

THE GOVERNOR'S DAUGHTER

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—that is, if my information is to be trusted. They camped last night at Shoal Lake and intended to bring in to Ellice to-night."

Truth shone from his steady eyes, but the thing was inconceivable and I burst out: "What could bring them this way? There was no hint of it when I left three months ago."

"Three months?" He shrugged. "Time enough for Miss June to make up her mind to marry. You are in the nick of time for my wedding, father."

"What?" I exclaimed. "Has he consented—"

"My suit? Not exactly. He believes his present intention to be toward Carew. But I hope to persuade that young man to a healthier role."

Standing there, a suggestion of humour on his dark strong face, I could not but feel that June would profit by the exchange. Yet habit is strong, and my thought had run too long in the opposite channel to be easily switched. Also, I was beset by doubt. If he still lingered as a sentiment in June's mind, she must undoubtedly have softened his outline as she herself had grown in culture, and she might shrink from the rough reality. Then there was the governor, arbitrary and violent, to say nothing of Carew.

"If you will please follow me," he interrupted my reflections.

Had the gates been still open, I might have tried a dash, but not only were they closed, but two of his men, Sioux of the west, had moved to my pony's head. There was nothing for it but obedience.

"Duncan?" he answered my question crossing the yard. "Under guard, both he and his men. We caught them napping. Took the place without a blow." Opening the door of a hut that had been the clerk's quarters he added: "But I shall require only your parole. Please stay here till you are called to supper."

IF rudely furnished, the hut was cozy with bison rugs, robes, furs. Duncan's Shakespeare and thumbed Homer lay on the table, but though I would usually have asked nothing better than an hour alone with them, I could now only pace restlessly and listen for the governor's arrival.

I had not long to wait, for within the hour I heard the clash of the gates. My strained ears gave me nothing else. Ignorant of what was passing, I had to fall back on my patience until a Sioux called me a half-hour later.

It was now dark, but walking across the yard I was conscious of vague forms moving about the stockade and gates, a sinister activity. Then my guide threw wide a door and I stepped, winking, into a blaze of candle-light, and saw that the meal had been set out in the store.

A long low building, the wall logs were hidden behind boxes, barrels, bales, shelves of gay cottons and blankets, staples of Indian trade. Sheaves of traps, hatchets, kettles, pots, depended in groves from the roof-balks. A long table that served for a counter had been shoved to the centre and bore a profusion of meat and drink, not only such as the land afforded, but also hams, cheeses, sweet biscuit, and fruit-preserves, the best of Duncan's store. All was brilliantly lit by scores of long wax candles—in transit to one of my missions—stuck in their own grease along the walls and table.

As my eyes grew to their light, I saw Duncan first, darkly regarding his plundered dainties, and I had almost laughed at the rue on his long Scotch face. Next to him, on the

breed's right at the head of the table, Mr. Temple sat opposite June, and I took a place that had been left vacant between her and Carew.

Afterward I learned that when the breed had bestowed June and her father together to freshen themselves after the day's travel, he then had carried Carew off to his own room. What passed there the Englishman never would tell, but he now appeared terribly frightened. As I seated myself, he sighed as though relieved by his removal from June's dangerous proximity; throughout the meal he fidgeted, shuffled uneasily, while his pale eyes wandered restlessly up and down the table.

FOR matter of that, none of us was quite at ease—Mr. Temple held himself stiffly, Duncan seemed to be chiefly concerned with the census of his plundered dainties, June steadily consulted her plate. I confess myself to a great anxiety, and hold it no shame, for never, perhaps, was stranger company gathered about stranger host.

Experience ought, by this time, to have taught me to cease wondering at anything that he might do, but just then I was amazed at the cleverness with which he had steered his love affair to this remarkable climax. Granted—as was true—that messages had passed between them? Still he had both foreseen and provided against the changes which time and travel had probably wrought in June's viewpoint. Realising that her love might not survive a meeting in the squalid peace of an Indian camp, he had prepared this splendid coup and now sat, conqueror of her father's fort, invested with the colours of romance. I must add that he carried it off with a confident hand.

