, and a moment later a glimmer of moonlight penetrated the foliage. Simultaneously and as though by prearranged signal the pursuing party came to a halt, and in the momentary silence they were aware of the faint pulsating throb of motor-engines.

"Keep your distance," advised the American as instinctively they commenced to close in. "We've no proof it's them. Those canoes may be another party altogether—an' the 'breeds just layin' for us as we break cover. Follow me, and watch your step."

"You're dead right there, boss," said Harry Pullen confirmatively as they moved off.

Cautiously, then, the party moved forward until the narrow stretch of beach emerged clear through the now more widely-separated trees, a strip of shingle backed gloriously by the wide sweep of lake across which the riding moon poured a pathway of iridescent silver. And speeding down this moon-bathed pavement, clear-cut and distinct, was a canoe. In that canoe were two figures.

The beach itself was empty.

"No good shootin'," the American remarked, noticing Harry Pullen's instinctive fingering of his revolver. "They've made their get-away all right." Then, contemplatively: "Two of 'em. . . . I wonder where are the others?"

Roy turned quickly. "Others?" he questioned, to which the American nodded slowly.

"Sure," he said confidently. "There were four in the canoe that passed and repassed that night we were camped." He paused: "And if that bunch weren't Dacre, Brine, Oulette, an' Le Fevre, my father was a woman. . . . No, there's another two of 'em somewhere around," he added, and made a sudden imperative gesture for silence.

In their preoccupation the sound of a second canoe had passed almost unnoticed, to be brought to them now by the American's tense attitude.

Well in the rear of the first, the stroke of this second engine stuttered dimly across the water; muffled, but becoming every moment more distinct. And then as they watched, at right angles across the lake of light, and heading directly for the outlet to Grassy River, swung a second canoe, in the bow of which was a hunched-up figure, with a second man tending the engine in the stern.

"There they go!" cried the American, "the other two sure's you're born!" He turned to glance at each of his companions in turn; Roy and Tony Clarges, and lastly, and upon whom his eyes lingered significantly, to Harry Pullen.

"Where's those two come from?" he demanded sharply, with a sweep of his hand towards the lake.

Roy followed the direction of the gesture, and a moment later understood the plural. For, in the wake of the first, attached to it by a towline, rode a third canoe—empty.

For a long moment Harry Pullen remained motionless, his eyes fixed avidly. Then with sudden decision he turned to the American.

"You can call me a liar," he said quietly, "if them canoes ain't ours!"

"*Ours!*" repeated Roy dazedly.

Harry nodded, lips grim and set. "Sure," he confirmed. "They've left us high and dry while they go back and register the claims."

CHAPTER XX

Roy's breath caught convulsively in his throat, broken off in the very act of inhalation. His heart leaped chokingly, so that he was aware of a thin insubstantial mist before his eyes that caused the whole perspective of lake and sky to flicker dazedly, as if he had been struck by some deadly vertigo. The base of his chest felt as though filled suddenly with something cold and lifeless.

The feeling lasted for but a few seconds before some insistent guardian of his self-control was able to suppress his panic. Gradually, as his vision cleared, the landscape ceased to quiver and vibrate, and it was at least with surface calm that he wheeled to face the American.

He saw that though struck with sudden pallor, the face of that hard-bitten veteran was set into a mask that subordinated anxiety to the purpose of the moment. Only the eyes were eloquent.

"We'd best be hittin' the trail for home," he said quietly. He jerked his head in the direction of where, but a few moments before, the others had been standing.

"You've said somethin'," Harry Pullen agreed from between set teeth.

"Where's Tony?" the American asked sharply, and then, his eyes alight, he pointed down the beach in the direction of their own camp. "Some boy!" he exclaimed.

Already a good five hundred yards in advance, Tony was streaking for home. Nell was, or had been, in danger; might at this present moment be in need of help. It was characteristic that he had not bothered to wait for the others. It is doubtful even if it had occurred to him to do so.

A moment later Roy was after him. The fatigue of his recent push through the woods off-set by the anxiety that gnawed him, he gained rapidly. Harry Pullen followed, a willing, but unpractised runner. Then, lumbering sturdily in the rear, followed the American.

It was by no means easy going. If there were stretches of firm sand, there were places where the scrub grew right to the water's edge, and others strewn with rocks and boulders which were more retarding even than the trees. Further hindrance were the promontories, which, though but some hundred yards or so across, were thick and intertwined with trees, and their

surfaces covered with windfalls. To avoid the chance of losing direction, it was necessary to skirt these obstacles, and this lengthened the route considerably.

For the last half-mile Roy and Tony travelled in company, and though companionship was grateful, they spoke but little. Rounding the last headland they came within measurable distance of the camp, where, in the strong moonlight, could be distinguished the outlines of the tents.

They knew there was no need for cover. Whatever aggression had been was there no longer. It was what this had left behind that was the vital factor.

As they approached nearer they could detect no indication of life, no sign or portent of Nell. Was she still inside her tent, undisturbed and unmolested; or . . .?

Neither dared put into words the fear that sickened him. They could only be guided by what they found.

They approached the tent with hearts pounding from hard exercise and the still greater strain of mental fear. All was quiet. The ashes of the long dead fire lay grey and desolate; the tents, stark and impersonal against the moonlight, seemed to imaginations quickened by panic to have about them an atmosphere of solitude and desolation.

Roy covered the last hundred yards with a burst of speed that drained his remaining ounce of vitality; afterwards he could not understand from what inextinguishable well of endurance he drew his strength.

At first, and in that dim light, everything appeared normal, with Nell sleeping quietly and serenely, the blankets drawn so closely about her that only eyes and forehead were visible.

He spoke to her softly, so that her awakening should not be unduly sudden. Then, as there was no response, he raised his voice, but again without reply.

Apprehension renewed, he switched on his pocket lamp, turning the rays directly on to her face. He saw that she was awake, with eyes turned to his. He expelled his held-in breath in a quick spasm of relief and gratitude. His heart, which seemed suddenly to have become stilled, joyously resumed its throbbing. “God was in His heaven, all right with the world.”

He spoke to her again, cheerily this time, in an attempt at reassurance of the party’s safe return; grinned cheerfully down on her.

Though her eyes spoke relief at the implied tidings, she did not speak. As he peered more closely, that overworked heart of his missed a beat, and then went racing madly on. He saw that her eyes held an appeal which, though mute, was urgent and desperate, and that her forehead was creased by pain. He spoke again, more loudly this time, the sharp edge of suddenly renewed trepidation in his voice.

And again, though there was no answer, he could read appeal in her eyes.

He went down on his knees and withdrew the blankets from her face. Then he saw why she had not answered him.

She was gagged!

With a curse which, like Uncle Toby's, it is to be hoped the tear of the Recording Angel blotted out, he withdrew the gag from her mouth. And then, as she moistened her lips:

"Don't speak," he said shortly, and whipped the coverings from her, an action by which he realised for the first time that she lay on the bare ground as fully clad as when he left her, but with ankles bound tightly with cordage cruelly thin, her wrists tied behind her. An additional cruelty was that the ends of these cords, stretching away under the tent canvas, were fixed cunningly to the nearby rocks so that she was unable to move her position.

By this time Tony had come breathlessly to his help, and together they cut her bonds, and while Roy chafed the lacerated ankles, Tony did the same with the bruised and swollen wrists, into which the rope had bitten viciously.

She bore the excruciating pain of returning circulation with a bed-rock fortitude that passed even Roy's conception of her courage. There were moments when the blue eyes filmed with agony, her lips pressed together until in their bloodlessness they were indistinguishable against the surrounding pallor. When at last they had bandaged the bruised flesh with oil-soaked linen, her face was bathed in perspiration as if it had been dipped in water.

By this time Harry Pullen had arrived, followed a few moments later by her father. She was sitting up in her blankets now, with something of colour returned to her face, her wrists covered now by the kimono they had wrapped around her. It was not until days later, when the injured flesh had resumed its normal appearance, that her father was allowed to realise exactly what she had endured.

"Not badly hurt, Nell?" he demanded breathlessly.

She grinned a gamin grin that went to Roy's heart for the sheer pluck of it.

"Not so bad as Jake Brine and that elongated strip of boneyard Le Fevre would be if you could lay hands on them right now," she said.

As though by instinct the American's hand stole to the hard lump in his side pocket, an act so significant that Nell broke into open laughter. She turned to Roy:

"Speaking about my father, an old-timer once said that 'Just so long's Tom Murrian's let alone he's that mild he'd make a Ladies' Sewing Circle look like a ball of fire, but once he's mad he's that tough he sets the sidewalk ablaze when he spits an' hires a private graveyard to bury his dead.' "

"I'd like to fill a couple of six-foot lots with those two right now, anyway," the American confirmed grimly. "But tell us what happened."

"That won't take long," said Nell. "As soon as I heard firing I went to the edge of the wood to see what was on—and of course I couldn't see anything at all. After I'd been there two or three minutes I thought I heard something stirring. I turned to investigate, but at that moment Le Fevre made his rush, and before I knew what was happening he'd his hand over my mouth, and my wrists behind me in a lock where I couldn't move without breaking a bone. He ran me to the tent, and then Brine came. Between them they tied me up and left me. . . ."

The sudden fear that came into her eyes at the mention of the half-breed's name was not lost upon the others. Her father shot a searching glance at her, his chin out-thrust.

"How did Brine use you?" he asked quickly.

Nell hesitated, and Roy's breath caught sharply in his throat.

"I can't bring myself to feel so bad about that long stretch of misery Le Fevre as maybe I should," Nell said quietly. "Ever since that night in Tom Long's I've always had a feeling that Brine was only waiting his chance to get back at me. . . . Anyway, he didn't look pretty enough to-night to make me so's I was sorry we wasn't alone. Physically Le Fevre may be length without breadth, but he's some kind of pull over Brine, and when he said they weren't to treat me rougher than they could help Brine just had to listen, though he made it pretty clear that he himself was all out for what he called 'making a clean job of it.' "

This was said in the easy tones of everyday conversation. It was not until months later Roy learnt that actually the long Le Fevre had pulled his gun on his fellow 'breed, threatening to shoot him out of hand if Nell were hurt more than was called for by his own somewhat generous ideas. It was Harry Pullen who supplied what probably was the actual reason for benevolence from such a quarter.

"That Le Fevre was a wise guy, all right," he said soberly. "There's umpteen million square miles in the North, most of 'em unexplored, but in all this country there's no place big or remote enough to hide a murderer. He knew that if anything happened to Miss Nell here there's not a man or woman in the whole North who wouldn't have camped on their trail if it took twenty years to find them. It's just self-protection. The people are so few and scattered, opportunities for successful killing's too good to allow a murderer to get away with it. Le Fevre's out to clean up a fortune, which any harm to Miss Nell would have killed any chance of. Instead of registered claim owners, they'd have been fugitives, with the full strength of the North gunnin' after 'em."

"Even now it'll be an unhealthy day for Brine when he and I happen to meet," observed Tony, upon which Nell turned to him with an amused smile.

"The first time in history Tony's ever spoken out of his turn," she commented.

"But what was their motive in binding you at all?" enquired Roy.

"So that I shouldn't bring you back here," explained Nell, to whom from the first the situation had been only too clear. "They fired those shots just to draw you off. Bluff; just bluff, with Brine and Le Fevre hidden somewhere out of the line of flight waiting for you to streak past, so that whilst Oulette and Dacre made for their own canoe, they could walk quietly in here and take ours."

It was only then that Roy came to realise how final and absolute was Dacre's triumph. For that the fourth of the claim-jumpers was his father's defaulting partner was manifest in the cunning with which the coup had been organised, and in which his brain was apparent in every phase.

And exactly how sweeping was their defeat became clearer the more it was considered. Five or six days' easy going would see the robbers at the Land Titles Office in Cinnamon Creek. The claim once registered, no court of law in the Dominion would recognise any other ownership. To do so would be to release a flood of litigation that would swamp the whole

machinery of the mining law, and, in practice, hand the industry to those prepared to spend most lavishly. First come, first served, without fear or favour, is the inviolable rule of mining claim registration; nor is any other procedure practicable.

Roy gazed from one to the other of the faces about him with a look of such blank and hopeless misery in his eyes, and his mouth so set and bitter, that under cover of the blankets Nell stretched out her hand to his in a long-sustained pressure of understanding. Her father, on the other hand, faced the issue with the uncompromising acceptance of facts that was one of the chief sources of his strength.

"We've been caught bending this time, all right," he said definitely.

Tony Clarges looked up. His face immobile, he was seated cross-legged on the strewn pine-branches that did duty for carpet. His manner contained no suggestion either of uninterest or detachment. It was just that he appeared to regard himself as unqualified to contribute anything to the common fund of comment. Only in times of action was Tony to the fore. Even now his mind reverted at once to the practical. "Have you thought over how we are going to get away from here at all, sir?" he asked quietly.

Mr. Murrian looked at him keenly for a moment. The more he saw of Tony, the better he liked him; the boy "wore well."

"No," he said. "Have you?"

"We can follow the beach down to the stream and then, keeping the water always in sight, thread our way through the trees until we come to the Grassy River," Tony said. "It'll be jolly hard sledding, I know, particularly the last part of the way, but I can't think of anything more practicable."

"And how much better off shall we be on Grassy River than we are here?" demanded the American.

"We shall be on the line of route between the various lakes," said Tony. "Myself, I think that the fact of Roy having been rescued from here a few months ago was the one chance in ten thousand. I don't suppose there's a canoe on these waters once in six months. But on Grassy River there's prospectors passing backward and forward two or three times a month."

After considering a moment, the American nodded.

"P'raps you're right," he said. "Anyway, it's a cinch we can't stick around here indefinitely. The thing for us to do is to cache the stores somewhere where Brine's mob won't find 'em, and come back for 'em

later." He turned to Nell. "You fit to make the grade?" he enquired solicitously.

Her thoughts upon her swollen and lacerated ankles, which even at that moment were hurting abominably, Nell nodded reassurance.

"Give me to-morrow to rest up," she agreed, "and you can count me in."

It was Roy, with the knowledge of the damage wrought to the tender flesh, who, eventually, put the veto on such an early start.

"You'll stay here until you're passed fit for general service," he pronounced decisively. "A few days more or less can make no difference," a ring of bitterness in his voice, "and in the meanwhile the rest of us can do a bit of prospecting. It's just on the cards we might light on something else," he added a shade more hopefully, at which the American nodded good-humouredly. From the bottom of his heart he was sorry for the boy's disappointment.

"You're the doctor," he acquiesced. "Anything that's good enough for the rest's good enough for me. This is the first time ever I've been marooned, and I may as well call it a day."

The flap was pushed back, and Harry Pullen, who had slipped out a few minutes previously, crawled back into the tent.

"Those crooks sure do rub it in!" he said in a voice of mingled disgust and appreciation, casting a length of newly-cut and fashioned tamarack at the American's feet. Murrian picked up the post, and after a quick glance, held it out for inspection.

Upon a flat surface prepared for its reception, and written in indelible pencil, was the following inscription:

DISCOVERY POST
TENDERFOOT CLAIM

JAKE BRINE
CINNAMON
CREEK

AUG. 22, 1923.
M.C.

"There's twelve of those," Harry Pullen told them. "One for each claim; our posts uprooted an' these put in their places. Three claims are in Brine's

name, three in Dacre's, three in Le Fevre's, and three in Oulette's."

Roy could see the American's keen eyes twinkle through the darkness.

"Tenderfoot's right!" he said. "That's just what the whole bunch of us are, with me the greenest sucker for bein' bluffed into desertin' camp by a trick that was amongst the discards before ever King Solomon staked his first claim."

CHAPTER XXI

There it was, however, and with no getting away from it.

Temporarily, at least, the party were marooned on a lake shore which, because hitherto undiscovered, was entirely remote from any chance of rescue. Nor, about the surrounding area which they occupied the next few days in exploring, was there any sign of Indian visitation. Indeed, the more the isolation of their position became impressed upon him, the greater became Roy's wonder at the chance which, on his previous visit, had rescued him from certain death.

Combined with this exploration, having indeed as its principal object, they did a considerable amount of prospecting.

In no place was the formation similar to their original claim. Inland the nature of the ground changed definitely to granite, and as well seek for grapes from thistles as look for gold in that. Nor, with one exception where the formation was more propitious, did the samples pan to anything particularly promising. To the American it looked as if Roy's original discovery was one of those freaks of geology with which every mining man is familiar.

"There's only just this in it," he said, examining the minute specks of gold left clinging to the pan after the washing of one of these samples, "where there's surface gold at all you never know how the rock's going to work out when you sink a shaft. This sample'd assay maybe six to eight dollars a ton. It's not much, but it's a paying proposition if the proportion doesn't peter out when you begin to dig. In any case we'll stake a few claims here, just in case."

Roy acquiesced rather grimly. That his party should busy themselves with a ten cent. uncertainty of this kind while Dacre and his fellow-robbers chugged merrily off to register claims of incalculable richness stolen from himself, and upon the ownership of which hung all in life he held of value, struck him as the last word in irony.

For that with the passing of potential wealth he would be bound in honour to release Nell from her engagement he had decided upon as only the inevitable result of the recent debacle.

Apart from personal pride his place was with his father. With his life work resolved into nothing more of dignity than a problem for the Official Receiver, the banker would have need of all the support he could get.

To write that the double loss of fortune and love was the greatest blow of Roy's career is to state what, patently, is obvious. Until the past few months he had had no career, and with equal certainty nothing approaching a set-back in his placid and easy-going life. Even in the midst of such a catastrophe, however, he found one small straw of comfort.

Quite suddenly and surprisingly it came to him that he was more fitted to face disaster than had been the case a few months previously. Association with the broad and virile American, with his fine scorn for the unessential; the cheery opportunism and initiative of Harry Pullen; and the simple self-effacing courage of Tony Clarges, had provided a mental stimulus which his own hard experiences had cemented to a strength and simplicity of outlook that otherwise might have remained undeveloped. Previously only potentialities had been there; Canada had brought them to maturity. Without this toughening experience he could not have brought himself to relinquish Nell.

Nevertheless, those three days were a rack of agony from which even sleep provided no escape. They took their toll, those hours of pain when in all the interminable vista of the future he could discern no prospect but loneliness for himself and disaster to those he loved. And most poignant and insistent of all was the thought of the sorrow this unqualified acceptance of duty would bring to Nell.

