

# Promotion and Myrtle

## A Tale of the Royal North-West Mounted Police

By STAFF-SERGEANT WILLIAMS

## Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

UPON riding in to Division Head Quarters, Staff Sergeant Williams of the R. N. W. M. P. is summoned before the Commanding Officer and informed that he will the next day set out in charge of a detachment whose duty it will be to capture three Blackfoot Indians who have gone on the war path and are trying to get across to the States. Williams is disappointed as he had expected a holiday, but on finding that Myrtle Coote, his sweetheart, is staying at McNulty's Ranch, he resolves to make this the first halt upon their journey. A dispute arising between two of his Company as to which is the best shot, it is proposed that during the noontide halt a match will be held. This is done and on Williams walking across to note the result of the first shot he suddenly finds himself looking into the muzzle of a rifle held by a Blackfoot Indian.



YOU can make guesses as to what my feelings were because I'll be incontinently hanged if I can put them into words. It is no use lying about it; I was scared, properly scared. A man is too darned near the Great Divide to take liberties with that little shining ring pointing at his breast, and, behind it, a hideous, painted, copper-colored face with inscrutable eyes looking back into his own. So I stood and waited, how long I don't know; but I went clean through the first half of the Litany and then fell to wondering what those unsuspecting jays down at the shack thought of me, silhouetted against the sky like a fool, with my arms in the air. I did not dare to move my head a hair's breadth to look 'round; nor, indeed, could I have taken my eyes off that red devil's face if you paid me.

Say, gentlemen, if there are any more happy moments like that in store for me, I'll gladly make them over to any poor fellow in need of a new sensation—I have my faults but I am not selfish.

After what seemed like a lifetime a shout reached my ears from below and the Indian's eyes narrowed ominously. It was Gabe calling to know what was the matter. I could not answer but I knew by the sound that he was approaching the hill. This would not do. It might mean the death of all three of us. Trapped? I should say so. I could almost have welcomed death for being such a fool. Of course it was the brown blanket of the Indian I had mistaken for a stone. The cunning brutes have a trick of lying flat on a hill with their eyes just over scouting for danger.

Slowly, step by step, my captor began ascending the hill towards me, his lean brown finger caressing the trigger. They keep their gun locks filed to a feather's touch and, you bet, I prayed that he might not catch his foot. Still, he did not fire, but when his eyes were high enough to command the plain halted and for one moment took his gaze off me. Whatever it was he saw, he began to retreat as silently as he had come, still keeping me covered, and this was the cruellest test of all; for I was firmly convinced that before he rounded the next little hill he would shoot me and run for it. Upon my soul by this time I could have screamed like a woman.

However, he was evidently not going to add to his crimes by deliberate murder for he contented himself with shaking his hand at me with a menacing laugh as he disappeared round the bend.

For another fifteen seconds I stood motionless, then turned my head. Gabe and Porter were about a hundred yards from the foot of the hill pointing at me and laughing immoderately. Oh, yes, it was a lovely joke. I drew a sharp breath and came to my senses. Indian or no Indian, rifles or no rifle, I must risk it. I gave a backward spring and half rolled, half scrambled down the hill landing on my feet at the bottom somehow.

"The Blackfeet!" I yelled. "Back to the horses. Back, you fools, and cinch up."

Porter stood and stared; I believe he thought I was drunk. Not so Gabe; the old instinct of the plains rose quick in him and he tore towards the shack, cramming shells into the magazine of his rifle as he ran.

"Get back, Porter," I shouted. "The Indians are behind the butte."

TOGETHER we raced to the horses, with the sickening expectation of a ball in our backs every step; but we reached them in safety. It took but half a minute to tighten their girths, but I was trembling so, what with my late experience and the reaction and the exertion of running, that Gabe had to give me a leg up. Once in the saddle, however, my name was McGregor, and, catching sight of three moving specks in a cloud of alkali three quarters of a mile away on Duggan's Flat, I dug my spurs into old Chippewa's flanks in a way he had not felt for many a long day. The spring with which he took the trail would have unseated a less seasoned rider, but I stayed with him. Good old boy! he sighted the quarry and one sharp whinny betrayed his excitement. I shall never ride another horse like

old Chippewa. Oregon-bred in the days when they turned out the real thing, with legs of iron and a heart as big as the prairie he was foaled on. I drink to you, Chip, in your equine Valhalla. May we ride together again!

There was no time for explanations. Across the spongy alkali flat we tore, in a whirl of flying dust, the heavy thud of our horses' feet the only sound. Dirck and Joris and Robert Browning never carried the news from Ghent at half the pace. No Dutch-bred horse could have stood it. Fast as we travelled, however, we did not appreciably gain on the flying Indians. It was no cayuses they were riding or we should have run them down in the first mile; it looked mightily as if they had been stealing ranch horses. If so they meant to travel a long way.

They were the first by a good half mile to reach the rolling prairie at the far side of the flat and, with a curse, I recognized the fact that we were likely to lose them after all. I hazarded a couple of shots with my long-barrelled Enfield revolver hoping to halt them, but the only effect was to flatten them down on their horses backs. Just as they passed from sight in the hilly ground we caught a puff of white smoke from the rearmost one and a ball sang high above our heads. So it was fight, eh?