"Now we are all here," he said as I took my seat, adding a grimly humorous allusion to our last meeting: "Or would be if we had Mr. Fraser. A pity he could not be here."

"A great pity," Mr. Temple dryly answered. Apart from this one allusion to the bitter past, he acted the pleasant host throughout the meal; was hospitable, attentive; talked well, proving himself both well-informed and reasonable in discussing the quarrel between the fur companies. Indeed toward its close he staggered us with a piece of information that was news even to the governor, and which may well be quoted as it introduced pregnant personal matter.

"That will not be necessary," he said when I remarked that division of territory seemed the only permanent solution, "providing that the negotiations now going on in London come to a successful conclusion."

"Negotiations?" Mr. Temple was surprised out of his stiffness.

"Toward the merging of the two companies. You have not heard yet? I had the news from Fort William last week—but that reminds me." He smiled grimly. "The news came out of despatches addressed to you."

WHEN, six months later, that happy union brought peace to the Northland, Mr. Temple was first in its praise. He was, however, too bitter a partisan to jump at idle rumour, nor was he, just then, inclined to peace.

"Never!" he cried, and Carew, who had sipped false confidence from one of Duncan's bottles, echoed the exclamation: "Never!" With an air of fussy importance, he added: "My father is one of the largest stockholders in the Company. He would never consent."

Ignoring the remark as though it

had been the buzzing of a fly, the breed answered Mr. Temple. "Never is a long time! Still, I have no quarrel with a war that has given me back my wife."

So far, he had scarcely looked at June, nor she at him, though her every fibre responded to his voice. In company with his talk her colours had flowed or faded to a tide of memories, and now she raised eyes to his that were large and humid as those of a mother deer; eyes in which, as in brown summer pools, memories of forest trysts were mirrored softly as on moonlit waters.

"What nonsense is this?" Mr. Temple spoke with the sharp habit of authority.

From June the breed's eyes came back with a look stiff as his own. "Is it nonsense for a man to rejoice in the return of his wife?"

"She is not your wife."

"Not by your law—yet, but that will soon be mended."

"Come, come, no more of this!"

The governor rose in his angry impatience. "The joke has been pushed to its limit."

"Joke?" Rising in turn, the breed still retained his level tones. "Joke?"

Your sense of humour develops—or was it also a joke when you tore her from me?"

Mr. Temple glanced irritably to right and left. It was plainly to be seen that he chafed under the necessity for argument, but lacking the force necessary to crush it, he was fain to continue.

"I used a father's right to break a tie damaging to his daughter. I acknowledged your claim on my gratitude, but not upon her, and if I did not then allow it, how much less now that she is educated far above your station and betrothed to another."

"Betrothed?" Under the breed's swift glance, Carew's new-found confidence evaporated and left him whiter than before. "Yes, I heard something of that. As for the tie—is it then the priest's word that makes a marriage?" Pausing, he looked down at June who had slipped to his side. "No claim? What say you?"

Once raised, her eyes had stayed with him, and now, like a bird to its nest, her white hand slid into his brown paw—a sufficient answer that brought the governor to his feet with a protesting cry. "June! June!"

"Yes?"

AS she turned to him, I saw again the face of the beautiful savage of the old trail, warm in its glowing love, splendid in its defiance. Right then I believe Mr. Temple sensed the error he had pursued these years, for a quiver of irresolution swept his face. As though realising the futility of argument, he spoke again.

"Sir, as you said when the gates closed on us this evening, a trick of fortune has placed us in your power. But beware how you use it to advantage yourself by this girl's folly. Even the Nor'west Council will not stand for such misuse; and if the companies should, as you say is probable, merge into one, the north will not be wide enough to hide you from me."

"The Council? She shall answer to it herself, and that within two weeks, for we go straight from here to Fort William. As for your threat"—he smiled quietly—"your power was not sufficient to keep me out of this fort." Throwing up his head with a quick toss of defiance, he finished: "But that is enough of talk. We cackle like old women. Are you ready, m'sieu l'abbé?"

"And you think that I will stand by, a tame witness!" The governor's passion exploded. "Here, Carew! Duncan!"

"It would be useless. He has twenty men outside."

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