

Gabriel, and these were speedily reinforced by Indians from Eagle Cry's tribe. Venlaw was determined that the redeemed post should not again pass out of the hands of the Hudson's Bay Company. There was little to fear that any immediate demonstration would or could be made by the North West Company, for the news of this defeat would take long to travel to headquarters. A surprise could not easily be effected again.

Never in the course of its history had the Hudson's Bay Company been threatened as it was at present. If they were defeated, it would tell hard against the white man in the country. The North West Company had not played a noble game. As much from vanity and jealousy as anything else it encroached upon these areas where the Hudson's Bay Company had honourably and firmly made its position. Under the name of protest against a great monopoly, it actually shook the general friendship of the Indians for the white man. The White Hands, if they succeeded, intended, despite their protestations of friendship for the North West Company, to begin a war of race.

At Fort Saviour, Venlaw strengthened his position, gathered friendly bands of Indians to unite with the Sun Rocks, and sent *coureurs-des-bois* to other forts south, suggesting plans of resistance and schemes of action if they should be necessary. Since that notable day when Summer-Hair was wounded, her tribe had been enthusiastically staunch and undivided in their loyalty to Ironheart and the Great Company. Red Fire kept bravely to his compact with the Factor and Eagle Cry. But the old chief was not so certain that the result of that compact would be well for him in the end. He knew now that Summer-Hair loved Venlaw, and he himself had not been indisposed to seal his friendship with the Hudson's Bay Company by giving his daughter in marriage to the Factor. But these are matters above the will of red man or of white. You shall more easily bind the wind than a man's or maid's desire, and nothing befalls as we ordain: not more now than when Euripides told tales of his old Greeks and their loves and slaughters. And it will be so until there be no more love or slaughter.

The Factor's task was a huge one. With Eagle Cry and his Indians they must coincide with the forces from Fort Mary, attacking the White Hands from both sides. The village of the White Hands was in the Long Valley beyond the Big Sleep Woods. Venlaw's policy was, in this case, to assume the aggressive. The White Hands were not likely

to make a move until spring. He would, therefore, march upon them at once and strike a decisive blow before the hostile forces could begin their horrible policy of waylaying and massacring stray travellers, or should seriously disturb the trade of the year. They would strike through to the west, relieving and reinforcing each garrison as they went. The Company must now maintain its position with a power and sharp demonstration, or subject itself in the future to constant attack and harassment.

Not the least anxious for the expedition to start was Benoni. He looked forward to meeting Bruce. That done, his embassy was over and he would return. He and Summer-Hair were the staunchest of friends. She questioned him unwearingly concerning the world in which Jean Fördie played a part so important to the lives of several people. When he first came to the fort, asking for Chief Factor Venlaw, she had vaguely suspected (what woman does not suspect every possible thing as bearing on her happiness when she loves?) that this man's arrival would affect her. She had never rested till she had got at some clue to the truth. Then, as might not have been expected in a "savage," she offered to lead Benoni herself to Fort Gabriel. Her father objected, but, because he saw she was determined, sent an Indian with her and Benoni. The rest of the tribe did not know where she had gone. The Indian had become ill by the way and had to return, so she went on alone with the showman.

Benoni had read her secret. He thought nothing for her could come of it, and so at last to turn her thoughts away from Venlaw he told her of Jean, and of Andrew's love for her, in as careful and delicate a fashion as he could. Meanwhile he became popular with the Indians, for, with his flute, he took their barbarous airs and gave them melody and fancy, and filled their lodges with a new wild music. He had caught the spirit of the North, this amazing old Mercury.

Arrayed in flaring feathers of war, with their painted faces and garnished buckskins, they listened to him, in a great group, the night before they marched. The trees were just beginning to send forth their timid and juicy leaves. The snow had melted and slackened away along the wide sluices of the plains, the birds came sojourning from the south, and the grass rose cleansed and eager like velvet to feel for the foot of man. The air and earth exuded freshness; through the pores of the trees came the sweet sweat of their

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