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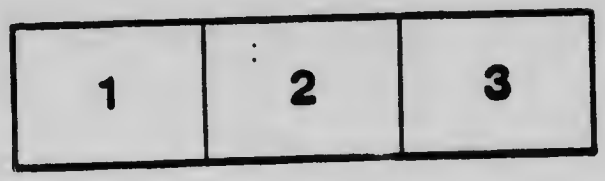

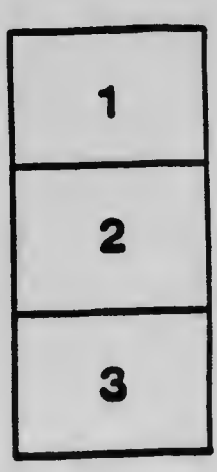

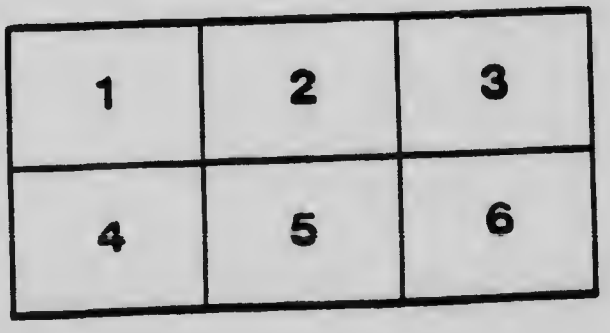

Class No 4.

2nd Prize,

Annie McConnell,

St. Giles S. S.

1904

"The woods must be afire near Sandy Chevalier's."

A FOREST DRAMA

A FOREST DRAMA

BY

LOUIS PENDLETON

Author of

"The Sons of Ham," "The Wedding Garment," "King Tom and the Runaways," Etc.

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A FOREST DRAMA.

I.

It was late of an August afternoon when a young man and a young woman landed from a little steamer on the shore of a remote Canadian lake.

They had travelled far, as far as railroads and almost as far as steamboats could carry them. The necessity of halting over night was therefore not unwelcome, but the rustic tavern built of hemlock logs did not win their entire approval and they were glad to resume their journey as soon as morning dawned. They were now to cross a portage of about a mile, take another small steamer, and be once more set down at the farther end of a neighboring lake. But having crossed, bag and baggage —the latter being carried over on a hemlock-bark team while the travellers walked—they found that the expected steamer was not in view. Indeed, they were told that the "Sally Q." might not appear at

all that day, being uncertain as to her comings and goings. There were two or three shanties at the Muskeg Lake end of the portage where they were now stranded, and it was possible to lock up the baggage and have it forwarded later, should they choose to proceed at once by canoe. Their destination could be reached by night in this way, and the young man suggested that it might be more agreeable than waiting.

The girl looked out over the rippling water with fond eyes and promptly approved the plan. A birch-bark canoe belonging to the teamster was rented, and they got afloat without loss of time. The day was cool and fine, and, in its windings among the green-clothed hills, the lake gleamed blue and white and shiny black, according to light, shadow and distance. Now and then the canoe glided past a clearing containing a few acres under cultivation and a shanty of hemlock logs or, in rare instances, a more ambitious little frame house. But for the most part the sloping shores were covered with a dense forest growth, to all appearances as yet scarcely touched by the lumberman's despoiling hand.

As they rounded one point after another, surprised flocks of shell ducks half lifted themselves

from the water and went skurrying and splashing away, or a smaller company of startled loons rushed swimming and diving to a safer distance, uttering their strange laughter-suggesting cry. Gliding across the mouth of a little sheltered cove, they saw a startled deer leap into the brush, and now and again the scream of the small gray eagle was heard as it sailed on high. Many were the proofs that this winding hill-locked lake was near to nature's heart.

In the course of the morning the travellers passed a lumber-loaded scow, a punt or two, and some half dozen canoes. In one of the latter were two Indians who lifted their paddles in salute and called out: "B'jou'!"

And with no lack of good will the young man responded: "Bon jour."

The girl remarked that there seemed to be more settlers on these lakes now than when she was a child. Otherwise she saw no change. "I was afraid that it would not be the same," she said.

At two o'clock they turned shoreward and landed, both glad of the change from the cramped canoe; for the young man rested on his knees while paddling, and the girl, seated on a bear skin in the bow, could afford but slight changes of position

with safety. By this time they were hungry, too, and a fire of birch bark and sticks having been lighted and water boiled they were soon heartily enjoying the tea and cold lunch brought from the portage tavern. But not very merrily, for there were signs of a growing constraint in the young man's manner. It appeared to the girl that he made an effort to keep his eyes away from her face.