There were times, indeed, when he questioned if it would not be more generous to sacrifice his own pride—indeed to hide its very existence, in a life spent wholly in her service. He realised that the American was altogether too big, his gratitude for service rendered too real and vital, for objection to Nell's marriage to follow on the wheels of disaster. In his inherent simplicity the American accepted the saving of Nell's life as a claim which only she herself had the right to dispute. Granted only cleanliness of record, if Nell was satisfied to be Roy's wife, she was his for the asking.

Taking all these considerations into account, then, was it right to sacrifice the happiness of two—Nell and himself—to the duty of mitigating the troubles of one—his father? As Nell's husband his help would be of more practical value than if the engagement were broken. For, married to Nell, he knew his father's bank would remain no longer in jeopardy. So that, the supreme gift to himself apart, the only price to be paid for all these

benisons was his own poor pride. But was it possible to sacrifice pride without a corresponding loss of self-respect?

The answer to this question, which all along had been hovering uneasily in the background of his mind, decided him. There is no compensation within the gift of life that is anodyne for the loss of self-respect. Once that is gone, to those whom love lends understanding the deprivation is starkly apparent.

Nell would not be a week before noticing the change in him, and once the reason for that change was appreciated, the chance of future happiness would have passed.

He shrank from revealing his decision to her with an apprehension so keen as almost to be physical pain. Recent close companionship had shown him that beneath the joy and sparkle of an untroubled surface lay a capacity for suffering the very depth of which would forbid expression. He knew, too, that the wealth of love she had given had beggared her of any chance of its re-creation elsewhere; that it was final and for all time.

Due to the blindness of his preoccupation, however, he did not realise that what he had to tell her she knew already. However blind love may be in the perception of character defects, in its object of discovering cause of unhappiness it is sharper than a serpent's tooth. Nell knew as well as if it had been written in the sky that the newly chiselled lines of unhappiness about his mouth, and the look of strain about his eyes, were caused by something more deeply founded and permanent than mere loss of potential fortune.

Considering the diverse traditions of their upbringing, she had gained an extraordinarily clear understanding of his standards. She knew him, as she put it mentally, like the paper on the wall. Thus, just as she knew that he had refused to declare himself until the mine was located and likely to prove a success, she recognised that automatically with the jumping of the claims the original conditions had become re-established. And, quite definitely, she was not standing for it.

It was upon the afternoon of the fourth day that she pinned him down to a definite statement of the position. Since the calamity, it had been his idea to delay the issue until, once more in civilisation, he could part from her finally.

Roy was seated on a flat rock that projected some little way into the lake, dabbling his bare feet in the water and staring in gloomy preoccupation towards the opposite shore. He turned at the sound of footsteps, and saw

Nell picking her way across the shingle. A moment later she was beside him.

For an appreciable space neither spoke. The indefinable constraint of the last few days was even more apparent now that they were alone, a condition which, realising its origin, she accepted with a resentment that was yet tinctured with the half-humorous concession to fate which was her unconscious philosophy. She was the type who, however great the cataclysm which beat about her ears, would greet it less with indignation than with wonder that anything so obviously cruel and destructive could be permitted. Which is not to say that she was lacking in real depth of feeling. Indeed, it was because, fundamentally, she was capable of such excess of joy or sorrow that, other comforts failing, her sense of humour was the one weapon by which she might preserve the sanctuary of her faith.

"Why pick on *me*?" she said quietly at last, glancing up into his face.

He turned to her, startled and uncomprehending.

"Pick on you?" he repeated.

She nodded, the sun, shining directly on her hair, accentuating every hidden light and shade, transmuting it to living gold.

"Sure," she said practically. "It's a pity about that bunch of 'breeds getting away with your claim, and of course I realise what it means to you. But after all it was they who did it, so why pick on *me*?"

He covered with his own the hand that rested idly upon the rock. Weakness, perhaps, but temptation to establish contact was irresistible.

"The trouble is," he said slowly, "that you don't even begin to understand what it all means. It isn't because we've lost the mine, it's the sheer dread of hurting you as I never thought to hurt a living creature that's got hold of me to the exclusion of every other feeling. That's why I'm quiet and unsociable—the dread of hurting the one I"—at his characteristic jibbing at the word she smiled inwardly—"simply worship, that's making me want nothing so much as to crawl into a hole and pull it in after me."

The hand holding hers contracted until, had she allowed herself, she could have cried out with the pain. Instead, she looked steadily out across the lake, self-defensively remote.

"Yet each man kills the thing he loves.
By each let this be heard,
The coward does it with a kiss,
The brave man with a sword,"

she quoted softly. Then, as she saw him flinch: "Unsheath the ancestral rapier, Roy; guess I'm able to bear anything—from you."

This last qualification, added not from cruelty, but as emphasising her own standpoint, was a twist to the barb at which his forehead contracted in a sudden spasm of pain. However, he had to go through with it.

"As soon as we get back to Cinnamon Creek, Nell," he said from between set teeth, "you and I will have to part."

However much it might have been anticipated, the announcement hit her like a blow.

"What's the big idea, Roy?" she said at last, her eyes fixed still immovably upon the lake. Her voice was steady, almost impersonal, but stealing a side glance at her profile he saw that her cheek had faded gradually to pallor; a little pulse he had not seen before throbbed at her temple.

"It's no 'idea,' Nell," he said bravely, "it's just a fixed principle."

For the first time she turned to look into his eyes.

"You use mighty big phrases for a pretty small job," she said quietly.

He felt that he had stood all he could be expected to stand. He was about to burst into torrential justification, when she withdrew her hand from his and laid it for a moment very gently over his mouth.

"Don't!" she said. "I'll say it much better than you, for while I'll get down to brass tacks, you'd only skirt around for fear of showing a glimpse of your heart. That's the Englishman's unforgivable sin, one you'd die rather than be guilty of. What you mean, but refuse to put into words, is that you'd prefer to spoil both our lives than to marry me on what you regard as sufferance."

Clear as was her perception, it covered only a half-truth. Wrongly, perhaps, but with absolute sincerity, he was convinced that without money or prospects his sense of dependence would weigh so heavily on his self-respect as to drive a wedge between their love.

As he did not speak:

“Has it ever occurred to you,” Nell went on in a small voice, “to ask yourself exactly how your new plans are going to effect me . . .?” At which concrete expression of his torment, momentarily his self-restraint broke down, and he beat the rock two or three times with the under part of his clenched fist.

“I know, I know, *I know*!” he cried. “That’s what I’ve been trying to tell you all along! That’s what it is that hurts!”

He saw the colour steal back to her face; because of her love and fine understanding no false sense of delicacy was going to stand between themselves and their happiness.

“So that, not only has Dacre stolen your claim,” she persisted, “but you’re going to throw me in with it.”

He said, hoarsely and conclusively:

“Dacre has beaten us, absolutely and irrevocably.”

It was the first sign in him of what she considered weakness. This, with the finality of his tone, goaded her.

“A man is never beaten till he’s dead,” she said, “and even then they may’ve only buried him on suspicion.”

With each sentence, with every argument she brought to bear, the more insistently he felt the necessity for renunciation. The sense of what he was losing swept over him in a wave of consummate hopelessness, her loveliness of body and spirit seemed to envelop him to the exclusion of all other desires than his need and longing for her. If he was to hold fast he knew that they must remain no longer together.

“Perhaps when I’ve had time to pull myself together,” he said, “the resuscitation may begin. At present I’m not only dead, but damned.”

At that her mood changed suddenly to anger. If he knew her so little, if his trust was so weak that he depended for happiness in the mere possession of money, then not only was he casting the pearl of her love into a cup of wine, but his very conception of it was a prostitution of the name. Her face flaming, she turned to him deliberately.

“Roy,” she said, “I want to ask you for the last time, does our engagement hold good?”

And with a sense almost of relief that his reply would end the tension, he answered with a deliberation equal to her own.

“It does *not*! . . . At some future time—God willing—if I make good I’ll come back to . . .”

She slipped from the rock to her feet, and commenced slowly to pick her way to the beach.

“However ‘good’ you make,” she said over her shoulder, “will make no difference. Once and for all time you’ve spoilt things.”

And Harry Pullen, crashing through the trees on to the shore, his arms filled with dead branches, yelled excitedly, and joyously:

“Wood! Wood! For the love of Mike bring some wood!”

CHAPTER XXII

Close upon the Canadian's heels followed Mr. Murrian and Tony, each hugging their load of fuel, which in the case of the latter consisted, surprisingly, of nothing but fresh green branches.

Roy regarded the trio uncomprehendingly. Why such violent haste for a fire? Also, in the name of sanity, why the living, sap-laden fuel?

Then from the skyline that bordered the stretch of lake to their right he was conscious of a low pulsating drone that was like the humming of some giant purposeful insect. At first so low in tone as almost to be indefinable, the sound obtruded gradually more insistently over the waters until, though muted still by distance, it seemed to dominate the quiet pensiveness of sun-bathed lake and the brooding majesty of the woods. He was aroused at last by Harry.

"For the love of Mike get a move on!" the Canadian shouted. "Get wood and keep on gettin' it! You too, Miss Nell," he added insistently.

Without staying to ask for reasons Nell set off at a quick trot over the shingle, to be followed, a moment later, by Roy.

Ten or fifteen yards within the trees was dead wood in plenty, bone-dry and brittle. When a moment later Roy emerged once more on to the shore he carried a huge armful. By this time a brisk fire was crackling, but nearer to the trees than usual, and but for the breeze that carried its pine-laden breath from the shore, sufficiently close to menace the woods. The first and most insistent law of the prospector is to obviate the danger of forest fires.

"You're taking a bit of a chance, aren't you?" Roy suggested to Harry, but the Canadian paused in his task of banking the leaping flames with fresh green branches to make a gesture that demanded silence, and then shaded his eyes to peer intently towards the far horizon.

Suddenly his body stiffened to a tensity that was as arresting as, unconsciously, it was dramatic. With outflung arm he pointed to the skyline.

"Here he comes, the old son of a gun!" he shouted. "Oh, hot dog! Hot dog!"

At that moment the American stepped out from the fringe of trees and throwing his load hastily on, the now thickly-smoking fire, he turned to his

tent. When he rejoined them he carried a pair of binoculars, which he focussed in the direction indicated. As he stood staring intently through the glasses Roy saw his face become charged with an expression of hardly repressed delight, his whole attitude indicating intense relief.

"It's a plane, all right!" he said as he lowered the glasses.

Harry Pullen, who had turned to pile still more green branches on to the now densely-smoking fire, nodded:

"Slim Peters from Cinnamon Creek," he confirmed, and turned to face Roy, who, fighting hard to maintain self-control, confronted him:

"An aeroplane from Cinnamon Creek?" the latter repeated incredulously.

"Making an aerial survey of the district," Harry Pullen explained, "and to report forest fires."[2] He arranged the additional fuel brought at that moment by Nell and Tony so as to create the greatest volume of smoke. "If we can only make a smudge big enough to attract his attention, I guess he'll come down to see what's goin' on!" he added.

"How will that help us?" Roy protested. "He can't land in the middle of the wood."

Harry grinned.

"No," he said, "but he can come down in the middle of the lake. Just take a peek through the glasses. . . . See the floats?" he enquired.

"A seaplane!" exclaimed Roy thus enlightened, and paused, overcome by the sudden prospect opened out by this literal visitation from the clouds.

"An air-liner," corrected Harry. "Slim Peters is going to carry a passenger back to Cinnamon Creek if he breaks every regulation in the Ministry of Air. That is," he amended with a trace of anxiety, "if he ever sees our smudge."

To Roy it seemed that under the Canadian's scientific treatment sufficient smoke was created already to screen a fleet of battleships, but Harry continued to call for more and yet more fuel. And while they laboured the drone of the seaplane became more and more insistent, the machine itself looming ever more distinct against the cloudless sky.

From a speck invisible except to the keenest sight it grew so that it could be distinguished quite easily, and from thence appeared literally to grow before their eyes. It was not long before they could distinguish the floats and the head and shoulders of the pilot.

Finally, with a rush and a roar, the seaplane swooped lower and still lower until, comparatively close at hand, it met the lake surface, to glide like a monstrous but graceful water-fowl to a point almost opposite the camp.

For the first time in Roy's experience the American seemed smitten with a certain measure of excitement, and was able to recognise in this the domination of the man's inherent fighting spirit.

In a life which before success came had been unusually hard and strenuous William Murrian had met defeat as many times, perhaps, as the average. He had been beaten by nature, by lack of capital, by enthusiasms unshared by his associates, by force of circumstances, though in general his doggedness and personality had managed to transform failure into victory. Even when defeat had been final and irrevocable the lesson learnt had been worth, almost, the cost of failure, for it was one of his favourite axioms that a man who does not learn by his mistakes don't deserve to make any.

It was only when frustration of his plans was caused either by cowardice, dishonesty or treachery that he had any resentment. Even then his anger was engendered less because of the failure than against its cause, and at such times he had never rested until in one way or another—and in the exaction of reprisals he was by no means tied to kid-glove methods—he had "made an even break of it."

In the present case the iron of potential failure had bitten more deeply than he had allowed to appear, and to this chagrin were several contributory causes. First, perhaps, was Dacre's almost unbelievable treachery towards Mr. Coniston, of the inner history of which the American had certain confirmatory knowledge he had not thought it necessary to disclose.

Following hot upon this injury to Roy came the events in Tom Long's restaurant. Strangely, perhaps, but considering his upbringing understandable, the American's indignation in this particular matter was focussed upon Dacre, the inactive participant, almost to the exclusion of Jake Brine, insulter of maidenhood and potential murderer. Brine was a 'breed, a yellow dog by nature preordained, and as such to be punished in much the same spirit as one deals with the irresponsible viciousness of a timber wolf; Dacre, on the other hand, was a member of the ruling race of Anglo-Saxondom, and thus a traitor to his order.

Then had come the jumping of the claim on Jackfish Lake which Roy had come so far to stake. According to the American's rough but workmanlike code these three injuries in themselves justified reprisals

which relied for their efficiency upon speed and accuracy in the use of lethal weapons.

Had come, then, the final insult. For Dacre to "put one over" a raw and inexperienced lad from the Old Country was one thing; to attempt the performance when the victim was associated with a hard-boiled American mining man was a belittlement that called for immediate and effective reply.

Probably the full humiliation suffered by William Murrian at the apparently decisive triumph of the enemy will never be divulged, for through it all he contrived to keep a stiff upper lip. Only Nell was able to read the sense of bitter defeat that lay beneath her father's usual easy-going manner, and even she could not realise its exact measure.

At the prospect, then, of a reversal of the position so unexpected and dramatic as to be entirely after his own heart, the flood-gates of his relief were opened. He literally quivered with an excitement he made only small efforts to suppress. Finally, hands held high above his head, his fingers snapping like castanets, he executed a few shuffling steps of some Southern Negro dance of triumph. This carried him close to the water's edge.

The seaplane, a beautiful but strangely incongruous modernism against a setting so primeval, was anchored but some two hundred yards from the beach. In his exalted state the American's voice would have carried half a mile.

"Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy!" he yelled standing so close to deep water that his boots threw up the spray in dancing showers.

"Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy!" which at the moment appeared to be the full extent of his repertoire.

The pilot's response was to launch his collapsible boat and paddle across the intervening space. From what he said afterwards the party was able to gather that the automatic pistol on the thwart beside him was merely a precautionary measure in case the gyrating figure on the beach proved actually as mad as from the distance he appeared.

Slim Peters proved to be a brown-faced veteran of the Canadian Air Force to whom the allure of flight was such that life would be insupportable without it. In common with many flying men he had the air of being surprised at nothing. Judging from his manner, to find a party of apparently civilised people, jettisoned and without means of departure, in a country hitherto unexplored and fifty miles from the nearest white man, might have been a matter of everyday occurrence.

“Welcome to our city,” said the American with considerable heartiness as the airman drew his boat up the beach.

The latter’s face was glowing as his eyes travelled from one to another of the party. It was noticeable, moreover, that they rested upon Nell for an infinitesimal fraction of time longer than upon the others. And in their depths as he did so was the light with which a man greets but one woman in his lifetime. Roy, standing close by, failed to perceive neither the glance nor its interpretation.

“You making a long stay in these parts, sir, or is it a picnic you’re at?” the airman enquired, advancing with outstretched hand towards the American.

“Say, Mr. Peters,” the latter greeted, “we sure are tickled to death to see you!”

Slim shook hands gravely all round. And Roy saw that he grasped Nell’s as though it had been something sacred.

His greeting of Roy was of the desultory fashion which is adopted by many Canadians towards those upon whom they wish to reserve judgment. His instinct told him how Nell stood with this stranger.

That this presentiment of future hostility was mutual was shown by Roy’s attitude in return. The glorious possibilities created by the airman’s advent were charged now with contingencies that were not glorious at all. He could not help recognising that his self-sacrificial attitude towards Nell had intruded into their relationship an element which it would not be easy to remove.

More serious than the injury to her pride was that, unwittingly, he had contrived to bruise the infinitely more precious fabric of her acceptance of their complete understanding. She was not sufficiently experienced to realise that in the event of his financial dependence it was no attitude of hers that would have galled him, but only his own, and that therein lay the point of cleavage.

He watched her narrowly as she exchanged greeting with Peters, noted the artistry with which that forceful personality held her hand only an instant longer than was necessary to transform ordinary courtesy to homage. At that moment her face was an enigma, yet though no man could have read encouragement there, nor any particular interest, Roy knew that in Slim Peters’s place his own heart would have beaten the faster.

“I’m sorry about it not being a real fire you’ve come down for, Mr. Peters,” observed the American. “It sure would have been a slice of luck to have been able to report one on your first patrol.” He grinned. “What about throwin’ a few sparks in among the woods?”

The airman laughed, his eyes straying to Nell.

“Who wants a forest fire, anyway?” he said mendaciously.

“Well, so long’s you’re satisfied,” conceded the American. “Though I was ready to burn the whole wood to get you here.”

The airman produced and lighted a cigarette.

“Why pick on me?” he demanded, and at the quaint term of speech, heard for the second time that day, Roy glanced instinctively with a half-smile at Nell, but she avoided his eyes.

“Because we want you to take a passenger back to Cinnamon Creek,” said the American.

Invariably is the airman an opportunist, in whose ability to turn an ephemeral condition to his own advantage lies the measure of his efficiency. In war Slim Peters had been what is known as an “ace.”

“Sure,” he said quietly, “I’d just love to.”

It was not the words, but the half-turn towards Nell with which they were accompanied wherein he made his mistake, and so doubled the number of his enemies present. As the American took up the challenge his mouth hardened appreciably.

“I said a passenger, not a passengeress,” he corrected curtly.

Quick to recognise the folly of giving offence in such a quarter, Slim stalled cleverly but unconvincingly.

