

True that no horseman had ever attempted it, but to-night, if ever, time was precious. He knew that the Indians, finding the shanty impregnable, would set fire to it before daylight, which would certainly mean death for his people, if not something worse. Once they were in the hands of the Sioux there was no telling what might happen, and unless he could succeed in gaining Only Ford and returning with a rescue party before the place was burnt down, it was clear that the worst must happen. It rested with him and White Star—with him and White Star, and as they safely crossed the ford and once more the night air sang in his ears, all the wild dare-devilery of his errand came out in a rollicking hunting song he had once heard an English missionary sing. And in tune with the song White Star's hoofs pounded the dry sand of the trail.

## III

Presently, however, the song died on the boy's lips, and sitting back in his saddle he listened intently. Behind him he could hear the rumble of hoofs, and an occasional cry of indescribable menace. The Indians were pursuing him!

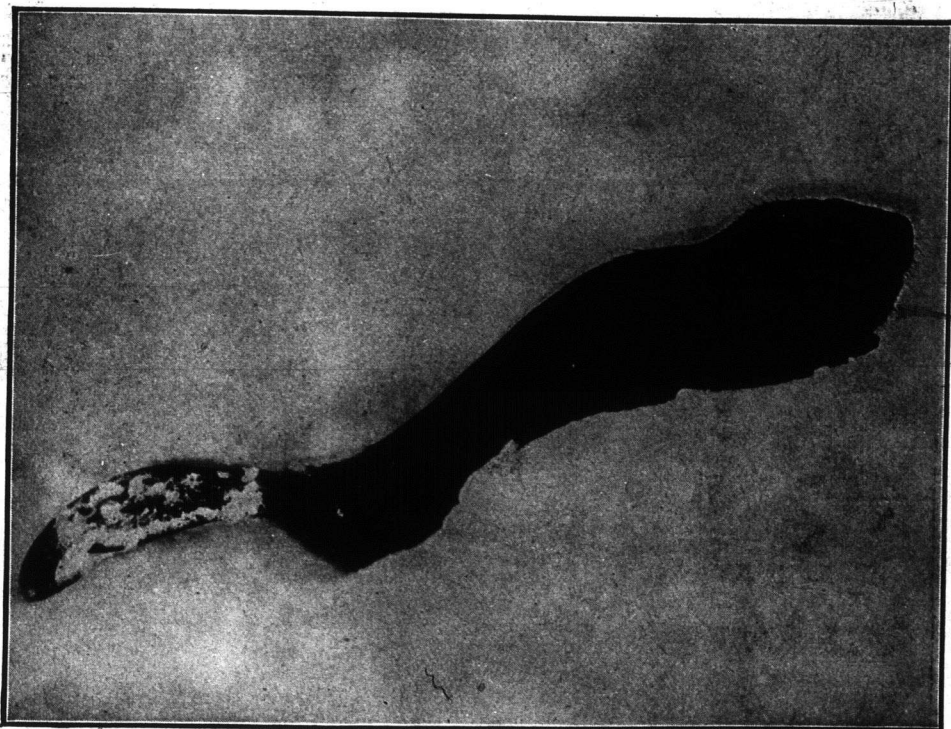
For five miles or more the way led along the old trail, which was all sound going; then, if he followed the course he had in mind, he would turn suddenly to the right

the Indian fall with a sickening thud then the clatter of stones drowned his cries.

The other Indians had more sense than to follow on that awful death ride. They drew up their mounts at the edge of the trail and listened to the noise coming up from the gulch. Then, when their tribesman did not return, they headed their mounts once more towards the trading post, for to them, wonderful horsemen though they were, it seemed impossible that any rider could safely descend that awful bluff.

How Shem kept his saddle he never knew. At times they were scrambling over loose boulders; at times White Star wedged her hoofs together and slid. Down, down they went, till presently before them opened up a sheer drop of twelve feet or more. Beneath it Shem could see the starlight glimmering on clear water, and knew they had reached the creek. White Star leapt; the water closed over them, and in a minute or so they were mounting the steep bank on the other side of the creek.

