

his huge yellow fangs: it was like the snarl of a hungry wolf.

"It is the firewater that speaks, Police Ogama," Two Moons interrupted; then calling imperiously, "Lone Wolf, come back!"

But the Indian drove his cayuse forward, and as his bare leg rubbed Kinnaird's boot, he spat in the Sergeant's face. Then at a dig from his heels the pinto sprang like a cat from the trail.

Kinnaird turned a handkerchief that was knotted about his neck and wiped his cheek, saying in a suppressed voice, "That is the way of a skunk, Nichie; but when we are on duty we do not kill skunks. Some day I will put you where you may spit no more!"

He turned toward Two Moons, asking, "Do we take the prisoner in peace?"

A scream of terror at his back, a cursing command from Somers, caused the Sergeant to wheel his horse just in time to drive him like a battering ram into the lean ribs of a cayuse, on whose back an Indian, knife in hand, thrust with vengeful cut at the cowering Dupre. Kinnaird's revolver held its cold barrel in the Indian's face as he said:

"Go back with Two Moons, or I'll take you to the fort, too! Back, or you come with me, dead or alive!"

"Ho, brothers!" the Chief cried. "It is enough—evil enough has been done. We fight not with the soldiers of the Queen. If Dupre is taken to the fort, Two Moons will go to tell the Police Ogama of Kamoos Dupre's dog way. Come, braves, we go back, lest there be bloodshed. Our tribe has smoked the pipe of peace. We eat of the Queen's rations, and we make not war with her soldiers. *Marse! marse!*" he bellowed.

And reluctantly, with scowling faces, the young bucks, their lips muttering the vile blasphemy of Indians, turned their ponies over the back trail, and trooped slowly, like melting shadows, into the gathering gloom that hung over the valley, a black pall.

The Chief, holding last in caution, wheeled his pony on the edge of the bank, and his voice came harsh and shrill, crying, "In the White Mother's hands now is punishment for Kamoos Dupre; but the long trail brings him again to the tepees of the Bloods! Two Moons will not forget!"

His voice was smothered by the approving cries of his braves which rang like the fierce call of a wolf pack.

Dupre shuddered; and the Sergeant said, "Keep that tribe the length of a day's gallop from your throat, Dupre. Now move out in front, and no tricks!"

The halfbreed, true to his heritage, eased of his terrible enemies, swaggered. "By Gar!" he cried, "you got no right put han'cuffs on me! Tak' de t'ings off! I can't ride."

"Shut up! Move on, you miserable coyote!" the Sergeant growled.

"You got no warrant for arrest, I t'ink me," Dupre persisted. "I won't go de fort! That Nichie he's lie for me. Dey go for steal my hoss—dat's all."

"Look here, Dupre!" Kinnaird snarled, "If you sling lip at me, I'll throw this quirt into you good and plenty!"

The quirt hissed through the air and landed on the rump of Dupre's cow hocked cayuse. The troopers' horses broke into a gallop behind, and they swung over the trail to Fort Nelson, forty miles away.

They had ridden for a mile, when Kinnaird spoke out of a moody silence bitterly. "Thank God, this is my last day as Number 860! That, back there—he swept his gloved hand over the back trail—"to have to stand for a filthy Nichie spitting in your face for a dollar a day! I've had five years of it. I have these," he lifted his arm with its carrying of three stripes, "not a sou in my pocket, and fit for nothing but to sit a horse."

"Are you going to cut it?" the boy queried.

"Yes, my five years is up to-day, and I won't take on again."

"Who'll get Captain Holland's inspectorship? When Little Snake shot him, I thought the bullet carried promotion for you, Sergeant. You're the man for the place."

"Marriages are made in heaven, kid, and inspectorships in Ottawa. I don't care. But there's water ahead. That's Fish Creek, and we'll camp for the night."

Dupre sat staring moodily into the fire as Somers boiled a fierce decoction of tea in the copper kettle; and when Kinnaird, filling a pipe, tossed him the plug of tobacco, saying curtly, "Have a smoke!" the breed worded the thoughts he had been turning over and over in his mind.