“Anyone you say, sir,” he agreed. To add: “But why the need for rapid transit?”

At which Harry Pullen came into prominence.

“Because Jake Brine has jumped Mr. Murrian’s claims, swiped the canoes, and hit the breeze for Cinnamon Creek to register,” he explained, “But if you get a move on we’ll beat him to it. . . .” He thought for a moment, “Just about, anyway,” he qualified.

Watching intently, Roy saw the airman’s face stiffen to interest. Prolific fiction to the contrary, claim-jumping is sufficiently rare in the North for an

authentic case to cause sensation. And then, gradually, in that brief silence a look crept into Peters's eyes as though, dimly at first, but cumulatively, had come an idea it might prove beneficial to exploit. As he turned to Harry, however, his face was once more under control.

"Jack Brine was always a yeller dog, anyway," he agreed. "Some day he'll go loco, and then he'll be handed a pill that'll cure any sickness bar *rigor mortis*. When'd he leave here?" he went on to ask, and on being told, turned deliberately to the American.

"Then we'd better get a move on," he said decisively. "Who's my passenger?"

Murrian considered a moment, and then with his usual generous acceptance of facts, turned to Roy. "As it's your claim, I guess you'd better do the registering," he said. And in so doing divulged the information Harry Pullen had been careful to suppress.

Harry had known Slim since, as he put it, "he was knee-high to a grasshopper," an intimacy which left no room for illusion. He knew that under the airman's rather casual exterior lay a strength of purpose which admitted of but few limitations in the way of scruple, though in fairness he admitted that however broad his views on dealing with opposition, he was equally willing to accept his own methods from the other side.

There is a type of personal combat favoured in lumber-camps, known as an "all-in scrap." In this is contained—by agreement—neither rounds, rules, nor redress in the event of permanent bodily injury. One battles as and how one pleases, with victory as the sole objective. In his personal antagonisms Slim's acceptance of the "all-in" method was as automatic as it was whole-hearted. It was up to the other fellow to take the gloves off and get busy.

As matters stood the airman made no demur at the choice. Harry would have been easier in his mind if he had.

Slim took brisk opportunity of the time it took her father to find some documents necessary for registration, to talk to Nell. She had been standing apart from the others, taking small apparent interest in what transpired. She greeted his approach with a slight but perceptible smile, and the easy unself-consciousness of American girlhood.

"You may not look much like an angel, Mr. Peters," she said as he came up, "but the way you dropped from the skies just in time to help us out makes me think you must be one."

“Well, I guess what you don’t know about angels there’s not one of ’em could tell you,” said Slim quietly.

Taking it by and large there is not much harm in implying that a girl is of celestial origin, and in the ordinary course Nell would have accepted the implication merely as a rather vapid compliment and let it go at that. In this instance, however, there was a quiet assurance of mutual understanding in the airman’s voice that she very definitely resented.

“I wonder does helping us out give you the right to say that?” she said impartially. From the corner of her eye she saw Roy approaching, and, woman-like, smiled on Slim in a fashion that considerably nullified the snub.

“Say, Miss Murrian,” said Slim fervently, “I wouldn’t say nothing to hurt your feelings to be made Governor-General with the pay an’ allowances of King George thrown in.” He stopped to stare aggressively at Roy, who came up at that moment.

And a little devil of mischief seized on Nell as fertile ground for sowing trouble. In belittling her womanhood by pleading with Roy she had received what in her inexperience she mistook for mortal hurt and, because she loved him, it was her instinct to show him that other men were not indifferent to her.

“Do *you* think I’m an angel?” she enquired as he joined them.

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[2] A patrol for this purpose actually is in operation from “Cinnamon Creek.”—AUTHOR

CHAPTER XXIII

Roy looked at her steadily and gravely for a moment, trying to interpret an attitude so alien to all his conception of her. But instead of returning his look with her old serenity he could discover only a coquettish demand for admiration. And that Peters should be witness, if not the direct object of this new mood was intolerable.

"No, I don't think you're an angel," he said coolly.

"Mr. Peters does," said Nell in an untutored endeavour to drive the lesson home.

"Mr. Peters spends quite a lot of his time in the clouds, I believe," Roy said in the Oxford drawl he used only upon occasions, and which both to the Canadian and Australian is so insufferably offensive. "Though presumably it is not often he flies so high as he has done to-day," he added.

In his manner, no less than in the words, was belittlement so flagrant as to have penetrated a skin far more impervious to challenge than that of Slim Peters, who was a fighter by instinct and training.

"I guess it don't need a chirper[3] to teach me anything about flying," he said with a slow deliberation that in itself was insult.

Roy flushed. It was not the first time he had been assailed with this taunt, and he had not learnt to like it. However, he had no intention of entering into a brawl before Nell, so he put an end to recrimination by turning to her and holding out his hand.

"There's Mr. Murrian waiting," he said quietly, "and the sooner we start the better—that is if Mr. Peters is ready," he amended with more civility than he felt.

Deep down Nell knew that Roy's implied rebuke was not wholly undeserved. She realised that she had been guilty of a sacrifice of dignity, which, had he been of sufficiently fine grain, might have cheapened her in the eyes of Peters. And even realising this, she increased her own desolation by turning an indifferent shoulder to Roy, and speaking to the airman.

" 'We don't want to lose you,' Mr. Peters," she said with inviting shyness, " 'but we think you ought to go.' "

When, from the corner, of her eye she saw Roy wince painfully, her heart missed a beat. Here was a new and apparently potent weapon all ready to hand—the power to make him jealous. For the first time in all her serene young life she realised the potentialities of her womanhood.

That her heart should have been a chaos of contradiction is understandable. With the airman's advent the position had executed a dramatic *volte-face* back to the old order. Once Roy had registered the claims, he would be at her side again, pleading to marry her. Which, of course, though it was all she asked of life, she would refuse irrevocably to do.

But in the meanwhile Slim Peters was beaming on her, obviously pleased with the impression he had created.

"I'll be right there in Cinnamon Creek, waiting for you," he said, and she saw the tan of his face deepen as he spoke. He was all ablaze at the prospect of seeing her again, and as oblivious of Roy as if Nell Murrian and himself were the only two people living.

"That will be nice," said Nell, and for the first time turned directly to Roy. It had been in her mind to say something provocative, but his face was as hurt and as little understanding as that of a child unjustly whipped, and because she loved him she could not go on with it. Instead, she stepped down from the raised tree-root upon which she had been standing, and going over to him, put her hand in his.

"Good-bye, Roy, and good luck," she said. And added, almost under her breath, "Come back soon."

Quietly as she spoke, Slim Peters overheard, and that same instant all the gladness fled from his face. Perhaps with the intention of overshadowing Roy's personality with his own, he jerked suddenly towards them. Before he could speak he was checked by a hail from the American.

"Say," the latter yelled, "are you three there on a ninety-nine years' lease? The boat's been waiting so long it's a museum piece by now."

Abruptly then, without further glance at Nell, the airman turned away towards the beach. But when, seeing that the others were clustering about the boat that already Harry Pullen had launched into deep water, Roy made as though to kiss Nell good-bye, she warded him off with outstretched hand, gently but definitely.

"You sure have the noive," she said, in the accents of a New York gamin, but in spite of her lightness he saw that she was in earnest.

“But . . .” he began, more hurt and perplexed than before.

She broke in:

“That’s all finished with,” she said with a briskness which cost her more than she ever told him. “Besides, Mr. Peters is waiting for you.”

“Damn Mr. Peters!” said Roy. Whereupon she broke into laughter. With her head thrown back to display the loveliness of her throat, golden-brown now from the sun, and the perfection of teeth gleaming milk-white in contrast to the scarlet of her lips, it came to him that but for the mocking tenderness of her eyes belying that chaste Goddess’s rejection of love, she would have been an artist’s dream of the Young Diana. For in spite of all he did not doubt that she loved him.

And at the sound of her laughter Slim Peters paused in the act of stepping into the boat to glance with startled longing in her direction, and when he perceived that she had forgotten his very existence, he cursed under his breath. As he took his seat in the boat his face was not pretty to see.

“Here, you!” he yelled, trading adroitly on the strength of his position, “you comin’ aboard—or aren’t you?”

There was no help for it; Roy had to go. Before turning away, avid for some sign of relenting, he shot one quick glance at Nell, but her smile in return was only one of maddening friendliness.

The American watched the pair narrowly as they arranged themselves in the boat. Slim was a primitive soul, whose desires and methods of obtaining them were equally elemental, and the strength with which Nell gripped his imagination precluded any possibility of concealment. To her father at all events the situation as it had so suddenly developed was as an open book, and it disturbed him more than a little.

He had come to regard Roy with an affection that had little or nothing to do with the saving of Nell’s life, for personal attraction is independent of gratitude. Apart from that liking, moreover, subsequent events had given him considerable respect for the boy’s pluck, and, considering his inexperience, the business-like way he had set about his mission. Hitherto he had had little to do with Englishmen, but if Roy and Tony Clarges were typical examples, there was nothing wrong with the breed.

Because of greater familiarity with the type his summing-up of Slim Peters had been more swift and accurate, with the result that, except in a strictly literal sense, he “had no use for him.” Even as a medium for transport he hated the sense of obligation entailed, but comforted himself

with the reflection that this could be nullified by a substantial payment in cash, or, alternatively, a few shares in the mine. In the meantime there was going to be nothing doing between Slim and Nell.

He had a fairly accurate suspicion, too, of the new and uncomfortable position between the lovers. Following the claim-jumpers' exit he had watched Roy closely, and was convinced that, despite a gallant attempt at concealment, the strain under which he so obviously laboured was caused not wholly by the failure of his mission. Remembering the almost diffident courtesy with which, until the new claim was rediscovered, Roy had treated Nell, he was "pretty darn certain what the game was."

And while verbally he would have called Roy a fool for his pains, actually this further proof of quixotism was by no means displeasing.

He watched the boat rather grimly until it reached the seaplane, saw the two embark, and noted the desultory way in which Slim threw over a leather coat and helmet to his passenger. Then the boat was hauled aboard, the engine started, and with a sudden lurch forward the 'plane skimmed the water. A moment later it had risen, and the journey to Cinnamon Creek begun. It was getting on for late afternoon now; the short twilight of the North would not be long delayed.

Flying was no new experience to Roy. His 'Varsity career had been interrupted in 1917, when he was eighteen, for a spell of war training, and the following year he saw service in France as a subaltern in the Field Artillery. More than once in that time he had obtained permission to accompany a pilot over the German lines, and the French landscape as seen from the air remained vividly impressed upon his memory.

But that orderly checker-board of fields and roads and hedges, all greens and yellows and browns and greys, had been nothing like this. That view, in which the signs of military occupation provided the irony, had been a pattern the fabric of which had been woven by a thousand years of civilisation. Here, however, was the raw material untouched by the loom of time.

As far as the eye could see stretched illimitable forest, dull dark olive shading to a deep dun brown. And, curving splendidly across it, at curiously regular intervals broadening into lakes, swung the Grassy River, so that the whole effect was as of a necklace of uncut crystal threaded on a slender silver chain dropped carelessly upon a dark green carpet.

They were flying east, so that they missed the full glory of the setting sun, though its influence was present in the mother-o'-pearl pensiveness of

the sky. Rearward, however, was as though he gazed into the heart of a furnace of molten gold and rubies, that overflowing, had stained the whole western sky to glory, and jealous of a former miracle, had transformed the water of the lakes to wine.

Remembering the incredible contrast between civilisation as seen from above and this wild untrammelled vision, he attempted to picture the aspect of this veritable Land of Promise a few hundred years hence; its forests long since dismembered, their legacy of rich leaf-loam disciplined to the nutrition of corn-land and orchards; crisscrossed with roads; the rapids harnessed to man's need of light and heat; the lakes a pleasure ground; and, where not insulted by mineshafts, bordered by glaring white hotels. And, loving the North warmly, like all must who once have seen it, the picture gave him a touch of sadness.

He came back to earth by the sudden knowledge that the 'plane was descending. Throughout the journey no word or signal had been exchanged between pilot and passenger, no unusual thing when the roar of the engine renders communication so difficult.

Apart from this silence, however, he had been conscious of an atmosphere of antagonism. From the first moment of the journey Peters had stared stolidly and immovably ahead, his whole attitude rigid and uncompromising. Not once had he shown the slightest interest in the well-being or comfort of his passenger. So far as the human back is able to convey expression—which is more than a little—Slim's back showed definite hostility.

They swooped lower and lower, the lake over which they flew seeming to hurtle upwards to meet them like the roof of some gargantuan elevator. And then to his surprise Roy discovered a moment later that the lake was streaming with incredible speed immediately beneath them. Finally he saw the water on either side parted into twin feathers of foam by their floats, and they were skimming the surface. Eventually they came to rest.

"Engine conked out?" enquired Roy, whose ignorance of anything in connection with machinery was abysmal.

Peters half turned in his seat.

"No," he said curtly, "but I've a kind of hunch that one of the starboard wing strut socket's given out. Maybe you won't mind launching the boat an' just paddlin' round to have a look."

Glad to be of use, though impatient of the delay, Roy acted on the suggestion. He found as far as his untutored eyes could discover that all was tight and shipshape.

"Looks all right to me," he said, commencing to paddle back to his place —and found himself looking into the muzzle of an automatic.

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[3] *Chirper.* Slang word for sparrow; also used as a term of depreciation for Englishmen in reference to the birds having been introduced into Canada from Great Britain.

CHAPTER XXIV

"Get to hell away from this bus," said Peters.

Instantaneously Roy twisted his paddle to check his progress, for there was that in the Canadian's attitude which seemed to render it advisable to keep his distance.

"What exactly are you talking about?" he demanded quietly.

Peters expectorated with vicious adroitness into the lake.

"Guess you've no through ticket on this packet," he said. Then, as Roy propelled the boat with one savage stroke towards the 'plane, he pressed the trigger of his automatic.

The bullet whistled viciously within a couple of inches of Roy's ear. The Canadian was too expert with a gun for the miss to have been accidental, though at the time Roy accepted it as a singularly lucky escape. Wisely, then, he back-paddled.

"This locality ain't exactly salubrious for your health," Peters rasped. "You'd best beat it while the goin's good," and spat once more with extreme deliberation.

There was something of calculated purpose in the action that made Roy recognise the uselessness of argument. Nevertheless, he had no intention of allowing himself to be dumped into the middle of a lake like ashes from a chute without having something to say about it.

"What exactly is your motive for this exhibition of hooliganism?" he said with such cold contempt that Peters turned on him viciously.

"Aw, cut out that Oxford and Cambridge college bunk!" he said savagely. "You may get away with it with—some fellers—but it only gives me a pain in the neck."

"Even a pain in the neck," pronounced Roy impartially, "doesn't justify you acting like a Hun and a blackguard."

"Look at here, now!" As he leaned over the side of the seaplane the Canadian's face was drawn into lines of elemental savagery. "That sort o' talk don't cut any ice. What I saw 'way back there on the beach made me know that if I go ahead and help you register those claims, you're goin' to

end up a pretty rich guy." He waited a moment, and then as Roy did not speak. "Did I get it right or didn't I?" he enquired.

Roy's hand closed more tightly over the paddle, and his jaw came a little more into prominence.

"If you'll get into this boat," he said from between set teeth, "we'll continue the discussion of my personal affairs on the nearest beach," a challenge at which the airman regarded him for a moment wide-eyed.

"What for d'you think I'd take a chance in a scrap when I've got you just where I want you right now?" he demanded in genuine astonishment.

Roy returned his stare with an equal amazement at the point of view expressed.

"Because," he said deliberately, "I didn't think there was a man on God's earth so yellow he wouldn't rather fight than quit."

The insult got home, for he saw a dull flush mount to the Canadian's lean face. But it had no beneficial effect. Rather the contrary, for Slim's hand strayed purposefully to the starting lever.

"Say, you make me tired!" he said. "After I'd downed a Jerry in France d'you think I handed him a nice new machine so's he'd have a chance of doin' the same to me? Not on your life I didn't! If he was very dead he got planted all present an' correct. If he wasn't he went to the coop for the duration. In any case he was no more worry—just like you won't be."

Roy shrugged his shoulders.

"But this doesn't happen to be war," he said, at which the airman raised his eyebrows.

"No?" he said at last. "Well, p'raps you're right—maybe it's more what you'd call an enforced armistice."

The engine began to throb convulsively. "Well—see you later," he shouted above the roar as the seaplane began to move through the water.

Any reply Roy made he knew to be inaudible, but he continued to search his repertoire of abuse until the 'plane was only a speck against the now fast darkening skies. If he could have laid hands on Peters there would have been a fight compared to which one of those "all-in" scraps of the lumber-camps would have appeared a mere girlish squabble.

It was not long, however, before the tumult and the shouting of his anger died in the bleak realisation of his position, stranded in the middle of a lake

of whose name and position he was ignorant, and with neither food nor shelter in sight. His only gleam of comfort lay in that at least he had regained a known area, and that, sooner or later, he might be fairly sure of rescue. The providential release from an uncharted country which was to provide such a spectacular last-minute triumph had fizzled monstrously to a disaster he recognised as irretrievable. Twice had he been within a hair's breadth of fortune. Now, for the second time, he had lost all; money, his father's good name, and the woman he loved—jockeyed out of them by as callous and barefaced an example of treachery as ever had been perpetrated.

Far ahead, silhouetted against the glowing twilight with the remote detachment that is the very spirit and essence of the North, he could distinguish one of the small islands with which nearly all those lakes are studded, and for this he made. There at least he would be able to light a fire, for in spite of the heat by day these northern nights strike cold. There was just a thousand to one chance, too, of a prospector's hut there, where, occupied or not, would be food, for that is the law of the North. The sole stipulation is that no more shall be consumed than will provide food for the day, that cooking utensils shall be cleaned and replaced, and word left of what has been taken, and by whom.

When after twenty minutes the moon had swung over the far background of the woods to spangle the lake with silver, he asked himself if it was only his imagination that, at irregular intervals, the dark mask of the island was punctured by a pin-point of light. As he drew nearer he grew more certain that, however instantaneously drenched by the surrounding darkness, assuredly that light was there.

Strangely, however, the assurance went little to lift the burden of his depression. There was something about that intermittent flickering which puzzled rather than cheered him; for it had neither the warmth nor the invitation that is broadcast by the cheery glow of a prospector's fire.

Though intermittent, the gleam was altogether too staple for that, being steady, and, as it were, all of one texture. It was as if a shade, held steadily before a lighted lamp, was only occasionally withdrawn and almost instantaneously replaced.

