

# The Prospector

By S. A. WHITE

All summer Redmond had prospected the northern wilds of Nipissing and Algoma in the vicinity of Moose River. He frequented the route of the canoe express which carries the Moose Factory packet from Temiskaming to James Bay, because the travelling was slightly less arduous in its wake. He was satisfied that the formation of diabase and conglomerate corresponded with the newly-discovered district around Larder Lake and the Montreal River, and he hoped to strike something big. Yet success seemed not at all ready to form a chance acquaintance in the wilderness, and the fickle goddess placed no outcroppings where his toes would hit or where his axe head would graze when he chopped wood for his campfire at nights and hewed a path through the tamarac reach of a new portage.

In August he came to Poste Du Croix, and there he obtained some fresh supplies, lingering a day or so where he could sleep in peace, free from the black-fly's menace, and the blood-thirsty tune of the giant mosquito. The Poste interested him. The picturesque setting, with its virile life, was the embodiment of the breezy, fascinating, northern fiction that had come his way. The quaint, old Scotch factor was there with his obstinate way his shrewd business head and his ancient stories of the great north-land still in lease to the greatest company that civilization or the lone stretches ever knew. The hardy voyageurs and the ruddy-checked French-Canadian maids were there—as well as the black-cassocked priest, Father Laconde. The factor's book upon the desk in the trading room of the log store told strange tales of cautious and riotous sons of the trapper brotherhood; there were huge accounts with long entries showing mighty bales to the debit of some; there were records extending over the space of many years to the credit of others; and there showed, besides, the unclosed accounts of those who had left Poste Du Croix never to return. Some of these records told tales of how the men concerned had fallen victims to the hunger of the wilderness, to the dread power of storms and floods, or to unknown catastrophes. Some names, too, had no footnote of explanation—nothing but a smudge of black as a sombre token. Of these the factor spoke only in a quiet corner, and the tale, although as black as the name—smudge, had always the scarlet stain of blood running through it. Redmond came in frequently to Poste Du Croix after that first visit. He has found a promising district with good indications about ten miles up Riviere Delarde, a tributary of the Moose. Soon it began to be whispered about that this graduate of a southern mining school visited Poste Du Croix for other reasons than to procure fresh supplies. Certainly, he remained longer than was necessary to obtain the articles of which he was in need, and the inhabitants of the settlement knew very well how fair was the face of the queen of all their maids.

Lucille Bleauvelt's countenance was sweet and beautiful as a painter's conception of the Virgin Mary. Her braided hair was long and dark as the inky mists that waved of a spring night from the swollen rivers of the north. Underneath the raven tresses her eyes looked out like two deep, dark forest pools by which a man must be loved before he can be blessed with any fathoming insight.

Lucille's parents were both dead, and

she lived with her father's brother, Ravonne Bleauvelt. Her two brothers, Francois and Gabriel, were also in the Hudson's Bay Company's employ at Poste Du Croix.

While Garry Redmond came often to the settlement, no one saw him with Lucille in the street, or at the factor's house, which was a sort of public place where men and maids were wont to gather for merry conversation or open flirtation, or even at the log store, where every inhabitant met every other inhabitant at some time during the day-space. Lucille was timid, and love was so new! She had no wish to share her wondrous secret with curious gossips by laying her actions open to observation. Her whim was to let them know nothing, and what they whispered was surmised.

But in the silence of the enchanted summer nights the canoe used to float like a leaf across the liquid silver that the

tooth for a glance inside the locket, but Lucille met hints and chaff with equal serenity and guarded her love the better.

Many a black-eyed voyageur cast revengeful looks upon the prospector because he had captured a prize more precious than silver or gold and because he had conquered where they had failed; but the tall son of Anak had a pair of huge shoulders, clear blue eyes and a fighting chin, so they went on their way, for they knew they might stir up a demon which would crush even their own sinewed frames.

The first frosts bit into the northland like steel. Poste Du Croix assumed an air of industrious preparation for the fur-trading season. Everywhere bustle and excitement prevailed. The trappers went out with their woodcraft equipments to take toll of the forest depths; the factor squared all old accounts as much as possible and made his books ready for

prospectors do. He stayed on at Poste Du Croix, noting with satisfaction that Lucille grew gayer and more beautiful with his near presence.

