

HIS GREAT ADVENTURE

That Makes Everybody in the Family Want to Hear It Read Aloud

CHAPTER XIV.

By ALAN SULLIVAN

THE trail broadened as they travelled swiftly southward. Then one memorable day they passed the farmhouse that lay farthest north of Le Pas. Beyond this they found surveyors locating a railway. Gradually the grim severity of the land changed. Here and there were the marks of a pioneer humanity. The trail became a road on which they passed settlers who waved their whips and glanced understandingly at the dog team. At last, on the horizon, they caught the smoke of Edmonton. The Indians shouted and urged the dogs onward. Presently they entered a lane dotted with houses. This merged into a street at the end of which were electric lights.

The dogs yelped as they tore along. From the south came the whistle of a locomotive. Then the leading team pulled up, panting, at the door of a hotel. Across the road was the railway station.

Pearson looked deep into the girl's eyes as he lifted her from the cariole. The look said: "You must trust me—trust me to the end."

He went direct to the proprietor, and found a ruddy, good-natured Saxon, brimming over with human kindness.

"Look here," he said. "I've come down from the North with a young lady I am doing my best to take care of, and I want your wife to look after her. She has had rather a hard time and lost her father in an accident in the Barren Lands."

The hotel keeper expanded visibly. "Certainly! I'll be only too glad to do anything I can, so will my wife. I suppose you would like two good rooms."

"Yes, if you please, and would you mind not saying anything about the matter outside? People are rather inquisitive. Can I depend on you for this? It would be conferring a real kindness."

"Of course you can. Depend on me for anything you like, and on my wife, too. Come along and register."

At the desk, the young man wrote the two names. Then in a flash wondered if he had been rash in throwing off all disguise. In another moment he laughed at the idea of their being recognized in this outpost of civilization.

"Many people here?" he ventured.

"Hardly any one. Never saw business so bad. We generally get a good many in from the North, but there is only one man here now."

"Who's that?"

"He is over there now. You see that chap by the door."

Pearson looked and saw a tall, thin man with sloping shoulders, black eyes, and bronzed face. There was a small, white scar on his left cheek.

The traveler's pulse quickened and his voice shook in spite of himself.

"When did he get in?"

"A day or so ago. Never saw him before, and don't know who he is. Come and I'll show you and the lady your rooms."

A few moments later Pearson rapped at Natalie's door.

"Come in!" said a faint voice.

He entered. Her face was pale, and she looked at him with the old terror moving in her eyes.

"You saw him?"

"Yes," he said, slowly, "I saw him."

"It's the third person of Dubawnt Lake. Don't you remember that Muqua said there was a white scar on his cheek?"

"Then he killed Nicolai!" snapped Pearson.

The girl tottered to a chair and buried her face in her hands. Presently she looked up, with the light of decision on her face.

"Listen, dear. We must start at once—by the very first train. Make any explanation you can. It doesn't matter if we have to leave everything

behind, we must lose ourselves very quickly."

Pearson's brow wrinkled. "But why do you think there is danger?"

"I don't think. I know. He is the man who put food outside our tent at Selwyn Lake. He is the man whose toboggan trail we saw that day after we left the post at Fond du Lac. It is true that he spared us once, that, in fact, he saved our lives, but there is a reason in his following us. I think he wants some promise or oath from you, that you will leave me and forget everything, and while you are with me he does not believe that you will give it."

"I'll promise nothing, much less promise to leave you."

She gazed at him steadily. "Not for my sake?"

He hesitated. "You should not ask me till I've had a chance to show what I can do."

Her form relaxed. "Go, dear, now, and find out about the train. We must not miss it. Perhaps I can make you understand later. If you love me, hasten."

Two minutes before the midnight train pulled out for Calgary, two figures hurried into the forward passenger coach. Half an hour afterward Natalie smiled brightly at her companion. "I think you managed that very well."

His arm slid round her. "Ah, I see you are beginning to put a little more faith in me. Now wait while I go and secure berths. I was afraid to do it before we started."

HE disappeared toward the rear of the train. She waited, yielding happily to the rocking motion as the miles slid by beneath the roaring wheels. The shadow was beginning to withdraw from her heart. Presently Pearson returned. His face was strangely stern.

