

brighten. "Did you ever see her like?" he demanded, holding her at arm's length; and her comment upon my reply showed quite a roguish wit: "The abbe knows that his cloth protects him."

At dinner it was a feast for eyes long denied such delicacies, to watch her dimpled arms, white hands, hovering over plates and silver soup-ladle as though to the manner born. Be sure that I searched her refinements for the savage which my philosophy suspected—I am fain to confess without result—as I acknowledged when the governor taxed me, later, over a pipe and bottle.

"Confess, father, that you were in the wrong?"

"It appears so," I answered him. "Let us give thanks to Him for it."

Nodding, he smoked in silence for a while, studying the fire in which we doubtless saw the same pictures, for presently he made a remark that carried back to the Swampy Sioux camp.

"Aye, she'll do better than that, father." A minute later, he added: "Have you taken any note of young Carew?"

I had. A young Englishman of good family, he had been apprenticed as clerk in the Company's service by his parents who either believed that vices could not stand the frosts of a Canadian winter, or might be left out in packing his trunk. That his had flourished under transportation, I knew. But as the bulk of my information came through the confessional, I could only answer in general terms.

"A bit of a roisterer."

The governor shrugged. "Pish! Young blood. Marriage will steady him. His family is excellent and he inherits the baronetcy on the death of Sir Philip."

NOW, it is not unusual for self-made men to be blinded by the false halos of a title, and vanity is here, strengthened by a genuine desire for the girl's own good; but I had always thought of Mr. Temple as being sound to the core and the revelation of this weak spot caused me great uneasiness.

"But she has just returned," I argued. "And you are already planning for her disposal."

"Merely banking my happiness," he returned, "just putting it where I can always find it."

"But June? Does she—"

"They have been a good deal together. She seems to like him, and in such a meagre society as this propinquity may be depended upon to do the rest."

"And he?"

He looked at me, a trifle defiantly, I thought, as though forestalling adverse comment. "He has already asked my permission to pay his addresses."

Now, thoroughly dismayed, I advanced my last and most powerful objection. "But does he know—the facts of her birth? That—"

"She is a natural child? Yes, and that she contracted an alliance in early youth which I broke off. The knowledge made no difference. Indeed, he waived details."

With the seal of the confessional upon my lips, it was not for me to say that I could easily imagine that beauty would blind the fellow to all other considerations in the choice of a wife. I could only advise caution, saying as I rose to leave:

"Better go slowly, son, for marrying is no light business and mistakes are easiest rectified on the hither side of the knot."

AS aforesaid, the turn of recent events had almost won me to his opinion, but pacing homeward under the cold stars, I reverted somewhat to my former scepticism. If this weak licentiate were all that culture could give her, I thought, better that she had lived out her simple span with her breed who, at least, was clean and strong.

Having this in mind, I watched very closely during the next few weeks, observing the pair alone and together—mostly the latter, for he attended her everywhere, walking, riding, canoeing on the Red, to mass where his devotion to her or the service could not keep his eye from the pretty half-breeds of my congregation. Before this I had rejected the eternal constancy of the poets, but I must have hoped that June would prove the exception to the general rule, for I felt distinct disappointment at the pleasure she evidenced in his company.

It was, of course, natural. He had his share of good looks, youth draws youth, and after three years her former life must have receded to a great distance, have loomed dimly as a dream. Certainly there was no hint of retrospection in the merry eyes she turned back when, one evening, she headed him in a burst of speed passing the mission; no note of sadness vibrated in the rich laughter that came floating back on the dusk. I saw at once that the governor had not erred in trusting to propinquity, and the thought sent me to consult with Martha, the half-breed wife of Louis, my stableman.

A strange confidante for a priest, you say? But you do not know Martha. A little old woman with

small beady eyes, she had taken from a Scotch father a caustic tongue and itch for other folks' business that made her at once a critic and chronicle of the settlements. Few came to the mission and escaped before she had pumped out their wells of information. Report has it that she once locked a recalcitrant witness in the church until he or she—I forget the sex—yielded up a scandalous tid-bit; but I never quite believed this. Not that she was unequal to it. Only I cannot conceive of her being driven to use such a crude stratagem. Be all of which as it may, I felt that if any one beside myself knew aught of Carew, it would be she, and I knew, moreover, that she liked June who never came to the mission without bringing her some small present.

ENTERING her cabin from the stockaded yard, I caught Martha staring after the pair out of her window, which facilitated matters.

"What do I know of him?" she repeated my question. "A few things that are hid from the governor."

"For instance?" I prompted.

"The sip, sipping alone in his room, not to mention the whiskey he takes abroad. Then there is the business of the Rives girl—" She stopped, chuckling at my sudden astonishment, for I had thought that piece of shame locked safely behind my own lips. "One doesn't have to sit at the confessional-window to learn some things, father. The nurse learns as much as the priest."

"Then," said I, "you know him to be no fit husband for Miss June?"

Her bits of eyes glinted shrewdly. "What of it? But I doubt whether the governor would thank me. Anyway, there are others closer to his ear than I."

"Some that are tongue-tied, Martha. Miss June has been good to you?"

"In a way," she grumbled. "Never less than a pound of tea, the best of white sugar, or twist tobacco for Louis. Aye, she's the good lass."

"Very well," I said. "She comes to confession, alone, to-morrow. Afterward, I shall send her out to you for a dish of tea."

"Tea and scandal," she muttered, "they go ever together, and the blame always to us poor women." But for all her grumblings I knew that she would do her duty.

THAT day—afternoon, rather, for she came late—was to be memorable on another account. With all my anxieties, I had not ceased to look in June for signs of her old self. While her wild growths had been trimmed close to the ground, my own practise had proved the enormous vitality of savage roots. Whether or no her preoccupations with Carew had retarded growth, it remained for this quiet afternoon to bring forth the first green shoots.