"Is it because he still may think of becoming a priest, and is—afraid?" she conjectured as she observed him narrowly. At the thought an expression crept into her eyes which might have been translated: "I won't have him a priest! It is nothing to me, nothing whatever, but it is a shame, and I won't have it."

She may not have determined then and there to entice him from his supposed aspirations of which she so positively disapproved—in his case—seeking to bind him to humanity and the world by a chain of roses as strong as iron; but it is certain that if this young man were susceptible to feminine enchantments his fate should have trembled in the balance that day. Whether he misunderstood her witching kindliness, or whether determined to remain invulnerable, there is no doubt that his con-

straint of manner became more noticeable as time passed.

The girl remarked that the place where they now rested resembled in some respects the site of a wild camp occupied by her boy-brother and herself when she was only ten years old—a refuge to which they had been driven by unkind usage after the death of both their parents. As she now drank her tea during this temporary halt on another wild shore ten years later, she recalled certain events of a memorable experience: the upsetting of their canoe among the terrible white-caps one stormy day, the loss of their gun and all their goods, and the exciting swim ashore of her brother, herself, and the cat and dog; the fever that then attacked the overworked boy, and her plucky but unsuccessful attempt to paddle him down to the portage and carry him across; the difficulties and dangers that beset the lonely camp of the two little refugees, one of whom was near death from fever and the other face to face with starvation. when a young French-Canadian sportsman came to the rescue and provided for their needs until they were consigned to the care of an uncle in England.

"You were to us the very 'good angel' for

whom I had prayed so often," she said smiling, her eyes tearful, grateful, almost tender.

"It was nothing," the young man answered quickly, hardly daring to look at her.

After their meal the girl strayed off a little way, gathering a few choice ferns and wild flowers. Meanwhile the young man enjoyed a pipeful of fragrant tobacco, sitting on a stone with his back against a log. He had paddled hard and was weary, being now unused to the exercise. This explained the torpor that crept upon his body and the vacancy that gradually occupied his mind. He had proposed to himself a quarter of an hour of rest, but his pipe was hardly out when his head fell back on the log and he slept. So the girl found him on her return and seated herself quietly to await his awakening. Let them reach their destination a little later, it was no matter. A smile began to play about her mouth as she looked at his fine, scholarly face, now peaceful and bereft of its late atmosphere of constraint.

"Sometimes I think that I could grow to love him more readily than any man I ever saw," was her half-jesting thought. "He is so unaffectedly courteous and honest and brave, and, unlike most men, he is not conceited. He would never imagine that

my love was to be had merely for the asking! He is a French-Canadian—I don't quite like that—but I shall always consider it an honor to be his friend."

As the man slept and the girl mused, two red squirrels skipped about in full view, barking and scolding at the intruders, and occasionally the cry of a loon was heard far across the lake, but otherwise the sylvan peace remained unbroken. Nearly an hour had passed when the sleeper suddenly started to his feet, gasping and blinking and fearfully examining his watch.

"How stupid of me!" he exclaimed. "It is a quarter to four, and we are hardly more than half way."

"It doesn't really matter, does it?" she asked unconcernedly.

They got afloat without delay and the young man paddled hard, keeping close in shore, except where inwinding bays would have lengthened the course, for the girl revelled in the near views of rock, hill and forest. As the afternoon wore away, the latter's physical discomfort, arising from an unvariable position, was at times forgotten in the pressure of mental anxieties. In what condition of life and health would she find those whose roof she sought? Would there really be a place for her? Would she be

wanted? It was easy to make plans in far-off England, but as the time for their testing drew near misgivings multiplied.

The sun went down in great pomp of red and gold, the glory lingering long above the screen of darkening hills. As night drew on and faint stars peeped through the rosy dusk of the west, the eastern sky was seen to brighten and glow, until, at a point where the horizon joined the dark wall of woods, they could discern the red leap of flames.

"The woods must be afire near Sandy Chevalier's," said the man at the paddle, breaking a long silence.