Then, clear across the water came the sound of a chorus, sung raucously by a single voice. Though the words were convivial, there was nothing spontaneous or of good cheer in the rendering. The voice was aggressive, and to Roy, supremely unattractive; nor were its accents those of an Anglo-Saxon.

Ceasing paddling for a moment in order to listen, he recognised that here, on the lonely island upon which he hoped to land, was an example of the effect of "home-brew," that substitute for whisky made from raisins, prunes, or apples, the effect of which consumed raw from distillation is far worse than from spirit properly matured.

Before making his presence known, then, he decided on some small investigation. Within measurable distance of the beach he turned, and followed the coastline a few hundred yards before landing.

He found the beach wider than those to which he was accustomed, ranging from firm hard shingle at the water's edge to heavy serrated sand nearer to the trees. Hard going, perhaps, but muffling to the footsteps.

He followed the water-line until, a few yards through the trees at the top of the slope, he was aware of the ray of light which even as he watched was blotted out, only to reappear for a brief instant a moment later. And all the while that raucous drinking song shattered the cool stillness of the pine-laden air:

> So we'll *just* 'ave one more . . . leet-le *drink*,
> And den we'll *all* . . . go 'ome.
> I wanter *buy* . . . a leet-le *rye*,
> But *I* can't drink a . . . *lone*.
> *Down* in the val-*lee*, there I *want* to roam;
> So we'll *just* hav' one mor leet-le *drink*,
> An' den we'll *all* . . . go 'ome!

Soft-footed he began to mount the narrow strip of beach, so intent upon his investigation he did not notice the obstacle in his way until he found himself sprawling full length on the sand. He sat up, cursing and rubbing his lacerated shins.

A moment later he was bending over a small object, covered carefully with a tarpaulin. Pulling this aside, he found the stern-engine of a canoe, complete with a large tin of gasoline.

He stood still for a moment, but the sound of his fall had not penetrated the strident voice of the vocalist. Reinforced now by other voices of equally unprepossessing quality, the chorus roared out louder than before.

He replaced the covering and continued up the slope. Arrived at the fringe of trees, he was not long in discovering the origin of that intermittent triangle of light.

It was one of the "permanent" camps used as a trapper's headquarters, canvas or tarpaulin stretched over a triangular framework attached to an eighteen-inch high foundation of logs, and which, even in winter, and when reinforced by snow, provide as warm a shelter as the ingenuity of man has yet devised.

Noiseless on the soft carpet of pine-needles, Roy made his way round to the far side of the "shack," where by a stroke of good fortune he discovered a hole in the tarpaulin. With considerable caution he went down on his hands and knees, and looked through.

At what he saw he fell back on his haunches with a cry that only some lightning instinct of caution stifled on his lips. Like the flash of a calcium flare it came upon him that at this last minute of the eleventh hour the Lord had delivered the enemy to his hand.

There they were; Brine, Oulette, and Le Fevre, with a stranger ladling profusely from the bucket of home-brew at their feet. Brine was the farthest from Roy, swaying unsteadily from side to side to the measure of the chorus, so that sometimes his body obscured the narrow V of the tent opening, while at others the light of the two candles shone through clear across the lake.

They were unwashed, unshaven, and dishevelled. For the moment they were hilarious with the half-maudlin, half-menacing exuberance from which those experienced in the ways of the Indian half-breed take warning, for, swayed by alcohol, it rests on the turn of a word which road their temper will travel. To the fourth generation it should be forbidden to supply the 'breed with potent drink, for whichever way it affects them is equally uncertain and dangerous.

The stranger, who evidently was the host, was a fat little half-breed whose enormous purple face was scored with a network of wine-coloured veins like a map with rivers. That the claim-jumpers should have no diffidence in discussing their affairs before him surprised Roy considerably, but that he was in their confidence was obvious.

Dacre was there too, sober, and very much afraid. Even the film-hero elegance of his especially tailored prospector's clothing looked rumpled and dejected, as though it had begun to lose faith in the wearer's capacity to do justice to its rakishness. Although he was clean and shaven, he seemed to carry these marks of civilisation almost with an air of apology, and as if afraid that the contrast they provided against the matted grimness of his confederates might be cause of offence. It was clear that out here in the wilds whatever dominion he had over his associates was distinctly nullified.

They wanted to drink, and they drank, with the result that things had come to lose their significance—including any sense of time. What matter to-morrow if to-day be sweet? "That bunch" on the claim were safe enough; left till called for, as it were.

So we'll just 'ave one more . . . leet-le *drink*,
An' then we'll *all*-l-l . . . go 'ome.
I wanter *buy* . . . a leet-le *rye*-e-e,
But *I* can't drink *alone*-e-e.
Down in the val-*lee* . . . there *I* long to *roam-m-m*;
So we'll *just* 'ave one more leet-le drink-k-k,
An' then we'll *all* . . . go 'ome!

The chorus, howled in dreadful unison, tin cups held arm-high with evil-smelling contents dripping promiscuously, blasted Dacre into shivering, white-faced silence, dreading to what next the half-breeds would turn for diversion.

Suddenly Brine, struck with some irresponsible impulse of inebriety turned to him, his pannikin in mid-air:

"What for you look like dat?" he demanded, gazing tenaciously at nothing.

Dacre shied like a startled colt.

"Like what, old chap?" he stammered placatingly.

Brine turned his bloodshot eyes from vacancy in a more or less successful attempt to focus his chief.

"Like a—like a—sick caribou," he said, and indeed, with his long face drawn longer yet by physical apprehension and thwarted desire for action, and which had the additional effect of lending his eyes the peculiar detached stare which in certain temperaments is a sure sign of mental strain, the Englishman's resemblance to that animal was almost ludicrous. So much so that the three other 'breeds broke into hoarse yells of laughter.

As though apologising for forgetting, however momentarily, the business of the day, Brine took a hasty swig at his cup, and then leered across at his host.

" 'E no good sport," he pronounced with alcoholic depreciation. " 'E no take a lil drink. 'E no want us to visit you; you le bon Jules, who for fren's 'ave always le grande welcome." He broke off to assimilate a further supply of "welcome." " 'E say, if you call on le bon Jules you get sowsed; then you

no go to le Crik[4] like what we arranged, an' to beat that goddam Americaine it is necessary to go queek." He poured the dregs of his home-brew on to the floor, as is the custom, and leaned forward to replenish his cup. " 'E got cold feet!" he pronounced contemptuously. "What for should we make haste? What matter if we not registaire for munce and munce?" His expression changed gradually from truculence to a grin of content as he glanced across at his companions. "An' in the meanwhile we ver' 'appy with le bon Jules," he pronounced. His eyes wandered back to Dacre. " 'Ow you tink dat bunch get away till we send for 'em? You tink dey fly 'ome, yes?" he demanded.

The lanky Le Fevre indicated approval of the point of view expressed.

"We put one over dat goddam Anglais on de Jackfish Lake Claim, an' we beat de 'ole bunch on dis one," and broke into a little improvised chorus. He seemed to find it pleasing, for he repeated it several times. "Dere's no need to 'urry, and dere's no need to worry," he hummed. And then, catching sight of Dacre's gloomy, apprehensive face: "Mistaire Dacre be more 'appy if 'e take a lil drink."

"I'd rather not, if you don't mind, old thing," Dacre stammered.

Brine, who once having succeeded in obtaining the correct focus, seemed to be reluctant to remove his gaze from the Englishman, repeated his question,

" 'Ow you tink dey get 'ome?" he demanded truculently. "You tink dey fly?"

Behind Dacre's smile was a goaded fury that he was too much afraid to show. Fearful to what lengths the uncertain temper of alcohol would carry them, he was out for conciliation at all costs.

"My suggestion was that we should have a good time *after* we'd registered," he said. "Then we should be certain it was all right."

"You tink dey fly 'ome?" reiterated Brine, who appeared to consider the question the high-water mark of humour.

At this the squat Oulette, inert and snoring hitherto, awakened to an annoyance of Dacre's attitude. At no time had he any understanding of the Anglo-Saxon population of his native Dominion, of which the British-born were by far the most objectionable. Driving home as it did an implied superiority, Dacre's abstinence in face of the prevailing license was additional offence. Now he wouldn't even answer a civil question.

Determined inflamedly that he should do both—drink and reply—he lurched to his feet, tin pannikin in hand.

"You dink with me, yes?" he said dangerously.

Brine looked up, assimilated the position, and leered into Dacre's face—now paler than ever.

"You tink dey fly 'ome?" he persisted.

Roy saw Dacre's eyes waver timorously from one to the other of the 'breeds, of whom for the moment Brine was the least dangerous only because he held Dacre in too much contempt to regard him as serious opposition. Oulette, on the other hand, was out for trouble. Here there were no hundred per cent. Canadians to butt in on their own side. The Englishman would be an ideally responsive subject upon whom to work off some of the race-bitterness which years of taken-for-granted inferiority has engendered in so many of his kind.

Interpreting his mood, Dacre's heart turned to water. Instinctively his eyes moved to the doorway of the shack. If he could get away somewhere and hide—out in the lake, say—perhaps they would fall asleep, and have forgotten when they awakened all that had transpired.

That furtive look did not escape Roy. It was a pity to leave just when things seemed likely to become interesting, but once the scene of operations was shifted to the open air, his difficulties would be enormously increased. In the event of discovery, of course, he could resign himself to a final losing-out on the claims. He did not dwell upon what would become of himself.

So he stood not upon the order of his going.

It took him, perhaps, three minutes to locate the 'breeds' canoe—those belonging to his own party would, he suspected, have been sunk as evidence too compromising to retain. Near it was another canoe belonging, obviously, to Jules, the stern of which, not being blunted to provide for the attachment of an engine, was no source of danger, though as additional precaution he thought it wise to confiscate the paddles.

He lugged the engine across the intervening space, and when he had floated the canoe, clamped it to the stern—a matter of only half a minute's work. By the side of the tarpaulin were the paddles which, together with the tin of gasoline, he made a second journey to retrieve.

A moment later he had pushed off into deep water, where in any case he was safe.

He gave the crank of the engine a sharp turn. Nothing happened. He worked at it for a couple of minutes, and then, from half-way down the slope that led to the shack, he heard shouts and yells. Without looking up he gave the starting handle one sharp, desperate turn—and immediately came the longed-for throb, and the water churned with the propeller. The canoe moved forward.

Only then did he look up, and when he saw what transpired his face was a study of mingled incredulity and laughter.

Dacre was bounding down the slope in long-strided terror. Twenty yards back, one behind the other in blaspheming hilarity, streamed Oulette, who led the field, followed by Brine and Le Fevre. In the shack doorway, holding his sides with sheer enjoyment of the sight of an Englishman in full flight before men of his own mixed colour, was Jules.

With the sound of Roy's engine, however, they stopped in their tracks as if they had been shot. For a moment they stood spellbound. Then, ignoring Dacre—who, breathing thankfulness at the diversion, turned off into the woods to his right—with a howl of consternation they rushed down to the beach. By this time Roy was fifty yards or so from the shore, and going strong. He gave them a cordial wave of the hand.

"I'll give your love to the Registrar!" he promised.

They howled at him like wolves, and dashed for the other canoe. Four strong and skilful paddlemen might still have a sporting chance of catching even a petrol-driven canoe.

A further howl made Roy aware that they had realised the difficulty of paddling without paddles.

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[4] *Le Crik.* The French-Canadian corruption for the Creek, i.e. Cinnamon Creek.

CHAPTER XXV

With but one short break, Roy chugged along steadily throughout the whole of that night.

The interval happened when, noticing a camp fire on the lake shore, he turned aside and rustled a meal from the prospectors whose camp it was, and in answer to whose curious enquiries he stated, quite accurately, that he was returning to Cinnamon Creek for supplies. Apart from this they found him rather stupid in answering their questions. However, with traditional hospitality, they gave him food sufficient to last until he could reach Pickerel Landing, his own provisions for the journey having carelessly—and fictitiously—been left behind at one of the portages.

The next three days he travelled irksomely, but at undiminished pace, snatching odd hours of sleep only at such times as nature refused to permit further liberties.

During the whole of this time he was tortured by the thought that, discovering that Jake Brine and his associates had not returned to Cinnamon Creek, Slim Peters would have registered the claims for himself. As Roy interpreted the airman's fiery shrewdness, this, indeed, would appear to be his probable line of action. Judged from more angles than one, it would be the wisest course; one that his official position as a Government servant would by no means preclude him from adopting. Just as there are more ways of killing a dog than by hanging, so there were more ways of reaping the benefit of a group of gold mines than by personal registration, of which an understanding with friends to do it for one is not the least convenient. Nor, by reason of the "Lobstick" being the first claim on a hitherto uncharted lake, would the absence of exact map references stand in his way. There being no adjoining properties under other ownership, the roughest possible chart would suffice.

By the time he reached the humid desolation of Pickerel Landing he had been without food for twelve hours, had obtained sleep only in odd snatches, and was exhausted in body and mind. He pulled in to the jetty, and made his way to the bunk-house to find that the sturgeon fishers had just landed a boatload of the catch, and thus he had the best meal since leaving Cinnamon Creek.

The room where he ate was really the kitchen of the shack, divided from the store only by a coarse curtain over the communicating doorway. It was just as he was finishing that he heard a heavy footfall clump into the store from the waste land outside and a hoarse voice render the call that summoned attention. Then from some mysterious region of his own, Seth Lee, the bunk-house proprietor, lurched through the kitchen to serve his customer.

"Howdy, Red?" he greeted.

"Howdy, boss! Cake o' Macdonald's chewin'," the hoarse voice came back. And then: "Seen the *Cree Indian*?"

"Ain't in yet," came the terse answer.

"Sure she ain't in yet." The hoarse voice vibrated with suppressed sensation. "Sure she ain't in yet. How should she be in yet?"

" 'Cos it ain't time fer her t'be in yit," said Seth unencouragingly.

"An' she'll be later in then the time she's doo to be in at." The husky voice was sunk in an attempt to stimulate curiosity.

Came to Roy the sound as of a small package tossed on to the counter.

"Twenty-five cents," said Seth. "Any snuff?"

"Yeah, a small carton. An' for why will she not be in 'til later than the time doo for her to be in at?" said the husky one, and Roy was assailed suddenly with a rather home-sick reminiscence of the patter of "cross-talk" as heard at the lesser music halls of his own country.

"Yuh mean why will the *Cree Indian* be late?" enquired the uninspired Seth.

"Yeah. For why will she be later than her doo—"

"Yuh can search me. Maybe becos she's stores aboard I'm badly needin'," broke in the pessimistic Seth. "Or maybe she's sunk wi' all hands," he added more hopefully.

Perhaps it was that following this picture of the might-have-been, his own tidings appeared dull, that the husky voice lost something of its confidence.

"Nope! She ain't sunk. She gotter tow."

"Yeah?" came back the uninterested voice of Seth.

“Yeah, she gotter tow,” said Red. And then, with some small return of his former impressiveness, “She towin’ Slim an’ his airplane.”

Roy sat up straight in his chair. The seaplane broken down! His heart throbbed to a more hopeful beat. Then, calculating the days since the ’plane left the Lobstick Claim, his spirits fell again as he realised the strong probability of the seaplane having returned to its base, and that the breakdown had not occurred until the beginning of its second journey. He listened intently for what was to follow, infinitely more interested, it would appear, than the stoic for whose benefit the tidings were released.

“Old Slim must ha’ had a whale o’ a bad time,” the hoarse voice went on. “Tossed about on the Saskatchewan River for days an’ days an’ days ’e was.”

That sounded pretty hopeful. Even allowing for the exaggeration which must be allowed to such a disciple of histrionic effect as Red, the chances were that the ’plane had remained derelict for some considerable time. A more hopeful note still was sounded when he remembered how scanty was the traffic on the stretch of river northward from Cinnamon Creek, and that the *Cree Indian* passed only twice weekly.

But in the meanwhile Red was still talking.

“Tossed around like a cork ’e was, an’ damn lucky to so be tossed. Ingin’ giv’ out when ’e was flyin’ high, ’way back over the woods, an’ ’e had t’slope down at just such an angle as would ’it th’river.” For a moment the excitement of the narrative was forgotten in characteristic local pride. “Say, that bo’ must be some flyer! He made th’grade all right, but I don’t reckon as there’s many of them there airmen as would ’ave.” The sense of drama reasserted itself. “If he hadn’t made it,” Red added with a kind of baffled relish, “yuh wouldn’t ’ave bin able to tell what was left of ’im from a hole in th’ground!”

“This is my busy day,” remarked Seth.

“Busy nothin’! Yuh gotter listen.” By no means was Red to be baulked of the audience of the only man he knew on the Landing who had not already heard, and elaborated upon, the news. “It’s a hunner forty miles from here to th’ Creek, an’ Slim came down pretty well middle way, with a leanin’ towards th’ Landin.’ Bill Judd of th’ *Cree Indian* sighted th’ plane an’ said if Slim’d wait there till he came back he’d tow him to the Creek. Slim said no—he wasn’t a flyin’ boat, he only had floats, an’ if there was

bad water an' his wings dipped he'd wreck. He said for Billy to throw him ropes an' tow him to th' Landin', but that 'e'd 'ave to go mighty slow."

"Guess there wouldn't be no trouble in goin' slow, all right," came back the pessimistic voice of Seth. "Anything like a head 'o steam in them chicken-wire bilers 'ud blow that grand-uncle of Noah's Ark from hell to breakfast."

"Billy said," Red's voice dovetailed passionately into Seth's concluding syllable, "that if he was to lose time Slim'd 'ave to pay for it, an' Slim said for Billy to put in his claim to th' Gov'ment. They made an even break at last by Slim payin' ten dollars cash an' Billy surrenderin' all rights to th' superannuation allowance for services rendered he wouldn't get from Ottowa. Guess th' procession'll arrive latish to-night."

Any further news that Red might or might not have had to impart was smothered in the storekeeper's indictment of Billy Judd for retarded delivery of stores.

Very deliberately, then, Roy put his knife and fork together, rose from his chair, and stretched long and luxuriously. Reviewing the situation in all its new bearings he knew that, unless by some fresh intervention of a fate more than usually malign, he had won. Yet he was conscious of no feeling of elation.

For more than a week his nerves had been subjected to a strain which had not failed to take its toll. Crisis had followed crisis, climax succeeded climax in such bewildering succession that now it looked as though calm water was in sight he had difficulty in adjusting himself to the new conditions. It did not seem possible that the tension had definitely relaxed.