We pulled up for a few seconds when we reached hard ground, uncertain which way to go. Gabe dismounted hastily to shift his saddle which had worked back. Suddenly he dropped to one knee and levelled his piece. Six or seven hundred yards away going south we sighted the three trotting smartly round a small butte. The rifle spoke and I saw the middle horse rear up, then double its head between its legs and roll over, the rider alighting on his feet like a cat.

"Good shot, Gabe," cried Porter, the first words we had spoken. "Give him the five dollars, Corporal."

Like a streak we were off again, riding like devils let loose, but too late. We found only the dead horse, shot through the lungs, the bar L brand on its left hip. The redskins were safe in a maze of buttes and coulees.

"A good start," I said bitterly. "First ambushed and held up, then a valuable ranch-horse killed—we shall be laughed at from the Cypress Hills to Winnipeg."

"Dey not laugh so loud when we get troo," said Gabe with a savage oath.

"Then I had a vision of Myrtle standing there, the revolver I gave her smoking in her hand."



"Dose dayvels not travel far on two horses. We are between dem and de railroad. Dey make tracks for de Milk River next but dey camp somewhere first and look for nudder horse. What time de moon he rise?"

"Just before midnight."

"Dat when dey start agen. Dey lie low in de coulees till den to rest their horses. Cheer up, Corporal, we catch 'em yet, I tell you."

I must confess right here that I did not know what steps to take. I was in charge of the party and would have given my eyeteeth to arrest the Indians; but simply had no idea how to go about it. So I did what was, perhaps, the wisest thing, appealed frankly to the scout for advice. Half an Indian himself, born and brought up in the tepees, he would surely know how to act. His advice seemed sound enough

though it did not hold out much promise of success.

It was too late in the year, he argued, to trail them by footmarks, the grass being dry and the ground hard. It would be altogether too slow and we might hunt them for a year in that rolling country. Our horses, as well as theirs probably, had already come a long way, the last six miles at a clip that would make the Grand National look silly. The nearest ranch, in fact the only one for many miles was McNulty's, and here the Indians were almost certain to look for another horse. We must play the game in their own way, cunning against cunning. Gabe's suggestion was to ride back slowly across the flat, knowing that they would watch us and come to the conclusion that we had abandoned the chase and were returning to barracks after an ordinary patrol. Once out of sight we were to ride north a short distance and, under cover of the low hills, work west again for six or seven miles to a narrow valley known as Dead Horse Coulee that led directly to McNulty's ranch. This valley was full of choke-cherry bush and stunted cotton-wood trees and by keeping to the far side we had a good chance of reaching the ranch unobserved. Here we could get supplies and rest the horses for a few hours, resuming the chase as soon as the moon got up.

I thought it over for five minutes and could see no better plan. One thing was certain; we must not play out our horses the very first day. I was feeling sick and unstrung and the thought of seeing Myrtle may have had some hypnotic influence, so, in the end, we carried out Gabe's instructions to the letter. Just before six o'clock we found ourselves waving our caps in answer to a welcoming flutter of handkerchiefs from the ranch door, as we rode across McNulty's oat-patch, hungry, tired and dejected; at least I was.

## CHAPTER IV.

IT is astonishing what a good supper will do to cheer a man up. Johnny-cakes are all right when Myrtle makes them, and maple syrup is none too dusty, though we do have to import it from Ontario. Eggs, too, fried in clear pork grease, just golden brown underneath and a few flakes of red pepper on the top of their bald-heads. My wig! fellows, there's not half as much hardship on the prairie as there's cracked up to be. Tea, brewed when the kettle just comes to the bubble, one teaspoon of good green (none of your twenty-five cent stuff) to four of black, is a better nerve stimulant than a kegful of Montana rotgut whiskey. I've tried them both.

In about half an hour we were, like a modern hotel, replete with every comfort, and those confounded Blackfeet to my mind as good as safe in jail. No need to bother about them. The question of a painted floor or an oilcloth in the front hall was what was troubling Myrtle and me. You see there's a very devil of a lot to think about when two tenderfeet go to house-keeping. What; didn't I say I was going to marry her?

Of course I was not such a blatant, bally-hooly cad as to scare her by saying how near I had been to the stopping-off place with that darned Indian; but she kind of guessed something. I caught her looking at me curiously once or twice and there was a little protecting touch in her hand as it rested on my arm. A woman is pretty much like a horse; she divines things without being told. Perhaps my face still showed the strain I had been through; Gabe said I was looking pernicketty. I expect I am only a white-livered coward with a bragging tongue.

So we strolled down the coulee among the wild gooseberries and saskatoons and McNulty and his wife, with the natural good-breeding of the west, left us alone. The shadows of the twisted cotton-wood trees grew and lengthened and the starry night-guards of heaven lit their bivouac fires in the great

silent sky. Listening to my girl's soft voice and the lazy tinkle of the stony creek, I drew a long draught of peace and knew that there were deeper things in life than the clank of arms or the rude jests of a noisy barrack-room. The sweet tenderness of woman and soft influence of home are more powerful factors in the world's economy than the wiry strength of a man's muscle or that fighting spirit that he shares equally with the brutes that perish. Anyhow, that is the way I sized up the situation, though I am open to correction from anyone in the preaching business.

It was arranged that we were to picket our horses on a green patch back of the hay-corral. Built on to the end of the stable was a small room used for harness and here we intended to snatch what sleep

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 24)