My study-window looked across a stockaded court upon Louis' cabin, and as the fireplace stood directly in line with the open door, I could see Martha's hospitable welcome and her fussings about a stew on the hearth after June was seated. If she took her tongue from her father, the old woman was thoroughly Cree in her habits and housekeeping. I could never persuade her to use a table, and though she had set her dishes upon it in deference to the quality of her guest, she herself squatted beside the pot in the old familiar fashion. Now fishing out a piece of meat, she grabbed the other end in her teeth, and cut off a mouthful with an upward slash of her knife; an action indescribably rude, so barbarously primitive that its repetition always brings me a shudder though I have seen it a thousand times.

June's shapely back was toward me, but her pose radiated sudden attention. Affecting me as it did, I felt the memories of camp and trail, rude feasts and fastings, that must have come crowding upon that vivid action.

For a space she sat still. Then her laugh came floating across the yard. Before my astonished eyes she slid down to the hearth, took a piece of meat in her teeth, threw back her head till the wide Gainsborough hat slipped back on her shoulders, and slashed off a mouthful in the old squaw's fashion.

SWALLOWING, she laughed again, a throaty ululation very like a child's chuckle. Perhaps an elfin humour had instigated the action; but if so, habit quickly claimed her, for she remained squatted beside Martha, surely the opposite of opposites in her white fluffy gown, great wide hat. And while I watched she seemed to undergo further translations, savagery gained upon her as clouds on a smiling land. Her eyes deepened, darkened. The small smiles, intelligences of expression, sparkle of life faded and set in the somberness natural to Indian psychology. The face died leaving only the beautiful sulky mask of yon bygone trail; in a short half-hour she went back a thousand years to

her mother's people. It was like watching the extinguishment of a soul and, unable to bear it longer, I rang for Martha.

"You told her?" I questioned.

She turned her bits of black eyes upon me with something like scorn. "I told her nothing. There was no need. The other is still in her blood and it will take more than this weak rake to oust him."

If I had doubted, confirmatory evidence came when, a few minutes later, she joined me at the mission-gate. As the full flower bursts from the bud under caress of the sun, so her nature seemed to have broken, at a touch, from the sisters' careful swaddlings. Her face, to be sure, had resumed correct expression. Polite words tripped on her tongue. But beyond these superficialities I sensed a cloud sombre as her ancient self, and which presently emitted a vivid flash.

The sun was setting, loomed in perfect dusk like a saffron wafer; and as we stood for a moment drinking of the glories of rose and gold which bathed the prairies, there came a creaking of huge wooden wheels and a Red River cart rolled by drawn by a ragged pony. The squaw, who drove, was very old. Sun and frost had dried her to a mummy. Her visage was burned into the semblance of a scorched hide from which bleared eyes peered purblindly. Labour, famine, heavy travail had warped and bent and twisted her frame. Seen without the gilding of pity, she was utterly revolting, yet as she drove on into the smouldering eye of the sun, June sighed and I saw on her face the unmistakable sign of envy.

"What a battered wreck!" I said, to draw her thought; and it came, in a wild burst, all capped with that imagery so natural to an Indian.

"She has drunk the wind, supped with sunset, slept with the stars, what then if she does go to sleep under the grasses that whispered at her bridal? She has lived!" The last phrase issued like a cry of regret, then she caught herself up with a conscious laugh. "But there—you will think I am crazy. And I must go, for it is drawing late."

AT this time, the sudden sickness of Brother Francis, of the Great Slave Mission, called me away, and my knowledge of what passed during the next three months comes out of the diverse mouths of Martha and Mr. Temple. With shame the governor afterward confessed to the pressure he had brought to bear on June. Martha told of the skill with which she played both him and Carew, appeasing one with a show of complaisance while she kept the other in hope and yet at his distance by alternate smiles and hopes. It was the same sharp eyes that noted the shivers of repulsion with which—having given in, at last, to her father's wish—June submitted to his love-making. Earth has not torture, despair, equal to that of the woman who is compelled to yield her cold flesh to a detested embrace; and though there was as little love-making as June could manage, an affianced lover cannot always be denied, and Martha would always spit as she told of Carew's beastlike acceptance of her shudders.

Consenting, June had stipulated that she should be married in Devil's Drum, as Virginie, Fraser's young wife—for whom she had contracted a great affection while on a visit to Garry—was in delicate health and could not travel, and I have always suspected Martha of being privy to another reason behind the proviso; one which appeared the night that my buckboard rattled from the Pelly trail into the fort of Ellice on my journey home.

I have mentioned the sack of this place by Cameron and Fraser as beginning the war of reprisals then going on. Since then it had been held for the Hudson Bay people by Duncan, Fraser's clerk, a Scotchman, well-read, with a twist for theology like all of his race. We had spent a pleasant evening together on my way up, and I was looking forward to a renewal of the argument we had left unfinished. Picture, therefore, my face when, swinging in, the gates let the last rays of the sun full upon June's breed.

"Welcome, m'sieu l'abbe," he greeted. "This is a long way from Montreal."

Since that first raid on our furs we had often heard of the man—usually to our rue. The last advice had placed him as far west as the Rockies. Yet here he was, one day from Pelly, two from Devil's Drum, very much at his ease under Fraser's nose.

He laughed when I mentioned the fact. "And I have such respect for Mr. Fraser that I am detaining all who enter the fort. Still, you will be comfortable, for I am expecting friends of yours."

"Friends of mine?"

He nodded in his old grave way. "M'sieu, the governor, his daughter, and the Englishman, Carew