

The man seemed rather surprised, yet he dropped his pile of blankets on the top of a canoe, and slowly took the half-sheet of paper, and began to read the bad, ill-spelt writing aloud. It was a letter from his wife.

Dear Louis,

I am send you these by Running Deer. I want you to know I am verree seeck, I lie on the bed all day, verree bad pain in the side. The baby, he is seeck too, and we are nearly starve. Leetle Jeanne he snare some rabbit, and peek some beree, else we are hongry. Come home as queeck as you can, with all your monee, then we get well again for sure. Your wife Marie
at Lac St. Anne.

The Englishman flushed to the roots of his hair. He felt keenly the awkward position he was in, the man's money practically lay in his pocket; yet he had not wished to take the money from him, he had won it fairly enough. In fact he had been annoyed at Louis's wild betting, it almost seemed as if he wanted to throw his money away. Could he offer it back? He would do it in a minute if he would accept it, but it would be adding insult to injury; he knew the pride of these blooming French half-breeds. He picked up his blankets and went on his way, feeling very puzzled and annoyed; it would be a lesson to him not to gamble with strangers.

By the time he had packed his canoe, a brilliant idea had struck him, he would go and have a talk with the boss of that survey.

The surveyors worked steadily up the river. When they reached the landing they would leave the water, and go by rail to Edmonton. The days were getting shorter and colder, and all seemed anxious to get back.

Louis Leblanc had lost all his cheerfulness, he was moody and very irritable, and hardly spoke to anyone. By the fire at nights he would sit with his elbows on his knees, smoking his pipe silently, thinking of a letter in his pocket, which he had never mentioned to any of these men.

He was worried and discouraged. He had visions of his wife, lying in bed sick, with very little to eat. He had told Running Deer to go back and shoot some partridge and prairie chicken for her, but he would be some time getting back. He saw his baby, little Pi  re, with the soft, white skin, and round, black, beady eyes; he saw him sick too, and longed to reach him, and hold him in his arms again, and coax him with dainty pieces to eat.

And where were the dainties to come from, he had gambled away all his money. Poor Louis! He was paying dearly for his weakness.

He fancied the men were smiling at him all the time, in contempt, he imagined, so he would not speak to them. None of them had ever mentioned the night at the stopping-house, nor were in any way different in their attitude to him. But he was suspicious, and wanted to be left alone, and if they chaffed or teased him, he would flare right up, and want to fight, instead of laughing as he used to. So they left him alone, with his thoughts.

In the beginning of November they reached Edmonton, and were waiting to be paid their wages. In a Government office on Jasper Avenue Douglas Ward sat talking to the Head of the Survey Department. He scanned the different maps presented to him, and glanced over pages of reports.

Next in order came the pay-sheets, which Douglas had carefully filled in for each man on the gang. He laid them on the desk.

"Ah, just so," remarked the Head. "Good men, I suppose? No wages to be deducted, I see."

"Splendid men," answered Douglas, "never would want better on any survey. They earned their money thoroughly."

"No faults at all, I see, eh? And no complaints. Are the men here?" He was busily writing cheques by this time, not waiting for an answer.