The girl asked the remaining distance between them and their destination, and was told that it was about eight miles. Ten minutes later, as the canoe rounded a point, they became a part of a brilliantly illuminated scene. Almost as distinctly visible as at noonday was every object of a long, stony meadow, the entourage of a farm house, the field beyond, and the sloping hillsides merging into the dark limits of the forest wall. Several acres along the verge of the clearing were dotted with blazing log heaps, which lighted up the sky and lake for miles. Moving to and fro in this fir[illegible] scene were numerous human figures.

"They are having a logging-bee. Mr. Hunter, and possibly your aunt, may be here, and we had better stop and inquire."

As he spoke, the canoeist abruptly changed his course, and approached the landing by a widely round-about way. He had observed several human heads on the water's surface directly in his path and comprehended the meaning of the shouts and laughter that had already reached his ears. In a clump of trees on shore could be seen the indistinct outlines of other human figures just emerged from or about to plunge into the bath. The young farmers of the lake, who had come at early morning in their canoes with their wives or sweethearts, and who had spent the day rolling together the logs of the newly-cleared land—while the women busied themselves at the house, cooking good things, knitting and gossiping—were now freeing themselves of the dust and smoke, preparatory to opening their "turkeys" and arraying themselves in holiday attire in advance of the evening's festivities.

Once at the landing, a little floating wharf of drift logs, the travellers lost no time in seeking relief from their cramped positions in the canoe. As the girl was assisted to rise and step guardedly

ashore, one of the bathers who had completed his toilet drew near to inspect the new arrivals.

"Good-night!" was his friendly salute, which struck neither of the travellers as odd, "good evening" never being heard after dark in that region. "That's Mr. Lucien Merrimy, Marshall's bookkeeper, ain't it?" he asked, when the salute had been returned.

"Yes. This is Miss Ransom. We stopped to see if Mr. Hunter is here, or his wife. Miss Ransom is going to their house. We thought they might have come to Sandy's logging-bee."

"Ab Hunter? They don't live in these diggins now."

"But I saw Mr. Hunter on his place not long before I went away."

"He sold out and moved away three weeks ago. He's 'way up on Mink Lake, trappin', they tell me."

"Oh!" ejaculated Miss Ransom, in keen distress.

"Don't be alarmed," begged Lucien Mérimée. "They can be reached. How far is Mink Lake?"

"I ain't sure jest how many miles, but it's quite a few. Not less'n fifty. Sandy can tell you."

Miss Ransom's heart sank as she listened. She was sufficiently well acquainted with the surrounding country to know that to reach a lake fifty miles

distant as the crow flies involved a tortuous journey by canoe and portage of nearly twice as many miles. Besides, her friend and travelling companion was evidently troubled, though unwilling to appear so.

"Until you hear from your aunt," he said, trying to speak cheerfully, "I think you had better go to the house of Mrs. Burton, an English lady. She is my friend, and I have no doubt it can be arranged for you to stay there; but it is a long way down the lake and we must stop here over night."

He moved away to find Sandy Chevalier, followed by the young farmer who till now had stood staring curiously at Miss Ransom; for the burning log heaps made the whole neighborhood almost as light as day. Left alone, the homeless girl stood looking vacantly before her, a prey to blank dismay. Even supposing that her aunt, whom she could scarcely remember, should be found cordial and agreeable, what future was there for a girl accustomed to refined surroundings in a trapper's camp on a wild lake that probably could not boast a single acre of cleared land?

Tears dimmed her eyes and self-accusing thoughts pressed upon her as she considered her hapless situation. This, then, was the result of her opposition to those who wished to control her desti-

nies, and of her sudden and wild determination to travel alone a distance of nearly five thousand miles in order to be free. She should have kept quiet and waited, she now told herself; she should have first received word from her aunt in the Canadian backwoods and advice from her brother in Arabia, or wherever he might be; she should have done many things that she had not done, and everything that she had done was a mistake. For the moment she even doubted if she had any right to feel resentment against her uncle in England, considering all that he had done for her brother and herself. Had she not judged him from the standpoint of passionate, impatient youth, taking no account of the fact that in his own view his course was just? It was easy to see her mistake now. She had done wrong, and her punishment was begun.

Within a few minutes Lucien Mérimée returned, accompanied by the French-Canadian farmer, a little bandy-legged fellow, more kindly than well-favored. Having been formally presented to "Miss Alberta Ransom," he made haste to assure her that his house would be honored by her presence.

"We are please' that you will stay," he said heartily, "but I fear it is a noisy time you have to-night. Come up, and Eloise will make you a cup of tea."

II.

