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TWO KNAPSACKS:

A NOVEL OF CANADIAN SUMMER LIFE.

BY J. CAWDOR BELL.

CHAPTER X.

Doctor Summoned to the Select Encampment—Newcome Interviewed—Nash's Discovery—His Venture—Drop the Handkerchief—The Dominie's Indignation—The Pedestrians Detained—The Doctor Stays—A Trip to the Lakes—Conversation on the Way—The Richards—Fishing—Songs—The Barrier in the Channel—Nash's Dead Body Found—His Crazy Sister Comes to Bridesdale.

IT was only eight o'clock when the elders finished their breakfast, and the children prepared to succeed them. All the party, except Mrs. Carruthers and Mrs. Carmichael, who had domestic duties before them, and Miss Du Plessis, who had her note to write, strolled out into the garden in groups. Shortly, a buckboard drove up to the gate, and its occupant, a washed out looking youth, enquired if the doctor was there, Dr. Halbert. The subject of the enquiry went forward, and found that he was wanted at the Select Encampment, for a man who had shot himself.

"I tell you frankly, my man," said the doctor, "I don't care to go to your Select Encampment; there is too much mystery about it."

"I guess the pay's all O.K.," answered the youth.

"Why do you not get Dr. Smallpiece to look after your man?"

"'Cos we don't know nuthun about him, and he's too small a piece for our boss. You best hurry up yer cakes and come on, doctor."

Re-entering the house for his instruments, the doctor confided to Carruthers his distaste for the work before him, on account of the mystery surrounding it, but said he supposed it was his duty to relieve human suffering.

"Where is it?" asked the Squire.

"All I can tell you is that it is out on the lakes beyond the Lake Settlement."

"I thoct as muckle," remarked the Squire to the detective, after the doctor was carried away on the buckboard.

"Let us go and see Newcome," said the detective; and the pair went round to the kitchen, where the wounded man lay on an improvised couch, and was waited upon by big Ben Toner, anxious for news of Serlizer. Mr. Nash began:—

"The doctor says that talking won't hurt you, Newcome."

"Dawn't spause 'twull," answered the surly fellow.

"Setting fire to buildings with intent to take life is a hanging matter, Newcome."

"Oo said t'warnt?"

"You seem prepared for your fate."

"Ma vate was aw raight to I got t'bahl i'my laig."

"I mean, you don't seem to care if you are going to be hanged."

"Oo's a gaun to hahng us an' vor wat?"

"You'll be hanged for arson with intent to kill. There are witnesses to prove you threatened to kill me at least."

Newcome started, and so did Ben.

"Yaw caln't prove nowt."

"Yes I can. I've got your pocket book and the odd papers out of your coat pocket."

"Aw'll hae yaw oop vor stalun as well as shootun, zee iv I dawn't, yaw bloody thafe!"

"Keep a civil tongue in your head, man, or I'll send you to the lockup at once," interposed the Squire.

"Leave him to me Squire; I'll manage him," whispered Nash.

Then, turning to the injurious Newcome, he continued:

"Your daughter, Sarah Eliza, is at Rawdon's Select Encampment, where the stuff you sell is turned out. She can give some fine evidence. The Peskiwanchow crowd, the man that pretends to be called Jones, and the rest of them, were picked up by you in a waggon, I know, last night. The coal oil and fire marks are on your hands still, and this pretty rag came out of your side pocket. What is more, I don't need to ask the Squire here to commit you. I've got a warrant already, on the evidence of Henry and Stokes and Steadman. I'll serve that warrant on you now, and have you off to the county gaol, where Dr. Stapfer is bound to cut off your leg, if you don't own up quick, for I have no time to lose."

"Daw yaw thenk as Stapper ull ambitate ma laig?"

"I'm sure of it. He always does; he has a perfect mania for amputation. You know Driver?"

"Yaas."

"Who cut off his leg for a little bruise?"

"T'wer Stapper."

"And who cut off Sear's arm at the shoulder for a trifle of a rusty nail?"

"Stapper taw. O, aw zay, Mezder Nahsh, dawn't zend us ta naw Stappers."

"But I will, I must, if you don't confess immediately all that the Squire and I want to know. Turn Queen's evidence, and make a clean breast of it. You can't save Rawdon and his gang; we have them tight. But confess, and I'll get you out on bail, and send you home to your wife to be nursed; and, when the trials come, I'll get you off your liquor charge with a fine. Refuse to, and you go straight to Stapfer's to lose your leg, and then to the gal-lows."

"Aw dawn't moind chancin' t'gallas, but ma laig! Wat daw yaw wahn't ta know?"