It is true that, reviewing the situation as calmly as the confusion of his mind would permit, he could not see what possibly could happen now to beat him. Of late, however, his guiding star seemed to have gone out of business, and recent experience had taught him that it is always well to keep a sharp look-out for the man with the brick.

Reaction had set in. Instead of the exhilaration one would have expected, he felt suddenly depressed and surprisingly old. All the experience of the ages seemed to have descended on to his shoulders. He felt incredibly wise and world-worn. Cynical, too, as if nothing mattered, and as soon as that dull grey mist cleared from the landscape, or at any rate would keep in the same place for ten seconds together, he'd push off to Cinnamon Creek and

get the interminable job done. And then he'd have some sleep. He felt that it would be very nice to have some sleep.

CHAPTER XXVI

The next thing of which he was conscious was a burning sensation in his throat, and a voice of familiar huskiness.

"Lie right back, son," it was saying, "an' swaller the hooch."

After assimilating with difficulty the prodigal measure of evilly potent spirit with which his mouth was flooded, Roy opened his eyes to find himself in a half-prone position, with his head resting against a crate that stood outside the bunk-house. Bending over him, was a shortish middle-aged man with a shining bald head and clean-shaven face, from which a pair of tiny blue eyes twinkled sympathetically.

"Not feelin' any too good, I guess," he said. Disregarding an injunction to the contrary, Roy attempted to struggle to his feet, but, though gently, the other restrained him.

"You're all in, I reckon," he said regarding Roy's drawn face commiseratingly. "Stay right there till you're not so sick."

"I'm all right," persisted Roy. "It's only that I've gone too long without a rest. Once I'm in Cinnamon Creek I'll be able to sleep the clock round." This time he managed to scramble to his feet.

But he did not remain on them long. Once more the mists gathered before his eyes; the ground swayed crazily beneath him. If the bald-headed man had not stretched a long arm to save him, he would have fallen pretty badly.

"Easy, son, easy!" said the latter, lowering Roy gently to his old position. "Don't rush it till you've gotta holt of yourself."

"I've got to get to Cinnamon Creek," Roy said as firmly as his weakness permitted. "Ill or well, I've got to get there."

The stranger looked at him hard for a moment, and then shook his head.

"If ever there was a lead-pipe cinch in this world," he said conclusively, "it's that you can't make the grade to Cinnamon Creek like what you are now."

Roy's mouth set obstinately.

"I've just *got* to, and that's all there is to it," he said. But the stranger continued to shake his head.

"I'm not arguin'," he explained firmly, "I'm just tellin' yer. You can't make it. You're a sick man. . . . Are you by yourself?" he demanded after a pause.

"Yes," admitted Roy.

"Canoe?" came the further enquiry.

"Yes," said Roy.

"Ingin' or paddle?" demanded the stranger.

"Engine," said Roy.

Although the stranger looked relieved at the information, the head shaking continued.

"An' what-all d'ye think'd happen if you was to go all blooie in the middle of the river like what you've gone all blooie now?" he enquired, from the construction of which sentence, in conjunction with the husky accents, Roy was able to identify the speaker as Seth Lee's communicant regarding the accident to Slim Peters.

The prospect he held out, however, was not alluring, particularly as in his present condition Roy felt that it was one by no means improbable of fulfilment. But he set his teeth.

"I shall be all right," he said rather shortly.

"Six or eight hours' sleep right now," said Red, ignoring the pronouncement, "an' you'd be as fresh as Barney Doolan's hatband. As you are now you're the sawn-off half of nothin' minus the ingin' an' acces'ries. What you want is to hit the hay for a solid eight' hours shut-eye."

Once more Roy struggled to his feet, and for the second time the stranger saved him. Even then Roy made another attempt.

"I'll say you've got sand all right," commented Red, restraining him with a hand the size of a ham. He wagged a sausage-like finger within an inch of Roy's nose. "But sand or no sand, you're not startin' in for the Creek by yourself. No, siree! Not alone you're not startin' in."

Roy's jaw began to project. However kind the man was didn't authorise dashed interference.

"Believe me I am," he said.

The stranger continued to shake his head.

"No, siree!" he repeated. "Not by yourself you're not startin' in for Cinnamon Creek."

By this time Roy was on the verge of losing his temper.

"Why the—not?" he shouted angrily.

"Because," said the bald man, "I'm a'goin' with you. Me—Red Hooper. A day or two in the city'll do me fine."

Roy looked at him keenly, and the man's small eyes twinkled. At that moment, however, whatever the latter would have said was interrupted by a voice which hailed them from a nearby cabin; a dwelling that already Roy had noticed as slightly larger and more prosperous-looking than the few other desolate habitations which surrounded it. The owner of the voice was a stoutish lady of, at that moment, somewhat menacing aspect.

"Oh, you Red!" she hailed again. "What's work done that you an' it ain't on callin' terms?"

Red looked distinctly sheepish, and, well under cover, made a gesture of resignation.

" 'Lo Mame!" he called back with rather nervous geniality.

"Hullo Mame *nothing*!" The lady's voice came back more commanding than before. "You do your hulloing from the middle of the Saskatchewan River an' the inside of your scow. . . . An' if yer don't come back with a fair load o' fish you an' me'll engage in a brisk exchange of back-chat."

Red said hoarsely and below his breath:

"Hire me, bo'! For the love o' Pete hire me to take yer to th' Creek. Tell her thirty dollars. If there's no money in it she'll jack up on me comin'. . . . Ber-lieve me!" he assured Roy fervently, "I haven't had no chance o' puttin' me legs under the table of a poker-game since Adam bought his first pair of one-piece underwear!"

It came to Roy that Red's suggestion contained distinct possibilities. During the last week or ten days nature had cashed every draft he had drawn on his store of vitality, and when funds were exhausted had granted generous overdraft. But though without rest he would not be able to make Cinnamon Creek by himself, with Red at the engine there would be nothing to prevent him sleeping in the canoe.

Observing his hesitation, Red proceeded eagerly to press his point.

“Give me what you like, only tell Mame thirty bucks,” he urged. The faint indication of a smile flickered for a moment at the corners of his mobile mouth. “I don’t turn in to her all I earn—though she may think it,” he added gratuitously.

“Who’s the dead-beat you’re tradin’ lies with?” called Mrs. Hooper suspiciously, and crossed over to investigate. By the time she reached them Roy was on his feet, though a shade uncertainly. He raised his cap—the one Slim Peters had lent him—as she came up, an attention at which she regarded him suspiciously.

“Your husband has been good enough to accept the job of driving my canoe to Cinnamon Creek, Mrs. Hooper,” Roy announced courteously.

Closer view disclosed her as no means so formidable as when seen from a distance. Strong and stout and stern-looking she may have been, but there was humanity in the firm line of the lips, and kindliness, not unmixed with humour, lurking somewhere in the background of her clear brown eyes.

“You’re a sick man, ain’t yer?” she said with a kind of stern sympathy.

“I’m a very tired one, Mrs. Hooper,” said Roy, “and unless your husband drives the canoe I can’t afford the time to rest.”

The harder lines into which her mouth had set were belied by the sudden irrepressible twinkle of her eyes as, turning an apparently indifferent shoulder to Roy, she addressed her husband.

“It’s good to see someone who knows what hustle is,” she said. “You’d better take the job on; you may learn how it’s done! Try an’ get the habit!”

Red’s face lighted.

“I’ll start in right now,” he said, endeavouring to free his voice from pleasurable excitement.

Together the three made their way to the shack, in the transit to which Roy was grateful for Mrs. Red’s unobtrusive, but surprisingly efficient support.

The parlour of the cabin was furnished with an eye to more solid relaxation than usually was to be found in the oil-clothed and lithographed discomfort of those stiff interiors. The chairs were roomy and comfortable. There were books on shelves ranged about the room and, as well as a home-made system of central heating to obviate the necessity of that last word in ugliness, the usual slow combustion stove, Red had built into the wall an open brick fireplace.

Once inside, Mrs. Hooper insisted upon tucking Roy into one of the big chairs whilst Red made his preparations for the trip, and a few minutes later brought him a cup of tea, and, as she expressed it, "stuck around to see as he drank it."

"How much did Red say for you to tell me you was payin' for the trip?" she asked quietly. Adding, after a pause: "And how much are you *really* payin'?"

Quite evidently the financial machinations of the cunning Red were hidden not quite so undiscoverably as he imagined. Having no knowledge of the motive behind the question, however, Roy hesitated in his reply.

"Ride him, cowboy!" said Mrs. Red in mock encouragement. "Frame up a lie as a child could believe!" She fanned the air impatiently with a capable hand. "*Can* you get one man to peach on another?" she asked eloquently of space, a question to which she proceeded immediately to furnish a reply. "Not while they stick together in their sin like ham an' eggs on a plate, you can't!" she said with a tolerance for man's natural frailties which gained immediate response.

"There was something said about thirty dollars," Roy told her. "It wasn't settled definitely."

Mrs. Hooper clicked her tongue.

"I *bet* it wasn't!" she said significantly. "Not," she added, "as both Red an' me ain't happy about it. Red's happy because he thinks he's bull-dozed me into lettin' him go to the Creek, an' I'm happy because I was sending him to buy stores anyway, an' now I shall soak him the thirty dollars he'll try an' bluff he's gotten from you. Well, that thirty bucks is better in my stockin'-foot than in his poker-game, anyway," she wound up philosophically.

Red came into the room at that moment, his face more shiny than usual from a muscular application of yellow soap, or, as his wife expressed it "all lit up like a Christmas-tree." He carried a deplorable suitcase which he informed Roy contained his "store clothes."

"You feelin' not so sick now?" he enquired.

Roy's vitality was still low from strain and want of sleep, but the faintness had left him, and his head felt tolerably clear.

"Fit and waiting," he said reassuringly.

Red went over exuberantly to embrace his wife, an attention which, despite loud-voiced protest, she made but half-hearted attempts to avoid. It was plain to Roy that, however disguised, an unusually deep affection existed between this eccentric couple.

"An' if you're not back day after t'morrer," the lady said warningly, "this here Landin'll see a bran' new widow within a half-hour of you showin' up."

Once they were embarked, Red made Roy a bed of pillows amidships. Then he tucked blankets round him, and put a further pillow at his head.

"Go to it, son!" he said. "There's a bite of supper an' a swig of coffee when you happen to wake, but it don't matter when that is. Sleep hearty!" By the time Red had attached a towline to his own canoe, and started the engine, Roy was asleep.

The river was unusually calm, and the canoe, being but lightly laden, rode smoothly and evenly. Lulled by that caressing motion, the soft, pine-scented breeze playing lightly on his face, he seemed conscious, even in sleep, of the returning vitality that flowed like a stream throughout his whole bodily and mental organism. It was after eight o'clock when he awoke for the first time.

He lay luxuriously for a few moments, content with the sheer physical enjoyment of a renewed sense of apprehension and alertness. It seemed to him now that during the past few days, as his need for rest increased, so cumulatively he had lost his perception of what went on about him, so that at last his actions had come to be automatic and without life, like those of a man on the verge of anæsthesia.

At his first movement, however, Red greeted him cheerily.

"How's it goin'?" he enquired.

"Fine, thanks," said Roy; and then: "Seen anything of Slim Peters and his seaplane?"

Red nodded.

"Sure," he said. "Passed 'em at half-after five about a couple miles the Landin' side of Cumberland House, an' still a'goin'."

So that, it would appear, disposed finally of any danger from the airman. Roy wondered rather amusedly what Slim's feeling's would be upon being greeted at Pickerel Landing with the news of his own presence at, and departure from, that delectable community. However, now that the way lay

clear before him to the goal, there was no use bothering his head about Slim or anyone else. Except, of course, Nell.

"Sandwiches better'n mother used to make, because more to 'em," announced Red, passing over a slab of meat entrapped between what at first sight Roy mistook for a couple of paving-stones. "And corfee," Red added hospitably, producing the vacuum flask.

Surreptitiously Roy cast the top storey of his wheaten monument upon the waters. He found the meat excellent, and being hungry, made a good meal. Then he took a hearty drink from the thermos.

When he recovered his breath he turned an enpurpled face to Red.

"What have you given me?" he demanded indignantly. "Vitriol?"

Red regarded him in blank surprise for a moment, and then, with the dawn of comprehension, groped under the thwart to produce a second vacuum flask.

"Guess I'm the guy who put the cough in corfee, all right," he grinned. "That there corfee I gave you wasn't the corfee I made for you, but the corfee I made for myself—corfee with a kick," he explained gratuitously.

The meal over, Roy lighted his pipe and lay back once more upon his pillows. Overhead the sky loomed immeasurably distant, the iridescent stars like lamps suspended by invisible cords. And, flickering across the dome of sky, the fringe of the Northern Lights swirled and eddied; now mobilising at one assembly point, with the whole sweep of sky clear before them; then, like the storm troops of an advancing army, would break in wave upon sweeping wave across the full breadth of heaven only to melt into isolated groups, which in turn would melt merged gradually into the cold impersonality of the ether—a miracle of which he never tired, and at which he never ceased to marvel.

And as he lay there dreaming, with Red gratifyingly silent, imagining him to be asleep, his thoughts turned inevitably to Nell.

Throughout the whole of his adventurous journey from the Lobstick Claim she had never ceased, however subconsciously, to occupy his thoughts. Even in that sleepless interval between the island and Pickerel Landing, and which now faded into unreality behind him, always he had been aware of her.

During that period of solitude and introspection he had realised that to her woman's heart he had failed her. Times innumerable and interminable he

had trodden again the old ground of his justification, and ever came out by the same door as in he went. Had his standpoint been, ethically, the right one, or had he been merely a self-deceiving fool? Was he justified in sacrificing her on the altar of his own sense of self-respect, or, conversely, should he have sacrificed himself on the altar of his love for her?

And always in the end came the answer, endlessly reiterated. If, penniless, he had married her, loss of self-respect would have been inevitable, and, reflected as it could not fail to have been in his happiness, with equal certainty it would have intervened, a dull grey shadow, between their love. She would have had to share the penalty, and being a woman, the greater burden would have been hers.

It was not that he sought to lay rude hands upon reserves which, though too sacred for expression, find sanctuary in the soul of woman. But he did feel that before they could stand once more on the old footing, frank and inexpressibly sweet, Nell must bring to the full light of day the hidden pique that had been responsible for her manner towards the airman. For there to be no chance that some future happening might widen this point of cleavage, its root cause must be both examined and understood.

Lulled by the subtle motion and the rhythmic throb of the engine, he fell at last into a deep and refreshing sleep. When he awoke it was to find the eastern sky dyed to luminous opal and primrose, which towards the line of horizon deepened into rose. The deep silence of the woods was sublimated by a soft breeze that played over the bordering rushes as by the quiet breath of sleep.

To the left a pair of musk-rats paddled busily on their lawful occasions, their broad bodies cleaving a wide wake in the smoother water below the bank. To the right a couple of duck followed swiftly and purposefully the river's course. At uneven intervals came the loud splash of a rising fish with its aftermath of ever-widening circles. The morning, untrammelled and unspoilt, belonged wholly to Nature. The air was clear and fresh as in the dawn of time.

Red sat motionless, sucking an empty pipe. Even when he saw that Roy was awake he contented himself with a quiet nod. It was not until the eastern glow, that deepened gradually to regal fiery scarlet, burst suddenly into a vast aureole of flame, and the sun blazed upwards above the trees to fill the sky with splendour, that he spoke.

"That's the only thing keeps me at th' Landin'," he said soberly. "Just that little old sun a'shinin' an' a'glowin'."

Roy suppressed any surprise that the soul of a poet should be concealed beneath so material and work-a-day an exterior. He knew how inarticulate were these men who lived hard and comfortless lives only because the North, a siren that promises all and gives nothing but her beauty for the gifts thrown so lavishly and ungrudgingly at her feet, has hypnotised them with her strange, compelling charm. Some day a poet will interpret the message of the North, and then we shall hear songs worth the singing.

"Winter, fall, spring, or summer; don't make no dif'rence to *him*," Red went on. "There he is in the same old lo-cation in the sky, a'shinin' an' a' glowin' to beat four-of-a-kind. It's as if," he went on, struggling for expression, "he was out to tell as how there is somethin' behind it all—that the flies an' the muskeg an' the lonesomeness o' summer, an' the blue-steel cold o' winter are all of a piece with the scheme o' things. That there's some meanin' to it, as you might say, to make it worth while, an' that somedays we'll understand all about it an' know we've had a square deal."

Roy nodded. The point of view appealed to him, and more particularly considering its origin. If behind the civilisation of man a hairy simian sits and gibbers, is it not equally true that under the outer husk of the least cultivated of our race the spirit of poetry lies dormant?

"Once you've drunk of the Waters of the North . . ." he quoted softly.

CHAPTER XXVII

At about half-past six they passed under the big iron bridge at Cinnamon Creek. Already the Indian reservation on the far side of the river was astir, with the smoke curling from the chimneys of the ramshackle cabins, the squaws sitting in their usual lethargic fashion at the doors, one or two dejected horses cropping the scanty herbage at the river brink, and, above all, the usual high-pitched half-yell half-bark of the huskies.

"Well, what's to do?" enquired Red when the canoes were moored.

Before answering Roy stepped aside to speak with a man in overalls who was busy probing the interior mechanism of a canoe engine.

"Guess you'll find old O'Dowd sittin' at the receipt o' custom 'bout half-after eight," he said in reply to Roy's question.

"Red," said Roy, "I'm so hungry that the inside of Tom Long's would look to me like the grill-room of the Waldorf Astoria. But I've claims to register, and until that job's done there's no breakfast for me. I'm going to be right there Johnny-on-the-spot the minute that office opens."

Red looked at him narrowly for a moment.

"Well," he said at last, "not bein' one to butt in in what don't concern me, I'll go book a room at the Prince Rupert, an' meet you at Tom Long's nine o'clock, or thereabouts!"

"Good enough," said Roy, and passed from the jetty across to the main street, and from thence to the unmade road where was the wooden shack that was dignified by the single sign "Land Titles Office."

The padlock was still on the door, and glancing through the window Roy could see the wide deal table littered with the same maps—mostly inaccurate—he had noticed when the Powers of Attorney had been registered. Beyond a desultory bulldog fly or two on the windows, however, there was no sign of life. So, lighting his pipe, he sat down on the wooden steps and waited.

At eight fifteen, although O'Dowd was not due for another quarter of an hour, Roy became affected with sudden panic. For, high above the river, he noticed a dark speck which could only be Slim Peters's seaplane. Five minutes later he was conscious of the low vibrating hum of the engine.