ALBERTA murmured thanks and followed her guide up the hill, Lucien halting to draw his canoe up out of harm's way. The house was a small frame of a primitive fashion, and was clearly taxed far beyond its possibilities to entertain the guests. Mme. Chevalier, a buxom housewife, was found hurrying about among her assistants, preparing for the great supper shortly to be announced. The sight of the strange lady evidently filled her with dismay, but she received her cordially enough, telling her she was most welcome if she would not mind the crowd and the noise. The dancing would, of course, continue till a late hour, and then the men would sleep in the barn and the women in the house as best they could —that is, if daylight did not surprise them before any one lay down at all!

As Alberta drar . her cup of tea in a comfortable corner, she looked in vain for a familiar face among the bustling matrons and young girls. And yet nothing seemed new; the very house with its four small rooms and attic above was almost a copy of

the one in which she had been born on a neighboring lake.

Meanwhile Lucien Mérimée had joined the group of men collecting about a fire in the rear of the farm-house. There was no room for them within, and here they sat on logs of wood and spun yarns until the welcome supper call was heard. A long table was set in the "living room" and another in the kitchen and dining-room, which were one, and a place was found for all. The feast would doubtless have appalled an epicure, but many of the hungry men and women gathered round the board had never seen half so many tempting eatables all at once. A whole roast pig, roast legs of mutton, fried salmon trout, ragout of wild duck, steaming vegetables, breads, tarts, cakes, preserves—all served at once and washed down with great cups of strong tea and hot toddy of Canadian whiskey.

By ten o'clock the tables had been cleared away to make room for the dancers. About the time this vigorous exercise began Alberta took note of several new arrivals. Three men recently landed from a canoe had joined the crowd of on-lookers about the doors. One of these was a brawny Indian of a stolid, grave countenance; another a dark-eyed white man with a long black beard and a nervous,

uneasy manner. Both wore rough shabby suits, their trousers thrust inside of their highly-colored stockings reaching to the knee which are usually a part of the river driver's dress. The third new-comer was in appearance a gentleman, some thirty-five years of age, of a clean-shaven ruddy face, dressed in neat gray outing-clothes.

"Who's that?" asked one of the by-standers in a low voice.

"An English sport named Hawksworth," was the reply. "He's campin' down the lake with that black-bearde 'eller. The Injin is his guide."

The Englishman would have been handsome but for a rather hard and bold look in his keen gray eyes, and the suggestion of a sneer in the lines about his mouth. It was an intelligent but not a pleasing face, except so far as one may be pleased with the mere strength of determination, which seemed to be indicated by his square jaw and prominent aquiline nose. Glancing in at the dancers and around the room with a bored air, his eyes fell on Alberta in her corner. Immediately his gaze became riveted, and it was the persistence of his scrutiny that drew to him her momentary attention.

Some time later, as couples were again forming on the floor, Mme. Chevalier approached Alberta in

her corner and asked if she would dance. An English sportsman, a Mr. Hawksworth, had sent her, she explained, to solicit the honor of an introduction and the favor of a dance. Alberta refused to dance, but consented to meet the Englishman, who dropped into a seat at her side with every evidence of satisfaction, to dance having clearly not been his object. He began by saying that it was an extraordinary and unexpected pleasure to meet an English lady in that wild place.

"This is my native district," was the girl's loyal reply.

"You don't say so!"

"But I was educated in England."

"Oh, that explains."

"It is very strange," he went on to say, "but I must have seen you before, somewhere in England. Your face is—familiar."

"Indeed? My home was in Surrey."

"Surrey—Surrey?" he mused, perplexedly.

Although she declined to help him with further particulars, Alberta felt convinced that he spoke the truth. They must indeed have seen each other before, for there was something strangely familiar in his face, too; those keen, cold eyes, that beak-like

nose, the cut of that smooth jaw, seemed a part of a past forever fixed in her memory. And yet she could not tell where or when, and knew positively that she had known no person of his name.

"Do you like roughing it?" he asked, the baffled look still in his eye.

"I *love* these woods and lakes, if that is what you mean."

He assured her that he, too, was gypsy enough to enjoy weeks and months of canoeing and camping. "I have a hunting lodge away up in the wilds north of here, and usually go there for the fishing and shooting in September and October." he told her.

"That must be fine," she said, interested, visioning a wild lake shore, a snug log house, days of thrilling trout fishing, weeks of ardent following after the moose and deer—a life of excitement, calm and isolation, dear to the genuine sportsman and lover of nature, to be reluctantly abandoned only as the leaden skies float down out of the vast bosom of the north, dropping a white mantle over the whole land and gradually obstructing the waterways.