At once all the people, Ben included, were ordered out of the hospital, and Coristine, much to his disgust, sent for. His hands were useless for writing, but, as he had a good memory, he could help in the examination. So Mr. Errol was called in to act as clerk, Mr. Perrowne refusing to do so, on the ground that all confessions made in the presence of a clergyman are sacred. Little by little the hardened old sinner revealed Rawdon's business, its centre and methods, his accomplices and victims. Then the whole story of the plot which culminated in the night attack was drawn from him, appearing blacker and more diabolical at every new revelation of villainy. It appeared that the Grinstun man had with him in the attack, which he conducted personally, his own six men from the so-called Encampment, together with the idiot boy, and two lots of teamsters or distributors, the five from Peskiwanchow brought by Newcombe, and four from another quarter. He had thus sixteen ruffians in his force, besides himself and the boy.

"Whose boy is that?" asked the detective, eagerly. He had been looking closely at the lad more than once and listening to his voice.

"Ah beeslong ta Rowdon."

"Who is his mother?" asked Nash, with a strange light in his eye.

"Her's cawd Tilder."

"Is she Rawdon's wife? Speak, man!"

"Naw, nawt az aw niver heerd."

"What was her name before he—brought her there?"

"Aw dunno, but t'laid's cawd Mawnta Nehgull."

"O my God!" cried the detective, as he fell back in his chair, and seemed to lose all power of speech.

"Come away, Nash," said the Squire, taking one arm of the stricken man, while Mr. Errol, handing his notes to the lawyer, took the other. They led him tenderly to the office, where Carruthers forced a glass of wine upon him. Nash revived, and begged that the door might be closed and locked.

"I may never have a chance to tell this again, so I want to tell it to you two, and to you alone. My real name is Nagle, not Nash. I was born in Hamilton, where my father was a wheelwright. I got a good schooling, and went into a lawyer's office, for father wanted me to become a lawyer. But I got reading detective books, and did a few sharp things for the firm that got me into notice and brought me private detective business. So I got on till I rose to be what I am, such as it is. When my parents died they left my sister Matilda in my care. I was only twenty then, and she, eighteen, a bright, pretty girl. She kept my rooms for me, but I was away most of the time, so she became tired of it, as we had no relations and hardly any friends we cared to associate with. She insisted on leaving me and learning the millinery in Toronto; so I had to let her go. I saw her often, and frequently sent her money. She got good wages at last and dressed well, and seemed to have respectable people about her. Suddenly her letters stopped. I went to her place of business, and heard that she had left to be married to a rich man in the country; but nobody, not even her closest acquaintances among the girls, knew where, or who the man was. I advertised, neglected business to hunt up every clue, travelled all over the country looking for my lost sister, promised my dead parents never to marry till I found her. And at last, O God! I have found Matilda, and you know where, a woman without name or character, the victim of the greatest scoundrel unhung, the associate of brutal criminals, the unlawful mother of an idiot boy! No! no more wine, Squire, not a drop. I want a steady head and a strong hand this morning more than any day of my life. Open the door and the windows now, please, and give me a little air."

Nash, for so he may still be called, sent Coristine away to Talfourd's for his bundle, and Miss Du Plessis, having handed the note for Rawdon to the dominie, accompanied the hero of the gloves in the Squire's buggy, so as to lose no time. Wilkinson was warned not to post the letter before his comrade's return. While waiting in the office, Mr. Errol, whose heart was deeply touched, locked the door again, saying: "John, let us kneel down and pray our Heavenly Father to comfort our friend in his great sorrow, and bless him in his present work." The Squire knelt with the minister, and the detective fell on his knees beside him, their hearts joining in the quiet but earnest supplications of the good man of religion. When they rose from their knees, Nash, almost tearfully, pressed their hands and bade God bless them.

Coristine enjoyed the society of Miss Du Plessis; nevertheless he drove fast, for the business demanded haste. The buggy returned in little over half an hour, and the bundle was handed to the detective, who took it up stairs, and, soon after, descended as a countryman, in flannel shirt, light soiled coat, and overalls. The rim of his wideawake was drawn down all round, half hiding his face disguised with a ragged beard. It could not conceal his refined, almost aristocratic, features, but such a country type is not uncommon in many parts of Canada, even accompanied with perfect boorishness. His boots were small, which also was quite Canadian, but he had rubbed the blacking off, and trusted to the dust still further to disguise them. Smiling and courteous, he bade everybody whom he could trust good-bye, and slipped a large pocket-book full of money and memoranda into the hands of the Squire. "You can keep it till I come back," he said; "if I don't, get