Though he could not see how Peters's presence in Cinnamon Creek could effect his own mission, he was filled with an unrest for which he was quite unable to account. He told himself that for all Slim knew to the contrary the claims had already been registered by those who had stolen them.

And yet it was with increasing unrest that he watched the seaplane grow until even the pilot's head was visible against the clear background of the air. Lower and lower it swooped until, with a rush and a roar it passed from sight behind the line of buildings on the main street. A moment later his mind pictured it taxi-ing importantly on the river surface.

A figure in a drab tussore suit turned out of the main street at that moment, in whom Roy joyfully recognised Dan O'Dowd, who greeted him with cheerful curiosity.

"An' where've you left the rest of the bunch, Mr. Coniston?" he enquired.

"That's what I've come to talk to you about," said Roy.

"Then I guess you want to register," observed Sim, producing his keys. "Walk right in," he invited as the door swung open.

Once Dan was settled in his chair, Roy produced his proxies and a rough map of the property. Glancing at the former, at first casually, and then with quickened interest, the official was guilty of a low whistle of surprise.

"Fifteen claims!" he exclaimed. "Say, that's going some! At five bucks per each, that'll be seventy-five dollars."

Roy paid over the amount, and to enable him to fill in the necessary forms, O'Dowd scanned the map. As he did so his amazement grew.

"Where's this?" he demanded incredulously, and upon receiving the information pressed eagerly for particulars. At last, still only half convinced, he handed Roy a large scale map of the district. "Sketch it there," he instructed.

With a sharp-pointed pencil Roy commenced to do as he was bidden, but having outlined the stream from Grassy River, stopped when he reached the lake proper.

"You've got me beat, Mr. O'Dowd," he admitted. "You see I only know the lake as far as our own claims."

Putting down his pencil, Dan stared at Roy as if he had been something from another world. “Well, if that doesn’t beat the band!” he exclaimed. “What d’ye *call* the blamed lake, anyway?” he demanded after a pause.

“Lake Murrian,” said Roy promptly.

“Guess we’ll have to send a survey party to give it the once-over,” remarked O’Dowd resignedly. He marked the name on the map, on the back of which he sketched a rough, but workmanlike plan of the property.

And it was at the very moment when, strangely calm and collected, now that at long last the victory was his, Roy slipped the titles into his pocket, that, happening to glance up, he saw Slim Peters pass the window. A moment later came the sound of footfalls on the wooden steps outside.

“Someone coming, Mr. O’Dowd,” he muttered hastily. “There’s one or two other things I want to ask your advice on, so I’ll wait in here until your visitor has gone.” Without pausing for a reply he slipped into the stuffy inner office, the door of which he was careful not wholly to close. A second later the outer door opened, and following a keen glance about the room, Roy saw Slim Peters’s face lighten as he advanced to the table.

“Howdy Dan!” he said, a note of confidence in his voice.

“ ’Lo Slim! You back again?” O’Dowd said easily. “Wrecked, weren’t you?”

“Wrecked nothing!” the airman protested. “Just a bit of engine trouble. But listen, Dan. I’ve something here as’ll make you sit up an’ take notice. Yes, I’ll say so!” He paused dramatically. “What’ll you say when I tell you I’ve discovered a new lake—one as has never even been mapped or surveyed?”

Watching intently, Roy could see O’Dowd’s features harden to sudden rigidity.

“I’ll say,” he said coolly at last, “that I’m from Missouri. You’ve gotter show me!”

The airman broke into an exultant grin.

“Sure I’ll show you,” he said confidently, and threw on to the table a small piece of high-grade quartz the American had given him as a souvenir. “I’ll hand you the lo-cation right now. . . . The lo-cation and particulars of three claims I want to register for Eddie McDonald of the Landing.”

If he had anticipated that his announcement would arouse O'Dowd to any particular demonstration of excitement, he was disappointed. By nature something of a hard-boiled egg, long years of compulsory audition to anticipations which in the event of realisation would have made Aladdin's Cave look like the last day of a jumble sale had given the Land Titles official an almost inhuman mastery over his features. In this particular interview he exercised that gift to its fullest capacity.

"Mark your find right here," he said, handing Slim a map that was duplicate to the one that already had been brought into service.

Bending over it, Peters traced with his pencil the course of Grassy River. Suddenly he stopped and drew a mark at right angles from it, which he enlarged eventually to a rough oblong. He placed his pencil then at a point on the right bank almost at the junction of the stream and the lake.

"There's the lake, Dan," he said confidently. "And right here is Eddie McDonald's claim."

After the most cursory examination of the map, O'Dowd drew a battered case from his pocket, selected a cigarette, lighted it, replaced the case, and leaning back in his chair regarded the airman long and thoughtfully.

"What were you doing on ground level?" he asked quietly, at last.

Slim returned the look with uncomprehending wonder, but as his eyes met O'Dowd's calm but penetrating glance his face hardened.

"Say, what're you handin' me, Dan?" he said shortly.

"Handin' you?" The official's voice was even and unemotional. "I'm not handin' you a thing. I'm just askin' you what was a man on aerial survey an' fire patrol doin' to stake a claim?"

From the sudden light that flickered into Peters's eyes it was evident that, with the form of the other's query, had come inspiration.

"What's a fire patrol to do when he sees smoke?" he demanded coldly. "Pass by, or go find out?"

"But supposin'," said Dan, removing the ash from his cigarette with a casual finger, "that when he gets down he finds it's no forest fire that's started up, but only a camp fire?" With a leisurely hand he pushed across the table the map that had first been used, and pointed to Roy's markings.

"Guess you don't get away with it, Slim," he said.

The airman's face was livid.

“Not when it’s Eddie McDonald’s claim?” he questioned loudly, “and he asked for me to register for him so’s to save him leavin’ the lake?”

O’Dowd tapped the table pensively with his pencil.

“What day was it you left him?” he enquired.

“Three days ago’—Tuesday,” replied Slim quickly, and faced O’Dowd’s calm eyes defiantly.

Abruptly, then, but leaving both the maps on the table, the official closed and locked his drawer.

“You’re a liar, Slim,” he said calmly, “and a poor liar at that. Eddie was right here in the Creek on Tuesday. I had eats with him in Tom Long’s.”

From pallor the airman’s face suffused suddenly to scarlet, his mouth set into a grin of anger it was manifest he was fighting desperately to suppress. Then suddenly his eyes seemed to lighten as if from within, and he brought his fist down on the table with a force that shook the room.

“Where Eddie was, or where Eddie wasn’t, don’t amount to a hill o’ beans!” he shouted. “That there claim’s his, an’ its gotter be registered. Just you bite on to that. Its gotter be registered. See?”

Unruffled, very carefully O’Dowd rearranged the various articles on his desk to their original positions.

“Upon production of the necessary particulars, Eddie McDonald or Eddie Mac anybody else may register any claim on Murrian Lake with the exception of those already held in the names of Murrian, Coniston, Clarges, and Pullen,” he said with deadly quietness.

He turned over the first map, and pointed to the detailed plan of the full fifteen claims. With the document face upward once more, he indicated the marks made by Roy. “Apart from those,” he said, “the whole lakeside is McDonald’s for the stakin’.”

For a full minute there was silence. Unused to, and bitterly resentful of defeat, the airman was beaten, and knew it. Anything unofficial he could have fought, but against the Department of Mines he was powerless. Also, at the back of his brain was dawning the beginning of wisdom. A formal statement of the circumstances from O’Dowd to the authorities, and the seaplane now riding so comfortably to the tide would have some other pilot.

Irresolute, his line of action confused and uncertain, one fact above all others stood out amid the chaos of his thoughts. The Englishman had

"beaten him to it," and in doing so had saddled him irrevocably with the consequences of his betrayal of trust.

He was aroused by O'Dowd's cool and discriminating voice.

"What's the big idea, Slim?" he was asking. "I thought I knew you better than that you'd put over crooked business such as this."

The airman's face set in a sneer:

"Aw, cut out the Pilgrim's Progress stuff!" he snarled. "What's it got to do with you what the big idea is, anyway? I just started something—that's all. An'—an'—well, it looks like I've lost out," he wound up sullenly.

And then Roy stepped out from the inner room.

Instantaneously, his face blazing, Peters made his rush—and in the same second was shouting agonised profanity to high heaven. After a moment, then, his struggles ceased, locked in a jiu-jitsu grip from which any attempt to escape was agony.

O'Dowd sprang to his feet. This time there was no doubt but that his official dignity was thoroughly aroused. Peters met his glance for a moment, and then his eyes fell before the other's authority. Not until then did O'Dowd speak.

"Let the hooks off him now, Mr. Coniston," he said, and through his teeth addressed himself to the airman. "You start rough-housing in my office, and I'll have Sergeant Wells put you in the cooler so quick you won't know what's hit you."

With an eye alert for instantaneous reprisals, Roy did as he was bidden, but Slim made no attempt to renew the attack.

O'Dowd making it clear that he wished for a quiet word with Slim, Roy bade that fair-minded official a cordial good morning, and passed out into the street.

Before proceeding to Tom Long's he called in at Mrs. Pullen's, to get her Power of Attorney to register another three claims adjoining those already staked, and which, later, he had no difficulty in persuading O'Dowd to accept.

"What's to do now?" Red demanded while Roy was enthusiastically tackling a dish of sturgeon.

"After I've bought a few things at Tom Marney's," said Roy, "I'm going to hit the trail straight back to—where I came from."

Red glanced at him alertly:

"Where's that?" he questioned.

Roy paused only a moment before replying. Then he reflected that as news of the find would soon become common property it would be a graceful compliment to make Red his first unofficial confidant. Besides, he both liked and trusted the genial fisherman, and felt that his comments on the new discovery would be worth hearing.

So, omitting any reference to Slim Peters, he told Red the whole story, a narrative to which the other listened with an interest that was almost ludicrous.

"Are you handin' me this thing right?" Red demanded when Roy had finished, "or are you just stringin' me?"

A sudden thought struck Roy. There was a way in which his companion's sphere of usefulness might be extended.

"Come and see for yourself," he said quietly.

The light of newly-created interest flashed into Red's expressive eyes.

"Jumpin' snakes!" he exclaimed, "I'll be tickled to death to be let in on the ground floor of a find like that. Maybe yours ain't the only place in that locality where there's gold."

"That's right, too," said Roy, and, slipping his hand into his pocket, produced a rough plan of the secondary group of claims his party had staked.

"Why not stake these for a start?" he suggested.

Red scrutinised the plans as a puppy examines a new and unexpected beetle.

"What's the big idea?" he demanded at last in the prospector's invariable formula. "Why hand this over to me?"

"We've staked all we can—all we want to if it comes to that," Roy explained, "and you might as well register this other lot as anyone else."

Still searching for the snag, Red stalled:

"But are they any blame good if I do stake 'em?" he demanded.

"So far as we can tell," Roy assured him, "they run about eight dollars a ton."

The eyes of the two met in a long appraising glance, and apparently what the sturgeon-fisher gathered from his inspection was sufficiently convincing, for, his face beaming, he thrust a horny hand across the table.

" 'Oh *what* a pal was Mary!' " he quoted. "Only stop at the Landin' long enough for me to put my old woman wise, an' I'll be right with you."

"There's no desperate hurry," said Roy easily.

The time Red occupied in registering his claims Roy spent in purchasing canoes, engines, and various small stores, though as his intention was to bring the stranded party straight back to Cinnamon Creek these latter were not extensive. Everything completed satisfactorily, however, it was not long before, with Red's and the freight canoes in tow, they were heading in the direction of Pickerel Landing, which by travelling all night they reached about eleven the next morning.

Apart from the pale whisps of wood-smoke from the chimneys of the few scattered cabins there was little sign of life discernible as they moored the canoes. Half-way up to Red's shack, however, they saw Mrs. Hooper standing framed in the doorway, waving a handkerchief.

"Mame," said Red as they came up to her, "are you prepared to take a chance?"

There must have been something unusual in his voice, for she regarded him for a moment with narrowed eyes before replying.

"I'll try anything once," she said at last, "except vote Socialist or have my hair bobbed. . . . What crazy stunt are you for wishin' on to me now?"

"I've close on a thousand dollars cached away," said Red. "How much have you?"

Her shrewd eyes never left his face. "You're a deceivin' blaggad, Red Hooper," she said, "for you've always told me I've frisked you as bare of dollars as a huskie dog of tail feathers. . . . I've three thousand dollars or more, an' it's yours for either one of two things: if you're in trouble and need to make a get-away, or if you've got a business proposition that looks like it was fathered by horse sense."

There in front of Roy the ex-sturgeon-fisher hugged his by no means unsubstantial spouse, and in his face was a great tenderness.

"You're a wam, Mame!" he declared fervently, "an all-wool double-width wam! An' I'm goin' to reward ye! Right here an' now I'm goin' to

hand ye a present for a good girl. A month's vacation, an' with maybe all kinds of money at the end of it."

Mame sniffed sceptically. "I know," she said, "all kinds of money but one."

Red cocked a wary eye at her.

"And that is . . .?" he queried.

"*Ready* money," said Mame, and in that terse summary epitomised the finance of the North.

As Red explained the position, however, and promised that under no circumstances should their capital be encroached upon until the commercial possibilities of the property had been incontestably demonstrated, she consented, but with more grumbling than was warranted by the adventurous excitement in her eyes, to accompany them to Murrian Lake for the purpose of "givin' the proposition the once-over."

CHAPTER XXVIII

For the first few hours of Roy's return to the lake it looked as though the point when harmony could be restored between Nell and himself had passed. It was not that her greeting was cold, it was as if though welcome came from her heart, that heart was yet very definitely in her own keeping.

It had been the same, too, when having seen the Hoopers settled on their claim, and hired on generous terms to keep an eye on the "Lobstick," the party embarked for Cinnamon Creek. Nor was Nell's attitude merely a passing phase, for during the journey back their relations were marked with the same easy, but non-committal friendship.

Even now that they were altogether beneath the informal shelter of the Prince Rupert Hotel, though outwardly she treated him with all the old sweet bonhomie, there was lacking still that spark without which love gleams with but an artificial light.

From the material point of view, however, things could not have looked more promising. The American's first idea of the richness of the claims had been confirmed by more searching tests during the time the party were marooned; in which period, too, more than sufficient high-grade ore had been loosened to provide for the full cost of the stamping-mill.

The pile of letters and telegrams which awaited him at the hotel satisfactorily disposed of, it was characteristic of the American that he should have gone directly to Roy's room.

"Take this along to the bank to-morrow," he said, passing over an envelope, "and I guess they'll cable it to your pop's business address right away. It's no good keepin' the old gentleman guessin' longer than we can help," he added.

The envelope contained a cheque on the Canadian Bank of Commerce for five hundred thousand dollars.

Roy went rather white. His voice sounded strange and unnatural as he tried to reply, rather as though it did not quite belong to him. But the American held up his hand.

"There's no thanks due from one or other of us," he said definitely. "I'm buyin' what I want at a fair price; you're sellin' something for money you came to Canada to get. It's an even break."

Roy took hold of himself. Common sense told him the mine held gold in enormous quantities.

"Mr. Murrian," he said quietly, "will you answer me one question absolutely truly and without evasion or reservation?"

The American's eyes twinkled. "Sure," he said. "The only time I ever do neither is when I figure the other feller's tryin' to put one over me. So go right ahead an' shoot."

"If you were to put the claims on the market in America," asked Roy, "how much could you sell them for?"

"To retain a considerable interest for ourselves? . . . . Maybe two million dollars. An' that's the Lord's truth," the American answered promptly.

Roy made a rapid calculation, and his heart gave a great throb of relief. Then, with him an unusual concession to sentiment, he held out his hand.

"I won't make you feel uncomfortable by overloading you with thanks for all your wonderful kindness," he said. "But I should like to tell you, and I think perhaps it will give you pleasure to know, that there is more than a strong probability you've helped to save my father's life."

"For which I'm goin' to make a nice piece of change for myself without a cent's worth of risk," said the American gruffly. "And when you saved Nell you took a chance that looked like you was headin' for bein' listed as Exhibit A at a coroner's inquest." He advanced a pace and laid his hand for a moment on Roy's shoulder. "Both you an' that perm'nent burst of silence, Tony Clarges, is ace-high with me for the way you acted that night," he said with a sincerity that lost nothing because the words were lightly spoken, "an' I'm tickled to death I don't have to lose touch with either of you." He made as though to move away, and then suddenly turned. "But I shall feel more settled about that," he added, "when I hear the Weddin' March over you an' Nell."

Roy flushed uncomfortably. He would have given much to discuss with this big understanding friend the doubts and fears that day by day took all the edge from his success, and made his nights a fever of restlessness. But until Nell herself put the position into words he felt that it would be disloyal to do so. And while he hesitated the older man's penetrating glance never for a moment left his face.

"You've got to get out of her mind that you ever supposed it mattered a hoot if you were made of money or hadn't a cent," the American said over his shoulder.

The momentary colour faded from Roy's face, leaving it white and strained.

"Has Nell been talking to you, sir?" he asked quickly.

"Not a word," said her father promptly, adding: "There are things so near the heart of a young girl, she don't talk 'em over with herself, let alone spill 'em to her old roughneck of a father."

It was not until later that even in his own mind Roy paid tribute to the penetrating understanding of the analysis. At the moment he was too overcome by this perception of the trouble that threatened to wreck his future to realise that it was but the concrete expression of a guardianship that was inspired and upheld by a love which was the very well-spring of the older man's every thought and action.

"But this is one of those things," the latter went on, "where I can't butt in. No outsider could. It's a question that lies between yourself and Nell, an' only you two can settle it."

Roy reached for his hat. "Thanks very much indeed, sir," he said soberly. "I hope with all my heart to succeed."

"That's all right," said the American easily. "Go down to Tom Long's and have a bite of food, and then come right back here."

"But what about yourself and Nell?" enquired Roy.

"I bought some sandwiches on the way up," said Mr. Murrian. "We're having them in Nell's room. Then I want to—er—hold a bit of a conference with the whole bunch of you. . . . There's one or two things want clearing up."

So Roy collected Tony Clarges, and together they went off to lunch, the latter in unusually high spirits. It was over the meal, indeed, that he made his most surprising effort yet.

"I owe a lot to you, Roy, old scout," he said casually as the meal was coming to an end.

Roy looked up. "Oh, yes?" he said interestedly. "Exactly what?"

"This Lobstick Claim business," said Tony. "My percentage looks like bringing me in a small fortune. Enough, at any rate, with my salary as Mr. Murrian's secretary, to—get married on."

Roy dropped his fork with a clatter.

"To . . .?" he repeated.