"It's a curious country," he continued, "a very curious country. From here the journey is fully twelve or fourteen days even at the best speed, and

the whole route is by water—lake, river and portage, portage, river and lake. I make the trip by canoe with my man and an Indian guide, with Indian packers to carry my supplies. I like to be comfortable, and you would be surprised to know what I have 'packed' up there in my time. I have everything. The Indians like gifts of powder and bullets and blankets and what not, and they are my slaves. I am monarch of all I survey, as the saying goes. It is good to have such a retreat. I wouldn't exchange it for a European principality. I like the sense of freedom, the ability to command—to feel that there is no one to dispute my authority within hundreds of miles, except an occasional factor at some trading post of the Hudson Bay Company, and I know how to steer clear of them when it suits me."

"What do you call your kingdom in the wilds?" asked Alberta, more interested than she cared to acknowledge.

"I have not been sentimental enough to give it a name. The hunting lodge, on an island in a lake without a name, I call my den—my retreat."

Their conversation halted here. Lucien Mérimée was about to play on his violin, and Alberta showed no further interest in this stranger Englishman's

kingdom in the north. The dance over, Sandy Chevalier took the squeaking instrument from the young man who had been playing and extended it with a pleading look toward Lucien, who stood in the doorway. The latter nodded consent, but produced his own violin which he had preferred not to leave with the other baggage at the portage that morning. A few strokes were sufficient to cause a hush throughout that gay company. First he played a bright, rippling air, interspersed with tender minor passages that pleased them all; then followed a wild love-plaint, all in the minor, a sombre tragedy, ending in a burst of half-mocking merriment. The latter brought the appreciative Chevaliers up to a high pitch of excitement—took the very heart out of one's bosom, Madame declared, tears in her eyes.

"He play well, hein?" demanded Sandy of those about him. "Vraiment c'est merveilleux!"

Putting the butt of his violin down on his knee, the musician sang in a pure baritone, to a light accompaniment, some patriotic lines, beginning:

"Sol Canadien, terre chérie!
Par des braves tu fus peuplé."

Chevalier then called for "Par Derrière chez mon Père," but Madame preferred "A la Claire Fontaine," or would be satisfied with "C'est la Belle

Francoise." Some one else asked for "Sur le Pont d'Avignon," and still another for "Cécilia." Lucien took the suggestion of the hostess and sang the widely popular "Fontaine," after inviting all to join him in the refrain. After this he played another touching selection, and then escaped from the room, fearing the dancers might grow impatient.

"His playing is wonderful," declared Alberta with enthusiasm, turning to Hawksworth, who had not yet vacated his place.

"Yes?" he responded doubtfully, not relishing the admiration expressed in her face. "Who is he? Some poor devil of a French-Canadian, I suppose, though he seems better kept than the most of them."

"He is my friend."

"I beg your pardon."

The girl turned abruptly away, entered into conversation with a young woman on her other side, and he saw that she was not to be readily appeased. Bowing and smiling, the Englishman then left her and returned to the group of men outside. As soon as opportunity offered, he took Sandy Chevalier aside, spoke to him flatteringly about the entertainment he was giving, and proceeded to extract information from him about the "wonderful fiddler" and the "beautiful young English lady" who

graced the happy occasion. The gratified *habitant* readily told all he knew. The fiddler was M. Lucien Grimée, a book-keeper in Marshall's lumber camp. Where was that? Off there in the "bush" behind Cedar Bay. And the lady? Lucien had brought her back with him only that day after being "out front" for more than a month; in the morning he was to take her to Burton's in Birch Bay. How long she would stay there Sandy could not say.

"Do you think he is to marry her?"

The *habitant* lifted his hands and shoulders in a slightly impatient shrug. He had not been informed, but thought it reasonably probable. Lucien was a fine fellow, a scion of a great French family of Quebec, and Miss Ransom, although with so grand an air, was a niece of Mrs. Hunter, wife of Ab Hunter, one of the common sort, now to be found trapping on Mink Lake. With one more flattering speech, the Englishman turned away, well satisfied, and walked down to his canoe where the Indian and the long-bearded white man were awaiting him.