"I got the berths, but—"

She looked at him anxiously. "Yes, what is it?"

"The tall man with the scar on his cheek is in the smoking compartment."

She quailed visibly, staring, speechless, as though fascinated. Pearson himself fumbled for words, but could find none with which to answer this question.

"And what now?" she whispered, faintly.

"There is only one thing to do, and it's perfectly reasonable. This man has no case against us, nor we against him. We can't prevent his following us, for there is no law against that, and he certainly can't attack us publicly. On the other hand I don't see that we are in any position to lay any complaint about him. There are many things we think we know, but," he hesitated, "we can't swear that we know. As far as the law is concerned he is a perfectly peaceable citizen. We can only go straight ahead and take no notice of him whatever."

She glanced at him curiously, and a strange expression flickered through her eyes. "Then you mean me to give up without an effort?"

"What!" he said, astonished. "You told me what I must do if I loved you."

"Oh, don't you see, I can't give you up like that!" She pulled him close to her and put her trembling lips to his ear. "Don't you understand, Jack. I'm afraid I love you too much."

His heart quickened. She was utterly his own, and now, captured by her love, she was ready to make a fight for liberty.

"Wait, darling. Let me think."

He sat plunged in profound introspection. She watched him anxiously for a moment which seemed hours. Presently he glanced up, with a new resolve in his grey eyes.

"I think I see it now. We will go

on just as we are, doing what I said, then when we get near some large city—say Toronto—we will slip out at night and wait a day or two. It's no use trying that here. The population is too thin, and we would only attract attention. I think that will throw him off."

"I trust you absolutely, Jack."

Next morning, after breakfast, Pearson seated himself in the smoking compartment. Immediately opposite, the tall stranger was exhaling a blue cloud from a cigarette and expelling it in two thin streams from his nostrils. The odour was like that of the cigarettes of Stanovitch. The sun struck sharply through the polished window and touched the white scar on the smooth brown cheek.

"Nice morning," said Pearson.

The stranger nodded. "Winter comes early this year." There was no accent in his voice. He might have been of any nationality.

"You have been in the North?" ventured Pearson, daringly.

"Yes," said his neighbour, calmly. "I came down from Le Pas a day or two ago."

"Fur, I suppose?"

"Yes, fur. The prospects are not very good this season, especially for mink and otter. Marten, on the other hand, are up to the average."

"Then you had not a satisfactory journey. It is a long way to go for a small result."

The slightest flicker moved through the tall man's eyes. "On the contrary," he parried, coolly. "I obtained some very useful data, which will be of great service to me."

A sudden impulse hurried Pearson along. Listening to his own voice, it seemed that he was reciting something he had rehearsed many a time previously in preparation for this one occasion.

"A lonely place, isn't it? One doesn't see much of humanity."

"Ah, yes, quite true! I was quite alone, but curiously enough I did not lack humanity. It is curious how society is represented in the North." Then he added, dryly: "All kinds of society."

"You were alone? Is not that unusual? It would have been very awkward in the case of an accident."

"You are quite right, it would have been awkward. Fortunately things went very well with me—although there are many accidents in proportion to the small number of inhabitants."

"You seem very much at home—are you a Canadian?"

"No, but I have had Canadian interests. I represent a foreign syndicate." For a fraction of a second the lids dropped over the dark eyes, then the level voice went quietly on: "You travel with your wife?"

PEARSON'S pulse fluttered. "Yes, fortunately."

"She is brave to face the North. Her first journey, I suppose?"

"Yes, her first journey, and I think I may say her last. A little of such an experience goes a long way with a woman. I am afraid she rather repents the curiosity that took her there."

The stranger exhaled another blue cloud and stared with contemplation into the smoke. "Ah, you are quite right. My observation is that curiosity invariably has strange and often extremely uncomfortable results. It is a dangerous tendency. You, for instance, do not look as though you are curious."

"No," said Pearson, slowly. "I used to be at one time, but I think I have got over it now."

The stranger nodded. "I congratulate you. In that case you have safely survived that period of life which is most apt to be perilous. You were prospecting in the North, were you not?"

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