"I was engaged when I came out here," Tony explained. "Of course, I hadn't a bean, and her father—Lord Beverley—made things dashed uncomfortable. So did mine, for the matter of that. So I thought the only straight thing was to call the engagement off and come out here. But, bless her! Enid refused point-blank to give me up. Bad taste, of course, and all that, but there you are. Said she'd wait for me until she was white-headed and gone at the knees if necessary. . . . So, although it was a pretty faint hope, we hung on. . . . And now, thanks to you, I'm able to write and ask her to come out and marry me."

For the second time that day Roy stretched out an involuntary hand, which, if rather self-consciously, Tony grasped with great heartiness.

"If it's a fair question, do Mr. Murrian and Nell know anything of this?" Roy asked.

"Of course!" Tony said. "I told them as soon as the chief offered to take me on." He crumbled bread into pilules. "He was jolly sporting about it. I believe he even wrote to say I was making good; anyway the guv'ner's increased my allowance. . . . And, of course, Miss Murrian's been most awfully good—and—and sympathetic." He crumbled his bread more furiously. Probably this was the longest connected speech he had ever made.

When they got back to the hotel, Nell and her father were waiting for them with Harry Pullen.

"It's just a matter of cleaning up," the American announced. "In the first place, so far as the claim's concerned I propose to form a private limited company right here in Cinnamon Creek an' allot the shares as we arranged."

He glanced across to each of the other four in turn. "How does that go?" he enquired.

Agreed to unanimously, the American went on: "Now we come to Slim Peters. If he hadn't happened just to have been around the time he was, an' taken Roy a joy-ride right back here, we should've been euchred for fair." He glanced across at Roy. "That's right, I guess, isn't it?" he enquired.

For a moment Roy was nonplussed; it was evident what the American was leading up to.

"Mr. Murrian," Roy said quietly, "for reasons I don't wish to go into, I want to ask you as a personal favour to allow me to settle that matter entirely by myself."

“Those reasons, whatever they are,” returned the American after a silence during which he regarded Roy with an amazement which was not altogether free from annoyance, “are bunk. Plain ordinary bunk, that I for one won’t stand for.” He rose from the table, and went to the door:

“Oh *Slim*!” he yelled; “come right in!” He turned back into the room. “We’ll see what the feller has to say about it himself,” he added dryly.

CHAPTER XXIX

Watching the airman intently as he entered, Roy saw, and in spite of a suggestion of truculence in his manner, how eagerly his eyes traversed the room until they rested upon Nell, and how they lighted, as with inward fire, as they did so. Indeed, it was not until the American asked him to sit down, and in a voice which quite obviously was designed to bring him back to earth, that the airman appeared conscious of any other presence.

"It's in regard to the service you did us in landing Roy in Cinnamon Creek," said Mr. Murrian. "We are all of one mind in considering that we cannot allow this to pass without recognition."

Brief as was the announcement, the airman's expression had changed to one of utter bewilderment. He looked at the speaker open-mouthed.

"In doin' *what*?" he said at last in an obvious attempt to gain time.

"Landing Roy here in your airplane," repeated Mr. Murrian.

Slowly the airman's glance travelled from the American to Roy and, learning nothing from the latter's expressionless face, back again.

"Say, you can cut out the stringin' game," he said shortly. "That kind of talk don't cut any ice. When you said for me to come here I knew what I was up against. I'm prepared to take all that's comin' to me. . . . And then, when you've said your piece"—once more his eyes rested lingeringly on Nell—"maybe, I'll have something to say myself. But"—he turned once more directly to Mr. Murrian—"you can cut out that junk about landin' Mr. Coniston here in the Creek. You know darn well the only place ever I landed him was in the plumb centre of Sandy Lake."

Roy saw Nell turn suddenly to him. There was something here she could not follow, but in which she realised her intimate concern. Her father's voice broke in:

"Say that again," he demanded.

The airman shrugged his shoulders. "Guess I've given you the right dope," he said. And then, with a touch of additional defiance: "Not only that, but I did the best I could to swipe the claims." He paused, then burst out impatiently: "But what's the use, anyway? All this, an' maybe a whole lot more, you'll have had from Mr. Coniston."

The American leaned back in his chair, his hands folded quietly in front of him, his expression polite, but rather detached. Had Slim but known it—his most dangerous fighting attitude.

"This is a new one on me altogether," he said unemotionally, but meeting the other's eyes very squarely. "Roy's said no word to me."

Came a silence that was very still. Entirely uncomprehensive of any motive for silence, the airman could hardly bring himself to believe that in actual fact Roy had said nothing. It needed Nell's expression, as she looked at Roy, to convince him.

The glance, indeed, told him more than that. Some quality of pride; of possession almost—and of love, unmistakable and illimitable, made him aware that whatever had been the result of his scheming would have made no difference.

And then suddenly the American sat up very straight in his chair, and from its former detachment his tone became crisp and business-like.

"I'm going to ask Mr. Coniston to make a statement," he said. "According to what he says, so I shall act." His eyes moved slowly from the airman to Roy. "Start her up, Roy!" he instructed.

Whereupon Roy outlined briefly the history of that eventful flight, gave a brief account of what subsequently had happened on the island, and of his escape, ending with a short account of the interview between Slim and O'Dowd in the Land Titles Office. To all of which the American gave keen attention.

"That the lot?" he enquired as Roy ceased speaking.

The latter nodded: "That's the lot," he agreed.

"Good enough!" The American jerked his head towards Peters.

"Is it right what Mr. Coniston says?" he enquired.

"Say!" The word shot from Peters as if released by a high-tension spring. "Say, what's this Third Degree stuff, anyway? D'you think you're my boss, or what?"

The American's face did not alter from its calm, unsmiling expression.

"Guess you know my position, Slim," he said gravely. "If not, I'll put you wise later. In the meanwhile, does what Mr. Coniston says go? Or doesn't it?"

The airman's lithe young body was fixed and rigid as that of a poised athlete. But there was no hesitation in his reply.

"Guess he's given you the right dope this time," he admitted defiantly. "I dumped him in the lake an' I tried to swipe his claims. . . . And that's that," he wound up.

"Why?" The question was sharp and emphatic, but to Roy's keyed attention it was as though it contained some quality neither harsh nor lacking wholly in sympathy. Whatever its elements, however, it had a curiously chastening effect upon the airman. His truculence vanished, leaving him what actually he was, a strongly passionate, elemental, and wholly bewildered boy.

"Aw, cut it out, Mr. Murrian, sir," he said at last with a kind of defiant wistfulness, and his eyes travelled bleakly to Nell. "Guess there's only three things a guy goes an' gets loopy over: hate, money, or—or—a girl. And with me it weren't either the first two. I don't hate anybody"—he cast a sidelong, rather self-questioning glance at Roy—"not even this guy here. I don't know either as I've more use for money than most."

In spite of himself the corners of the American's immobile mouth relaxed; there was a ring of pride in the boy's voice, which, reflected in his manner, was not without dignity.

"Why 'not even' Mr. Coniston?" asked the American. "What's he done that you should hand yourself a bouquet for not hatin' him? Seems to me," he added, "that whatever grouse there is is comin' from him to you."

"I laid for him," cried the airman, "because he was cuttin' in on my girl!"

Roy wheeled abruptly in his chair. The airman's conduct throughout had pointed to but one obsession. He felt, however, that all things considered, it would be better to assume ignorance.

"Your girl?" he repeated blankly. "What should I want with your girl? Particularly," he added coldly, "as I have the honour to be engaged to Miss Murrian." At which the airman regarded him with genuine astonishment.

"But that's the lady I mean," he said simply. "Miss Murrian's been ace-high with me since first I saw her—oh—I guess a year since now."

Nell's face told nothing of her feelings. She was a woman, and must have known how it was with Slim. Apart from which it is not impossible that she anticipated Roy's quick glance of scrutiny.

But with the others it was different. Each in his fashion resented the airman's attitude. Below his breath Harry Pullen muttered amazed profanity. Tony looked Slim up and down with eyes that were cold and contemptuous. Only the older man, who, in view of his origin and experience, perhaps was more akin in spirit to the Canadian than were the others, remained unmoved. Neither the lad's very real reverence for Nell, nor his uncompromising singleness of purpose, were without appeal.

"So you thought the best way of being ace-high with her," he said sternly, "was to turn thief."

The airman stiffened.

"If you was a younger man, Mr. Murrian, sir," he said, "I guess I'd make you take that word back," a hint which left the American unmoved.

"There's no other name I know for a man who tries to take what don't belong to him," he said impartially.

With momentary lack of control Slim leaned forward and smote the table with his clenched fist.

"Steal *nothin'*!" he cried violently. "Wasn't I goin' right back to the claim to hand over?"

Very deliberately the American produced and lighted a cigar. Then he looked up:

"Like to tell us the story?" he asked coolly. "Or maybe you'd rather my daughter were not here?" a suggestion at which Nell rose immediately to her feet, but, at a gesture of appeal from the airman, sank once more into her chair.

"I'd rather you stayed right here, Miss," he said. Adding, very simply: "Guess no feller need be ashamed feelin' for you like what I do."

With a delicacy which, however surprising to Roy, was far less so to the American, the airman turned from her and addressed himself directly to her father. It was as if, to save embarrassment, he tried to render his statement impersonal to any of those present.

"It was months ago when you was here over a group of claims Dacre wished on to you that I was introduced to Miss Nell," he said. "I can't tell you how she sorter *got* me—but I went away feelin' as if I'd found out just how good life was."

He broke off, his lean face transfigured. The barely furnished, belittered bedroom; the dusty half-made street outside; the four men present swept away in a flood-tide of memory.

"I saw her once—twice before you went back to the States," Slim continued, "and each time I came away just stark crazy for the next meetin'. When you left I started in to save up so's I could follow. Before I'd got above a couple hundred dollars, though, you were back, an' I saw her again. This time she got me worse'n ever."

He paused, his face gloomy and regretful. "If I'd been in Tom Long's the night of the trouble with Jake Brine," he went on, "it wouldn't ha' been just a beatin'-up that 'breed'd ha' got, I'd just have killed him. As it was the two Old Countrymen butted in, an' that did for my chances. When I heard as how one of 'em was leavin' the Creek as your stenographer I was that mad I felt like campin' on his trail with a gun, an' hearin' that same guy was own son or brother to a king or a duke or a Lord Mayor or something in the Old Country only made it worse.

"Then, weeks after, when you came back again, an' I knew there was nothin' between Miss Murrian an' him, I was that happy I felt all lit up like a Christmas-tree.

"It wasn't till I heard as how Mr. Coniston was here, too, an' seen the way he looked at her an' she looked at him, that I got wise to my own chances bein' so mighty slim. Trouble was, too, that I wasn't in no kind of shape to put up a fight. It was just then I'd taken delivery of the 'plane, and my orders was to make a hurry-up job of tunin' her so's to pull out right away. An' then, before the bus was good an' ready to start, the whole outfit of you had pulled out for the North!"

Arrived at the only part of his revelation concerning which he had difficulty in speaking, Slim paused, more, however, for the purpose of assembling his thoughts and motives than from any undue embarrassment. Suddenly he turned to Roy:

"When I saw Harry Pullen's smoke smudge," he said, his voice crisply business-like, "an' found the party all dressed up an' no place to go, just at first I was gladder'n a school treat for the chance of doin' somethin' to help out. It wasn't till we were well on the way back to the Creek it came to me just exactly how much I was stubbin' my own toes in takin' you along. 'Slim,' I asks myself, 'you going cuckoo, or what? All the guy behind you's gotter have to make the little lady his is the dough, an' once you catch up that bunch o' 'breeds he'll be all aboard for matrimony. Why give him a

hand to help another guy to corral the one who looks to you same as water to a man burnt up with thirst? You ain't licensed to carry passengers, anyway, an' if you dump him he'll be no worse off than he was before.' And so," concluded Slim, simply, "I just dumped him."

Deciding, after a reasonable pause, that no more was to be forthcoming for the moment, the American's features relaxed to an expression of bewildered amusement. Even to Roy there was a suggestion of crude logic in the point of view expressed.

"But say!" The American's voice betrayed less of censure than of curiosity. "How did you think to get away with it? How was it goin' to help you out with my daughter? And"—his voice rang hard—"what was the big idea, after dumping him, of trying to swipe his claims as well?"

As he made confession the airman's voice was easy and matter-of-fact. "I was goin' right back to the lake with the tale that I'd dumped my passenger for puttin' it up to me to double-cross his party an' go fifty-fifty on the claims. Then, to clamp down my position I'd have transferred the titles back again." He paused disconsolately. "What put the Indian Sign on the bluff was my engine breakin' down. From then on, until I was towed into the Landin' and happened on Dacre an' Brine, I was pretty certain I'd lost out."

As he ceased, Roy spoke:

"How did they get there so soon?" he enquired interestedly. "I left them neither paddles nor engine."

Slim nodded dryly, not sorry for the opportunity of scoring. "You forgot to look for a mast an' sail," he said. "With the right breeze a sailin' canoe'll beat an engine canoe to a frazzle. If the wind that started up the morning after you left had held out—which it didn't, an' which it was twenty to one it wouldn't, anyway—you'd never have registered them claims."

"As it was I only won on the post," said Roy.

Slim nodded. "You sure had the luck," he said regretfully. "Soon's I heard from Dacre and Brine how they'd not yet called at Cinnamon Creek, and that they'd left the other two 'breeds on the island to save weight, I kept my trap shut about anything I knew, an' got a hurry-up party to help repair the engine. For although I'd heard you'd called, on figurin' the time you an' Red left I thought even then I might beat you to it."

Instead of the naïve confession resulting in the outburst which so unquestionably it deserved, the ingenuousness with which it was expounded

had no other effect upon Roy than to send him off into a fit of silent laughter. It struck him, too, that after all Slim had done nothing against his own particular code. With robbery the thought farthest from his mind he had but fought with weapons which, had the positions been reversed, he would have expected to be used against himself. Peters was not bad; it was just that with the frame and passions of a strong man his mental processes and sense of ethical responsibilities were as primeval as the untrodden land which was his birthplace.

It was the American who, breaking the silence, quite adequately summarised the situation.

"Guess the proper place for you, Slim, is the looney-house," he said. "But for that I'd use my influence with the Provincial Government—an' believe me I've a pull there that'd uproot a sycamore—to have you fired."

"I should worry!" said Slim indifferently, and rising slowly to his feet strode over to Nell; looked down at her, devouring her with his eyes.

"I guess you hate me, Miss," he said. "If you do, I've no kick comin'. One way of lookin' at it, I deserve all that's comin' to me. I should've known I'd no chance with you, an' just've been proud to help out, anyway." He hesitated, and then on sudden impulse thrust out a hand: "But I'd like fine for you to shake hands an' tell me you'll not hold it against me," he added earnestly. "Guess you can afford to forget—which I never shall."

For a moment Nell hesitated. Her resentment against his treachery was bitter; that he should have dared to imagine himself usurping Roy's place in her heart was greater offence still.

A hush had come over the room; arresting, palpitating. She saw the corners of Slim's mouth contract, the keen eyes fill with sudden moisture.

He looked very boyish, standing there. . . .

Her heart got the better of her head. And after all, who was she to judge, and by what standard? Impulsively she took his hand, and at the longing she read in his eyes her own filled with tears.

Slim turned swiftly to leave the room, when the grave voice of the American arrested him.

"Shake hands, son!" he said kindly. "Guess there's no harm done, anyway."

As the airman passed through the door he all but collided with the hotel proprietor, who thrust his head inside the room.

“There’s a gen’man downstairs by the name of Coniston,” he announced, “asking for Mr. Murrian. There’s a young lady with him.”

CHAPTER XXX

"Show 'em up," shouted the American. His stage management adequate to his sense of drama, he beamed delight on the company.

Roy jumped to his feet. "My father here?" he cried.

"Sure!" the American said complacently. "I cabled him before we started out. Said if he'd come straightway to the Creek and wait till we got back, prob'ly he'd hear something to his advantage. As it happens, though, we got here first."

"But you didn't know then that we should be able even to locate the place where the Indians found me," protested Roy. "Or that there'd be anything worth while there if we did! You were taking a big chance, weren't you, sir?"

"I was takin' no chance at all." The American's voice was quietly confident. Before Roy could commence the fire of cross-questioning that crowded to his tongue the proprietor of the hotel threw open the door, stood aside for the visitors to pass through, and closed it noisily behind him.

Roy had time only to notice that though there were more and deeper lines about his father's face than formerly, under the stimulus of hope renewed he looked better than might have been expected. To observe, moreover, that the girl was charming, and rather shy, when someone brushed frantically past his chair. And there, in front of them all, the reserved and diffident Tony Clarges held his lady in his arms.

After Roy had shaken hands with his father the American came forward, his arm on Nell's shoulder. Quite spontaneously, it seemed to be agreed to leave Tony and the other new arrival to themselves.

"That's just fine of you to come right away, sir," the American said heartily, "and I don't think you'll regret it. In the meanwhile I'd like you to meet my daughter."

"Who," Roy explained in a burst of inspiration, "has done me the honour to promise to be my wife."

Perhaps it was unfair to Nell thus to force the issue, but she smiled in friendliest fashion upon the father, to whom, indeed, she had taken an immediate liking.

The banker was a gentleman of the old school, and with illimitable *savoir-faire*. Although the position was so bewildering as mentally to leave him gasping, he allowed no trace of this confusion to appear in his manner. Instead he took both Nell's hands in his, scrutinised her for one long vital instant, and then, to Roy's unutterable relief, kissed her.

"Then my son will be as fortunate as was his father before him," he said with grave sincerity. In which he could have paid no higher tribute, for to his dead wife was given a reverence that ten years of loneliness had served only to enrich.

"And in accordance with your request, sir," he added, turning to the American, "I was so fortunate as to persuade my friend Lord Beverley to entrust his daughter to my care as companion for the voyage."

Whilst Tony led Enid Beverley across to Nell, Harry Pullen was introduced to Mr. Coniston, but shortly afterwards, and despite protest, took his leave on the grounds that he was "buttin' in on a family party."

The American waited only until the two girls were upon terms, which, as in some mysterious feminine fashion they appeared to find immediately some common ground of sympathy, did not take long. Then he turned to his daughter:

"If you'll beat it, Nell," he said, "I'll be with you in a couple of minutes. Tony, take Miss Beverley an' show her all the sights of this teemin' metrop'lis. You can see the Indian Reserve from the jetty, an' maybe there'll be one or two Cree Indians asleep on the steps of the Canadian Bank of Commerce. After that you can watch folks bein' shaved through the windows of Larry Perkins's barber shop. After that, if your excitement permits, you can come back here, an' I'll maybe take you all to supper at Tom Long's."