Shem patted the terrified and sweating pony's neck, and spoke words of praise and encouragement to her. Not till they had reached the top of the watershed and could see below them the bickering lights of Only Ford, did he



Live Canadian Beaver going after food

down an almost perpendicular bluff, ford the creek at the bottom, and from thence across the rugged watershed into the next valley, thereby cutting off the long and tortuous road round. Little did he think, however, what was in store for him if he attempted this passage, and for the time being his one thought was to reach the bluff.

Nearer and nearer behind him came the noise of rumbling hoofs, and presently Shem realized that he would soon be out-distanced by the larger and stronger mounts of Grey Eagle's detachment. He leant forward in the saddle, riding lightly as an Indian himself, and as though she understood the peril White Star swept on. It was an uneven race from the first, and while yet some distance from the bluff the Indians were near enough to open fire as they rode. For some minutes the bullets whistled by, then the Indians, realizing that the race was theirs, ceased firing and rode on in silence.

Finally one of them forced his cayuse to the utmost, and a minute or so later was galloping alongside the white boy. He drew his tomahawk, but at that moment White Star darted aside off the trail. They had reached the edge of the bluff, and Shem had turned his little mount down the headlong descent.

Finding himself foiled when success seemed certain the Indian followed. Together they plunged headlong down the awful incline. Huge boulders of rock, loosened by the horses' hoofs, sped along ahead of them, gaining strength with every bound. It seemed that both riders and horses must be hurled to their doom, but somehow White Star kept her feet.

As they crashed on, Shem presently realized that the Indian was down. He saw the man's cayuse rolling over and over among the loose rocks. He heard

look back. Then he saw in the heavens a soft and fitful patch of light shining in the direction from whence he had come. He knew well what it meant, and his heart froze within him. Drawing the pistol from his belt he fired three shots in rapid succession. This he did time after time till a light moved in the settlement below. Then came the answering discharge—the men at Only Ford had heard and understood, and presently Shem heard the rumble of hoofs ascending the bluff. He remounted his cayuse and waited for the rescue party to join him.

## IV

In the meantime a stern battle was going on at the trading post. Immediately the Indians realized that they had let one of the beleaguered party pass through, they went mad with rage. Five or six of them pursued Shem, while the remainder tried to take the post by storm.

Ralph Inman and his wife, however, were fighting for the lives of their children and their own. Their rifles barked out with deadly effect, till the groans of the dying were mingled with the mad cries of the savages.

Once, twice, the Indians were driven back, then realizing the folly of their tactics they became more cautious. They were in no hurry to burn the store and all the treasure it contained until they were forced to do so. If once they could capture the white occupants these treasures would be theirs, but as the hours slipped by and the defence showed no sign of slackening their warlike spirits overcame their discretion.

At length one of them crept up, and lit a fire under the cookhouse floor. The flames took hold readily, and in a few minutes the cookhouse was burning like brushwood. The red glow of it lit up the forest, and Inman knew that the end



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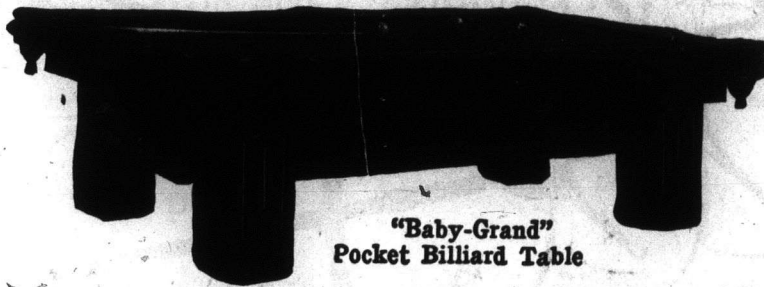
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