"By gar! ain't no use you fell's tak' me Fort Nelson. Dat Nichie won't come for mak' charge; I don't do no'ting." His tone changed to a wheedling

whine. "I got seeck little boy, me. S'pose you let me go on my shack I don' mind give you fifty dollars, me."

"You hound!" the Sergeant exclaimed. "Do you think we're breeds, to take a bribe?"

Dupre's shallow face grew black in his disappointed anger, and he babbled in foolish sneering. "Dat's all I got me—s'pose 'tain't 'nough. You mak' big mans you'self tak' one mans pris'ner. Why you don' catch de whisky jacks, eh? Dey got plenty money—dat's why, eh?"

"You're a liar, pinto man!" Kinnaird retorted.

"Dat's de trut'. Why don' Constable Somers tell de p'lice 'bout he whisky runners at Stand Off, eh? Cause de head mans, Mayo, he got tam fine girl, Chris. An' Somers he's mak' de good wit' dat Chris girl—dat's why."

With a cry of rage the constable sprang to his feet; but Kinnaird's strong arm, thrust across his chest, barred him from the insulting breed.

"Let me go!" the boy pleaded. "I'll kill the vile lying animal!"

"Leave it to me," the Sergeant answered, a smothered quiet in his tones. He reached down beside his saddle and picked up a quirt, saying sternly, "Get to your feet, Dupre! By Heavens! men can't stand too much, even if they are policemen. I'm going to teach you to keep your dirty tongue still where white women are concerned."

The breed crouched like a sullen dog till the whip sang through the air and stung his back. With a curse he sprang to his feet. Again it hissed snake-like. Dupre threw up his arm, and the diverted lash bit into his cheek, drawing a tribute of blood.

Kinnaird threw his quirt down in disgust, saying wearily, "There, I lost my temper? But what is one to do?"

Encouraged by the cessation of hospitalities, Dupre vented his anger in threats. "I'll mak' report to de Major dat you strike de pris'ner. You get broke, M'sieu' Sargen'! Dem stripe will be strip from you' sleeve!"

Kinnaird laughed, and turning to Somers said, "That's why I stopped you, boy—though it had to be done."

Presently Dupre was handcuffed by his right wrist to the left wrist of Somers, and side by side they lay down on the constable's grey blanket, while Kinnaird stretched himself a few feet away on the other side of the prisoner.

For a long time the Sergeant lay staring up into the night sky, jewelled with millions and millions of blue-white diamonds. He could hear the steady slumber breath of the boyish constable, and the guttural suck of the breed's—even in sleep he was like an animal.

Strangely the malicious words of Dupre about the girl at Stand Off lingered distastefully in his mind. They were in a land barren of women, and Somers was but a boy. What if there was really some cause? Scandal swept the prairies with the same curious leaping of distances as did the Indian's knowledge of far away events. What if there was something—something—Kinnaird slept, not the deep sleep of a toiler, but the police sleep of the plains, which is shattered to wakefulness by the fall of a leaf or the soft slip of a foot.

Slowly a pair of lids lifted from the black snake-eyes of the breed; his sucking breath stilled. The Sergeant's broad chest rose and fell in the light of the flickering fire with a steady rhythm that told he was asleep.

Then the breed's moccasined foot slipped along the grass, and gently, gently, rolled toward his free hand a faggot of willow. His nervous fingers clutched it, and with the gentle pass of a juggler he swept it over the sleeper on his right and through the loop of a leather pistol belt. With the noiseless stealth of a lynx creeping slowly inch by inch, he carried the belt to his side, his bead eyes gleaming with lurid ferocity in the red light of the dying fire. As his bluish fingers, clutching the butt of a six-shooter, drew it from its leather pocket, a buckle clinked softly, like the faint chirp of a cricket.

Flat on his back, chained by the right wrist, not daring to move, the breed, waiting with closed lids lest the slight noise had carried to the ears of the sleepers, did not see that Kinnaird's eyes were open.

The Sergeant lay staring in cautious quiet, wondering why this sense of dread held him on the alert. Nothing moved; there was no sound—just the soulless red of the dying embers. What had waked him with a sense of evil? The form of the breed was motionless in sleep.