Immediately the door had closed behind the others the American went to a drawer and produced a box of cigars. "Nell an' I are takin' a walk down the street," he said. "We shall be back in half an hour, and I'll come right in here for a chat. In the meanwhile I guess you'll have plenty to talk about," and with a friendly nod he disappeared.

The trend of circumstances had rendered it impossible for Roy to keep his father informed of the progress of events. At that moment the banker had no exact idea whether Roy's mission had resulted in success or failure, information which, in its entirety, could come from only one source.

"I take it," said the banker when Roy and he were alone, "that Mr. Murrian has brought me here for some specific reason. His cable, which must have cost him a good many pounds, was urgency itself."

"My future father-in-law," said Roy, "never does *anything* without a specific reason."

There was something in Roy's manner that made a new appeal to his father—a mental alertness which hitherto he had not observed. For the first time in their relations there was an absence of his old dominance. This time it was man to man.

"But I'm all at sea," he said. "I know nothing at all of anything that has happened."

Without a word Roy handed him the envelope which contained the American's cheque. He understood now why the latter had suggested the following day to pay it into the bank.

Even with the draft spread out in front of him Mr. Coniston seemed unable at first to grasp its exact significance. The best he had anticipated was the staking of a promising claim upon which, by putting it on the market at a favourable moment, he might realise. That at one stroke the whole of his troubles had passed automatically away did not for the moment seem possible. And then comprehension seemed gradually to dawn. To Roy, watching closely, it was wonderful to observe the deep lines which recent strain had etched so deeply on his father's face fade as by some process of rejuvenation to lesser prominence.

"I wonder if you realise what this means?" the banker said slowly at last.

"Fully," said Roy quickly. "And I take all the more pleasure in it because success is due less to myself than to friends whose spontaneous generosity and unswerving loyalty have been almost too wonderful to realise. . . . I know I'm talking like an Illuminated Address," he added, "but—well—I feel pretty deeply about it."

The banker reached for a cigar.

"In our last interview, if I remember rightly," he said quietly, "in order to make my position clear it was necessary to go into considerable detail. May I suggest that this time it's your turn?"

Roy grinned.

"You didn't suppose I was going to let you off hearing all about it, did you?" he exclaimed. "As they'd say over here—'not on your life I'm not.'

I'm not the boy hero for nothing."

The full story occupied more than the half-hour allotted. Roy omitted no single detail. And as the narrative developed, so correspondingly did the banker's pride in his son. It came to him now to wonder at his original doubt, for which, looking back impartially over the boy's career, he could find no adequate justification. He felt a pride in his son now which hereafter was to be the greatest thing in his life.

"But Dacre!" he said when the story had been brought up to date. "It's utterly incomprehensible." He regarded Roy narrowly from under shaggy brows. He was the business man now, on his own ground, adequate to the situation.

"Now that the position of the bank is re-established," he said, "it is my intention to employ detectives to trace those bonds he stole. If I can do so I shall prosecute. I shall never get them back, of course, but——"

Came interruption. In the absorption of the moment they had not heard Mr. Murrian's knock.

"Want to make a bet on it?"

Mr. Coniston looked up with a smile.

"A bet on what?" he enquired.

"That you don't get those United States bearer bonds back?" said the American.

The banker shrugged his shoulders.

"I'd be willing to lay a pretty long shade of odds," he said.

"Say, I'd like to call that bluff!" The American's expression was solemnity itself. "Do you dare bet a dinner at Tom Long's for"—he checked the guests by his fingers—"we three, an' Nell, an' Miss Beverley an' Tony, an' Harry Pullen an' his missus, eight—a dinner for eight at Tom Long's you don't get 'em back?"

The banker threw back his head in such a laugh as Roy had not heard from his father for a year.

"I'd love to make that bet," he said. "When is the dinner to be?"

"To-night," said the American.

"You mean," said the Englishman incredulously, "that you'd like to bet I have those bonds back *to-day*? Or is it," he added understandingly, "just

your way of extending hospitality?"

"Hospitality *nothing*!" the American protested. "I want to bet you a genuine twenty carat bet of the best dinner that ding-busted Chink can frame that those bonds are in your possession before nightfall to-day."

Roy's heart beat, perhaps, a shade more rapidly. In some fashion not yet disclosed that old-timer in sin his future (God willing) father-in-law had the cards stacked. There was a catch somewhere. He thought it only fair to come to the rescue of an unarmed man.

"My father'll try anything once, sir," he said. "Nor am I averse to buying a gold-brick myself, once in a way."

To his surprise the American took him up at once.

"Then it's a bet?" he questioned eagerly.

"It—is—a—bet," confirmed Roy, slowly and distinctly.

"And you, sir?" enquired Mr. Murrian politely of the banker, and by the wantonly prolonged negotiations Roy knew how immensely the old miner was enjoying himself. He knew, too, that the spoof was timed to explode, now, at any second.

"It—is—a—bet," repeated the banker after the manner of his son.

"*Good!*" Very slowly and ceremoniously the American unbuttoned his coat, plunged his hand into his breast pocket, produced therefrom a foolscap envelope, and with a bow passed it across to the banker.

"You lose!"

CHAPTER XXXI

The climax, so artistically led up to, was a greater success even than had been anticipated by that natural optimist Thomas Murrian.

Roy did what, probably, was the best thing possible under the circumstances by throwing his head back in helpless laughter. Though he had not anticipated a culmination so stupendous, he had, at least, expected some big surprise.

With his father, however, it was different. When he had torn open the envelope and seen that its contents were, indeed, the missing bonds, he was capable of nothing more adequate than a gasp of utter incredulity, the American contemplating him meanwhile in the manner of a magician regarding the object of his benevolent necromancy. Eventually it was the banker who filled in the hiatus.

"As to how these came into your possession . . ." he said, dabbing a moist forehead with his handkerchief.

"Into your possession," the American corrected. "They're not mine, an' cost me nothing to lay hold of."

A glimpse of his father's face told Roy that it was time to get down to business.

"We're in your hands, Mr. Murrian," he pleaded. "As you are strong, be merciful, and put us wise."

His eyes alight, the American passed over a further envelope.

"Here's another little surprise packet I've pleasure in handin' you," he said.

Opened, it proved to be a legal transfer to the banker of three claims on Jackfish Lake, the property which, originally, Roy had been sent out to stake.

"Those were Dacre's, too," the American explained, "an' naturally he didn't pick the worst. Not havin' the money to work 'em, I guess you'll be able to buy out those two 'breeds pretty good an' cheap. Or I will," he added after a moment's reflection.

"Mr. Murrian!" The banker laid the transfers on the table, and faced the American gravely. "Will you please tell me what has enabled you to work

these miracles, and, more particularly, how much they cost to accomplish?"

"Not one bean!" was the answer. "As to how, I'll tell you. Dacre's just a cheap crook, an' like all cheap crooks, thinks himself a blame sight smarter than what he is."

Roy looked up.

"Where was it he fell down?" he asked interestedly.

"Soon's you told me—in Winnipeg—of how not only had he swiped your claims, but your pop's bonds as well, I was on to him. My first move was to force him into the open by refusin' to carry out negotiations regardin' the property I was to buy from him. I figured he was bankin' on money he was to draw from me to finance the claim he jumped from you. Left without a feather to fly with I'd a hunch exactly what he'd do."

The American's tone was brisk and business-like. "Of course he daren't cash the bonds for fear Mr. Coniston had put the police on to trace them. Not that that worried him any. If they wouldn't fetch money they'd fetch money's *worth*—the thing he was just crazy to get because it was goin' to bring in just all the money in the world."

"And that was?" enquired Roy.

"A stampin' plant for the claims on Jackfish Lake," the American said. "With no money an' less credit, the obvious thing was to deposit the bonds as security for a six months note against delivery of the necessary plant. In this way the bonds would be comfortably buried, an' by the time the note matured he'd have milled enough ore to meet it, an' so redeem the bonds."

He met the banker's eye, and the latter smiled grimly.

"Typical!" he said. "That would appeal to Dacre immensely—to use one robbery to finance another theft from the same source!"

"Sure!" The American nodded amiable but slightly detached acquiescence. To him the proceedings had been a pleasurable duel of wits in which he had been called upon to display rather more than his usual acumen. "The trouble was that with four ace-spots and the joker he didn't know the first thing about playin' the hand. Instead of coverin' his tracks by approachin' some jerk-water firm a couple of million miles the other side of the United States border, he puts the proposition up to the Vulcan Engineering an' Milling Corporation of Detroit, who supply every stampin' outfit in the North."

“In what way, exactly, did that effect matters?” enquired Mr. Coniston, breaking in at this point.

“Effect ’em! It didn’t so much effect ’em, as blow ’em off the map,” explained the American. “I knew Dacre was a poor fish so far’s grey matter’s concerned, but I didn’t think he was loopy as he proved himself over that proposition. However, there was no harm in just takin’ a chance.

“Just as a long shot I wrote to Detroit enquiring if such a proposition had been put to ’em, and if so, by whom. Later in the day came the reply. Sure Dacre’d put it up to ’em, they said; they had the bonds cached away in their strong-room an’ were despatchin’ the plant next week. All to do then was just to wire the firm to do one thing an’ not to do another; to send the bonds to me, an’ not to despatch the plant to Dacre. From that moment, of course, I had him stone cold.”

He ceased speaking to stare interrogatively at the banker.

“Get me, Mr. Coniston?” he enquired.

Admiration for the other’s shrewdness was manifest in the banker’s appreciative nod.

“You mean,” he said, “that with the stolen bonds actually in your possession, and backed by the evidence of the engineering company, by threatening to communicate with me you induced him to transfer the claims,” he suggested.

The American’s eyelids narrowed.

“That was what I put up to him at first,” he said, “but it didn’t seem to cut the amount of ice I needed. Although—just in case—he’d been careful to keep the bonds out of circulation, he seemed to think you’d be shy of prosecutin’ for fear of what he’d spill about the bank’s credit.”

Mr. Coniston nodded gravely.

“There’s something in that,” he admitted, “though with the additional funds represented by the bonds in my balance sheet any suggestions regarding insolvency could easily have been disproved.”

“It don’t amount to anything.” The American’s tone was eloquent as to his opinion of Dacre’s mentality. “Next thing I put up to him had him crawlin’. I just said it was a pity about you, for you’d be called to take the stand, anyway—as witness that he’d attempted to obtain credit by the deposit of stolen securities.”

As one who pays awe-stricken tribute to a master, so for a moment the English banker regarded the American.

"There was no getting away from that," he said slowly; and then, struck by a sudden thought: "But tell me," he went on to enquire, "you must carry considerable weight with the Vulcan Engineering Company?"

Mr. Murrian felt in his pocket for a cigar:

"I *am* the Vulcan Engineering Company," he said.

CHAPTER XXXII

The longing that oppressed him getting the better even of his desire to be with his father, a little later Roy excused himself, and sought out Nell. One way or the other the question between them must be settled.

She came to the door at his knock; and he saw at once with a sense of exhilaration that behind the friendliness of her nod was a quality he had missed so inexpressibly in her since the day of Slim's visit to the island.

"Come for a walk, Nell," he said quietly.

She hesitated a moment, and then her face set into more serious lines:

"What about your father and mine?" she asked.

"I left them as matey as two birds on a bough," Roy assured her. "They were discussing whether Dacre would go back to Winnipeg on to-day's train or Friday's. Your father conceded him until Friday, but I've a kind of idea he'll leave to-day."

"I know all about Dacre . . ." she said. "Wait while I put on a hat."

She came out a few moments later; alluring, desirable, fresh as the morning. Again he had that same sense of reunion. In some strange intangible fashion he knew that the cloud had passed.

This was the first time they had really been alone since tension had arisen.

Nell linked her arm through his:

"I think it was fine of you not to have told us about Slim dumping you in the lake," she said quietly. "And I'm glad you didn't. It—it—tells me things about you I didn't realise."

Roy pressed her arm closer to his side.

"As long as it has brought you back to me, Nell, that's all that matters," he said.

She was a little time before she spoke.

"I don't think I was ever very far away," she said at last. "It was just that I was hurt that you should think it would matter to me whether you were rich or poor. You saying nothing about what Slim did has let me into an

angle of your mind that puts a fresh light on it. I don't know why exactly it should do so, but it has helped me to see your viewpoint. I understand now that it was not for fear of losing my respect made you ready to give me up, but for fear of losing your own."

They were threading their way between the wild raspberry canes that grew on the patch of land which separated the main street from the hotel—the same place where, weeks previously, he had pleaded with her not to accompany the party on the expedition. Grown now, were the bushes, to the height almost of her shoulder. It was late afternoon, the time when most people were at "supper." The street that skirted the patch was deserted. He drew her to him, and she made no attempt to resist. . . .

"As long as it's all cleared up," he said, "I don't care how or why. All that matters is that you love me."

"You need have no fear of that," he said, "now—or ever."

"And talking about clearing up," he said when once more they were on their way, "there's just one thing more I want."

"What's that?" she questioned.

"To have a word or two with Brine," said Roy grimly. "Your father cleaned up Dacre with all his usual thoroughness, but personally I don't feel half so bad about him as I do about that 'breed. All that Dacre's crookedness has done is to give me you—and a fortune. Brine, on the other hand, actually laid his beastly hands on you, and caused you physical pain. Well . . . I want to do the same to him—with interest."

She slid her hand down his arm until it rested on his own.

"Roy—*don't*!" Looking down at her, he saw that her distress was acute, and in addition that she looked tired and a little pale. "I don't think I could bear any more—excitement," she said in a low voice. "I want quietness just now. Let Brine rest; he'll 'get his' all right sooner or later." The pressure on his hand increased. "*Please* Roy!" she pleaded.

He gave way at once. "Why, of course, dear, if you ask me," he said readily. "Only—I hope he won't think I'm afraid of him," he added.

She gave a little proud laugh.

"He'll be too pleased at his let-off to think about it," she said. "I'll bet if he was to see you right now he'd streak for the tall timber as if he was being chased by a forest-bred jaguar."

They had turned down one of the few side streets the "city" boasted, one that at its far end was merely virgin prairie. Towards the end of the built-up portion, however, was a frame candy and tobacco store that sold ice-cream. To this refreshment, then, they turned.

And when they came out Brine was standing in a doorway on the opposite side of the street. One look at his face and at what he held in his hand told Roy that the 'breed had not taken up his station at that strategic point merely to take the air. Temporarily, at least, the man was mentally unbalanced, mad from the twin causes of drink and hate. Even from across the full breadth of the street Roy could see how reddened and wildly staring were his eyes; how, the supporting jaw out-thrust, the thin lips mouthed and mumbled.

Roy seized Nell by the shoulder and pulled her by main force into the store, the latter so tiny that there was no possible concealment for himself. Bearing in mind an axiom of Harry Pullen's that with huskie dogs and half-breed Indians the bold line is the safest he moved forward so that his body was outlined by the doorway. He would have passed down the two steps and into the street, but that he knew Nell would follow.

Lounging in a doorway thirty or more yards down the street, his glance moving alternately from the candy store to Brine, and from the latter back again, he was aware of Slim Peters. Like the half-breed, he held a revolver, the butt in his right hand, the barrel, in readiness for immediate action, resting lightly across his other palm. The space between them was too great for Roy to read his face, but from the distance it looked threatening enough, and it appeared more than an odds-on chance that if the half-breed missed his aim, here was another vengeful sharp-shooter standing by to take up the practice.

There was nothing for it, then, but to take his medicine. With his expression under better control than was the clamorous beating of his heart, he waited for the inevitable shot.

But for the gunman and Slim Peters, there was no living thing in sight but the flies that danced and swirled against the background of the heat-haze, and a bedraggled huskie dog nosing for garbage in the gutter. To Roy the whole scene spread as stilted and unnatural as a stage set for tragedy. Everything was hushed as, slowly and deliberately, the half-breed raised his revolver. . . .

Roy awaited the shattering impact of the bullet with a curious sense of detachment. Brine's scream, stabbing the late afternoon somnolence of the

sun-baked street, too, seemed strangely apt to the setting. Only his revolver clattering hollowly to the raised board-walk impressed reality.

Movement began again with Brine writhing in sudden agony, blood oozing through the fingers that clutched his other wrist, and yelling curses in mingled French and Cree Indian.

His revolver, a thin whisp of smoke curling impersonally from the barrel, swinging carelessly on a finger passed through the trigger-guard, Slim Peters moved leisurely to inspect the damage, arriving simultaneously with Roy. Nell, her face dead-white, would have followed, but Roy motioned her back imperiously. And, surprisingly, she obeyed.

"Y'ought to know that sort of stuff don't go, Jake," Slim said gently.

Brine mouthed livid blasphemies, and with his uninjured hand dived for his revolver. Whereupon, without compunction, the airman launched a hearty kick at the most convenient portion of the bending figure, so that Brine sprawled abjectly on all fours. This enabled Roy to kick the gun from the high board-walk into the gutter three feet below.

In the same everyday fashion in which he had acted throughout, Slim hauled the half-breed to his feet.

"If it had been the little lady you'd threatened to loose off at, Jake," he said, "I'd have put you out same as if you was a mad dog." In spite of a savage effort to the contrary, Brine swayed dizzily as he stood. "As it is, I guess we'll go along to Doc Benois," Slim went on. "Reckon there's no call to bring Sarg. Wells into a lil private mix-up o' this kind?" he added, referring to the Mounted Police officer in charge of the district.

"Oh, by Jove no!" Roy agreed hurriedly. "And—and—thanks more than I can say." He held out his hand, which, after regarding it rather uncertainly for a moment, the airman gave a tentative shake.

"That's all right," he said easily. "I just happened to notice Jake here campin' on your trail, and as you had the little lady with you I followed along just in case. But I guess I owed you something, anyway."

His fingers closed about the forearm of the now somewhat subdued half-breed, and with a touch that was strangely gentle made a tentative examination of the wounded wrist. "Got a handkerchief that ain't too soiled?" he jerked over his shoulder.

"Let me."

Slim jerked round sharply on his heel. Nell was standing by with a strip of cambric—torn hastily from her petticoat—in her hand, with which, regarded with uncomprehending wonder by the now wholly silent 'breed, she bound up the arm.

When it was finished, Slim, who during the whole operation had uttered no word, turned to Roy:

"Guess God A'mighty must think a whale of a lot of you," he said.

Roy slipped his arm through Nell's, preparatory to moving off.

"I think He must," he said gently.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *Waters of the North* by Louis Charles Douthwaite]