

which seemed as long as a year. Men gambled away one another's small store of wealth, drank away their own disappointments, shot each other's lives out unmolested. Three spasmodic vigilance committees hanged six men by the neck until they were dead, but speedily allowed themselves to dissolve and the town to relapse, because of a happy combination of sheer laziness and sympathy with the offenders.

Rumours of an advance flew thick. They were always brought heavily to earth by a charge of common sense or investigation. Nevertheless, others were speedily on the wing; and men looked at them. Ensuing disappointment came in time to possess a cumulative force that amounted to a dull, sullen anger against nothing in particular.

The young man of whom mention has already been made, took his month with an outward seeming of imperturbability, but with an increasing inner tension. He was a tall, dark, straight young man, broad-shouldered and clean built; strong, but with fine hands and feet. His hair was straight and black; his features clean cut and swarthy. By his restless eye and a certain indefinable cast of expression you knew him for a half-breed. He gave out his name as Michail Lafond, and he lived much in himself. Towards the close of the troublous thirty days, a practised observer might have noticed that his slender fingers were rarely still. Otherwise the half-breed appeared the most indifferent member of the community.

His apparent idleness did not prevent him from investigating in his painstaking manner each rumour as it took form. This was the reason why, when finally the formation of a genuine train was undertaken by three of the specialists known as scouts, Michail Lafond was one of the earliest to know of it, and one of the first to apply for admission. He owned four strong little horses of mustang stock, and a light, two-wheeled wagon of the bob-tailed type. Most of his life had been spent in the great Northern wilderness. He was expert in his own kind of woodcraft, accustomed to hardships, and a good shot. In every respect he knew himself fitted to become a member of such an expedition as the present. He had no doubt of his acceptance. When he realized that at last his waiting was ended, he saddled one of his horses, and rode three miles out on the lonely prairie, where he jumped up and down, shook his fists in the air, and screamed with delight. This was the