The days of the wild, free, open life on ridge or frozen stream were joyous ones. The nights before Ravonne Bleauvelt's fireplace were very dear, and the old man knew instinctively of a bond which joined the hearts of those on either side his chair. When Redmond was gone—he boarded with the factor—the uncle would touch the locket upon Lucille's neck and smile knowingly. Rings were not to be had for the buying in Poste Du Croix, and Ravonne's keen eyes had noticed that there was an empty cross-link hanging from Redmond's watch-chain.

## II.

The drifts of the choked ravine grew blue. A fragrant mist exhaled from tree-trunks strangely dark. The pond-ices sagged in the centre.

Poste Du Croix knew the signs. The inhabitants understood that lake and river would presently be unfettered. They watched for the emerald flash of winging mallards and honking phalanxes of a bigger breed pointing straight as a compass needle for James Bay. MacBane, the factor, stood outside the store and observed the steam rising from the cracks of the logs. He sniffed the spring air, and trained his field-glasses on the raw-backed ridge which shut out the vista of Delarde Valley. All the trappers were in with their furs, excepting the Bleauvelt brothers. They had a habit of pressing the season to the very end and riding in on tumultuous spring floods with their canoes piled high with trophies. It was a dangerous habit, and men less skillful and daring would have lost the cargoes nine times out of ten. Yet, on this occasion they had not taken their canoes upon their toboggans to the line of huts up the Delarde. They promised to be in before the forest-trails gave way, with their snowshoes on their feet and weighty sleds dragging behind. Another thing troubled MacBane! The Moose Factory packet had not come up from Temiskaming, although it was a week overdue. He feared something had happened Mangard Gironne, the stalwart tripper—the wilderness postman whose advent to the company's stands occasioned such rejoicing by bringing in news of "le Grand Pays." The factor swung his glasses alternately between the ridges and the big bend of the Moose River along which the trail from the southward posts wound like a dirty-colored snake, but all attempts to

pick up trudging figures were vain. Nothing stirred but the rifts of snow sliding with a sudden swish from the ravine edges to the brown gullies beneath. There was no sign of the coming of the tripper or of the return of the Bleauvelt brothers.

"A-weel," sighed MacBane, as he dropped the glasses in his pocket and turned to old Ravonne standing in the door. "A-weel, I doot not but the young fules may stay ben till the snow melts, an' aiblins raft in their furs when the flood gangs doon. They dinna have any sense!"

Ravonne shook his head in smiling contradiction of MacBane's testy complaint.

"Non, M'sieu Rodereek," he replied, "Francois et Gabriel—ils revienndront

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Mountain Climbing at Glacier, B.C.; two of the climbers are women

great moon spilled on Moose River through the pine tops, and only the soft-voiced whip-poor-wills and the drinking fawns heard the words that were whispered and the vows that were sealed.

Lucille's father had been a famous trapper, and a man of careful living. He had sent the girl to a residential school in Ottawa upon the mother's death, but he did not live long enough after her return to enjoy the fruits of her superior education.

Pneumonia, or, as the wilderness dwellers term it, the "fever of cold"—claimed his mighty body for its prey.

So the months of the warm season sped on, and Lucille's dream grew sweeter. At her snow-white throat there was a splash of gold which had not been there before Garry Redmond's coming.

The jealous girls, like Marie Lenoir and Narcisse Verome, would have given a

the entries of rich fur bales which must soon come in; the women stitched leggings and gauntlets for the iron winter.

Francois and Gabriel Bleauvelt journeyed forth into the Delarde Valley, a distance of twenty miles, to a log cabin, which was the first stage of their winter's hunt. The uncle, Ravonne, grown too aged for the chase, acted as the factor's assistant, and from his knowledge of the trade was invaluable in that capacity.

Francois and Gabriel hoped to bring in their giant loads of peltries by the snow's end, and they had promised Lucille to make Poste Du Croix without fail before the thaw came, for she had whispered a secret to them before they left for the Delarde Valley.

The frosts and snows put an end to Garry Redmond's work on the claims he had staked and he paid off his Indian helper; but he did not go south as most