Mr. Errol and this lawyer chap, who seems a good fellow, to help you to make it out." Then, the dominie expressed his readiness to take the note to the post office, and Miss Du Plessis, a little piqued at Coristine's apparent want of attention to her, said that, if Mr. Wilkinson had no objections, she should, above all things, like a short walk after a cramping drive. The schoolmaster was only too delighted, in spite of Mr. Perrowne's glance of jealousy, which Miss Halbert saw and noted with a tap of her dainty foot on the verandah. So, Wilkinson and his innamorata tripped along the road, and, some distance behind them, shambled Simon Larkin, the hawbuck from away back, alias Mr. Nash. The children came out to play, led by Marjorie. Perrowne was still talking to Miss Halbert, Mr. Errol was closeted with the Squire, and the Captain and the veteran, on a garden bench, were telling yarns. "Cousin Marjorie," said her juvenile namesake, "we are going to play drop the handkerchief, because we've got such a lot of nice people to play it." Miss Carmichael answered: "Oh no, Marjorie, try some other game." But Marjorie insisted. So, a ring was formed, with Marjorie as handkerchief holder, outside. The ring consisted of the Captain and little Susan Carruthers, Mr. Perrowne and Marjorie of the same family, Coristine and Miss Halbert, Mr. Terry, pipe and all, and Honoria junior, John Carruthers junior and Miss Carmichael, and baby Michael, but with whom? Marjorie suggested the two aunts and Tryphosa, but finally concluded that there had to be an odd one any way, so baby Michael took the Captain's hand and Miss Carmichael's, and the game began. Of course Marjorie dropped the handkerchief on her Eugene, and Eugene caught her and kissed her with great gusto. Then he had to drop it, and Honoria saluted him with effusion. Mr. Perrowne was her choice, and the parson, tell it not in Gath, the perfidious parson gave himself away on Miss Halbert, who captured him, blushed, and submitted. The Captain and Mr. Terry were becoming indignant and shocked. Miss Halbert had mercy on John Carruthers junior, who went wild with delight, and brought out Miss Carmichael. She, pitying the Captain, gave him the handkerchief and a long chase, but Mr. Thomas finally triumphed, and chose Susan Carruthers as his victim. Susan took grandpa, who pocketed his pipe, and, after a sounding smack, passed the handkerchief on to his grandchild Marjorie. She, true to her name, chose the lawyer, and that gentleman, emboldened by the parson's precedent, dropped the terrible symbol on the shoulder of the girl who was all the world to him. She pursued him, and he ran as he well could do, but at last he got weak and tired, and she overtook him against her will and his, and Coristine was in the seventh heaven of delight. They could take him and trample on him, and flaunt his recreancy before Wilkinson even; he didn't want to kiss any more, even the fresh young lips of the children. He wanted that one impression to stay forever.

Miss Du Plessis and the dominie were not in a hurry to get back to Bridesdale. She had received a letter from her mother, saying that Uncle Morton was coming to see her, and that she would try to induce him to accompany her to the country, as she did not wish to shorten her daughter's brief holiday by calling her home. Imparting the news to Wilkinson, a long and interesting conversation began which branched off into a variety of topics, treated seriously, at times poetically, by the kindred minds. Miss Du Plessis was quite unreserved, yet dignified, and without a trace of coquetry; nevertheless, the dominie assured himself that Mr. Perrowne had not a ghost of a chance in that quarter. She was pleased with the generous way in which he referred to his companion pedestrian, in spite of the provocation which she knew the lawyer had given his friend. The adventures of the past night, the fresh air of the morning, the rural scenery and his delightful companionship, made the schoolmaster eloquent; yet his sense of propriety and natural politeness kept him from monopolizing the conversation, so that his silent attention was even more flattering than his appeals to the lady's intelligence and culture. Outside of the English classics and current literature, her reading lay chiefly among French and Spanish authors, most of which were not unknown to the studious dominie. A few ripples of well-bred amusement were raised by his recital of his experience at the Beaver River, where he found the Voyage autour de mon Jardin, especially by his specimens of Lajeunesse French and the story of the dug-out. Of course, he did not offend a lady's ear with a word so vulgar; it was always the canoe. Too soon the pleasant morning walk was over, and they stood before the garden gate at Bridesdale, just at the moment when Coristine accidentally stumbled and was captured by the fair possessor of the handkerchief. "How good of your friend to please the children by taking part in their games," remarked Miss Du Plessis in all sincerity. "I cannot express the depth of my humiliation," replied the dominie; "it is scandalous—a violation of the rights of hospitality."

"But, see! Mr. Wilkinson, Mr. Perrowne is there; and Fanny also."

"I have nothing to do, Miss Du Plessis, judging them that are without; Mr. Coristine pertains to my inner circle, and shall know my opinion of his shameful conduct before the sun rises much higher in the heavens."

"Hi! there, shipmate," bawled the Captain, "come on and add a link to this here endless chain. I told you your real name, you sly dog! Ha, ha! Will-kiss-em, eh Marjorie? Not you, you little puss; but your cousin there, colourin' up like a piney rose."