Ah! Dupre's swarthy fingers had moved; they clutched something. A sudden tinge of fire red lay like blood on steel.

As Kinnaird drew a hand free of the blanket, some part of his anatomy creaked. Two hands sprang into action the same instant; and two bodies writhed and twisted, dragging the constable by his chained arm. There was the sharp bark of

a six-shooter; and then the breed was hurled to earth, Kinnaird's knees on his chest, his arm almost torn from its socket as the pistol was wrenched from his grasp.

"What do you think of that, Somers? The sweep meant to murder us!" Kinnaird panted, as, forced to his knees by the drag of handcuffs, the constable stared in half-wakened wonderment. "Unlock that bracelet and slip it on this coyote's other wrist! There!" the Sergeant continued, rising as the steels clicked home. "Boil the kettle. We'll have a cup of tea and pull out. I don't want to sleep beside a snake."

## CHAPTER II.

An Indian dreads the law; and Two Moons abode in his tepee far from Fort Nelson.

But Major Dixon gave Dupre three months in the guard house because he was evil, even for a breed, and was known to belong with the men of Stand Off.

David Kinnaird placed on his iron cot a khaki uniform, a red tunic, a pair of blue-black breeches with wide yellow stripes down the side, and walked out in a suit of tweed, no longer Number 860 of the N. W. M. P.

He continued on across the barrack square, running his eye up the tapering white pole in its centre, to rest for a second with a little feeling of regret on the Union Jack that fluttered lazily from its peak as he passed to the Commandant's quarters on the farther side.

As he approached, Major Dixon drew a chair close to his own on the verandah, saying, "Hello, Mister Kinnaird! Sounds odd, doesn't it, Sergeant—the civilian touch, I mean? Sit down. There's a cigar. What about the whisky runners at Stand Off to-day? Still think you can bag the lot with that detective scheme?"

Kinnaird puffed a cloud of smoke from his lips and nodded confidently.

"It's devilish risky. They'd shoot you in a holy minute if they caught you spying on them. They killed Sergeant Blain for less. He was supposed to have been drowned fording Bleeding River; but there was the mark of a lariat about his neck."

"If I succeed—"

The Major interrupted Kinnaird eagerly. "You could take on again in the vacant inspectorship. I wouldn't dare even suggest this thing to headquarters, and you do it all off your own bat; but if you can get convicting proof that they're moon-shining, I'll slip down a force strong enough to corral the whole outfit. If I report that you broke up that damnable traffic, the powers will make you inspector."

"Well, I'm going to try it."

"I want to tell you something, Kinnaird," the Major said, casting his voice in a confidential tone. "I brought young Somers up from the border patrol because of talk about a girl at Stand Off. Chris is the name. Probably nothing in it; but you know what talk about a woman does to a youngster in the force. And that cursed breed Dupre—"

"I know. He's a lying hound! I have known Somers, in the East, since he was born, and if duty demanded it he'd arrest his own father. His honour is as bright as that medal," and he touched a silvered disk that hung from a red and black ribbon on Dixon's black tunic.

"But what about the girl? He used to see her in Border City."

"I talked with him on the trail of her. He's but a boy—I don't know," Kinnaird interjected somewhat wearily. "But I want to—He's rather in my charge—His mother—It's got nothing to do with his duty to the force—that's like steel—it's just himself. I want to break it up. There, that's all Major. It has nothing to do with the M. P.—it's between the boy and me."

"And Chris Mayo, the outlaw chief's daughter?"

"Yes. That's one of my reasons for a holiday in Stand Off. If there is anything foolish between the girl and Somers, I'll break it off somehow. I can't let him throw his young life away."

## CHAPTER III.

Kootenay Jack, Cayuse George, and Tough Wilkins sat on the verandah of the Lone Pine at Stand Off, flipping Colt bullets at a family of gophers that occupied basement rooms in the prairie just across Broadway.

Square and angular, like the abutment of a bridge, the stopping place lay against the dominating verandah, from which thrust a lean semaphore shaped wooden arm carrying the crisp inscription, "Thad Mayo."