It was after two o'clock when Alberta at length lay down in an inner room, sharing her none too ample couch with two of the older women. There she slept until called next morning, although the

squeaking fiddle continued to afflict the ear and the tread of the dancers to resound throughout the house until the hour of dawn. The sun had just risen when Lucien Mérimée came forth from his brief slumbers on the hay in the barn. The very last of the revellers were now departing in their canoes, loath to go and hurrying off only to save good Mme. Chevalier the labor of serving them with breakfast. Sandy was asleep, but Madame was stirring about the kitchen.

"Ah, you would not go so soon!" she exclaimed, when asked about Miss Ransom. "Let her sleep yet a little, cher M. Mérimée. Elle est tellement fatiguée, cette belle demoiselle."

"As long as you think best," the young man agreed, and going down, he took a brief plunge into the lake in order to freshen himself, for he, too, was fatigued. The bath, breakfast, and a strong cup of tea brought every desired result, and when Alberta was at last ready to start, and Madame saw them off with a smile and a friendly parting word, he dipped the paddle with no lack of his accustomed vigor.

III.

JOHN BURTON'S farm on Birch Bay was one of the most desirable in the vicinity of Muskeg Lake. There was not much cleared land, but the stone had been taken out of what there was, and the rich soil yielded abundantly. Moreover, Burton owned more cattle and sheep than any farmer on the lake, and in addition a well-equipped saw-mill that was always running. As wealth was measured in that region, he was an unusually prosperous man. Both he and his wife were English, and being far above the average of their neighbors in education, it resulted through no fault of their own that they were called proud and exclusive by some of these less fortunate neighbors. Their house was a two-story frame standing on a cleared hillside above Birch Bay, and, though simple in all its arrangements and furniture, was regarded as more or less palatial by the average shack-dweller of the lake.

They were somewhat of an anomaly in their sur-

roundings, but were by no means an isolated instance. Educated Englishmen were to be found in wilder spots than theirs; they merely represented in their own way the instinct of expansion which has caused a dauntless, conquering race to girdle the globe and carry civilization into its remotest corners.

"I am really ashamed of myself," laughed Mrs. Burton, as she sat lunching with her husband in their cozy dining-room. She was past forty-five, but her vigorous English constitution and native color gave her an appearance of youth which the average woman of the American continent is glad of at a much earlier age. Her husband was less well preserved, his gray hair and the deep lines in his strong ruddy face casting no doubt on his fifty years.

"What have you done?" he asked, only mildly curious.

"Don't scold me, dear, but I have been neglecting everything, and have read 'Père Lorette' all the morning—the second reading, too!"

"I might say you were foolish, but people who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones. If anybody had told me two weeks ago that I should ever plough through a manuscript novel and sit up half the night to finish it, I should have believed that my

sanity was doubted. But once started on the confounded thing, I couldn't lay it down."

"Of course not. It is so absorbing. And André is *such* a hero!"

"The girl is uncommonly bewitching, but André —he's a good deal of a prig, and I couldn't forget that he was a French-Canadian."

"You prejudiced Englishman! Isn't Lucien a French-Canadian?"

"Lucien is an exception. I should never have believed it possible for me to get on so well with a French-Canadian, and a musical one at that."

John Burton enjoyed the contempt of the able-bodied Briton of the mechanical engineer type for all forms of art, especially art considered as a serious pursuit for men. If asked his opinion, he would have said that the painting of pictures, the writing of novels, and particularly the making of music, were pastimes suitable only for women, and such men as went in for them seriously were not only wanting in manhood but were open to the charge of seeking an excuse for loafing. To his view a "fiddlin' Frenchman" was quite beyond the pale of respectability, and yet Lucien Mérimée had long been in the habit of visiting the house as a wel-

come friend and was often requested to play the fiddle. So much for being "an exception."

"It ought to be published," Mrs. Burton continued.

"Isn't he going to try?"

"Why no. He burns them. Lucien told me that he had written three before this one was begun and burned them all. He has been writing during his leisure for years, and this is the first that anybody has seen. He told me that he wrote the first ones in French, but now he prefers English. He is a genius, John," the lady concluded, "and the wonderful part of it is that he doesn't know it."

"Don't be Utopian. Genius doesn't lie around loose in our day. You had better be careful not to put any such notion into his head, for he is not likely to keep on burning them, and he may be disappointed. A critical reader might not agree with us about 'Pére Lorette.' We read very few books and are hardly able to judge."

"I never read a better tale, I'm sure!"

"Let him keep his pastime, but don't— He needs something of the sort as a refuge. He's like a fish out of water in that lumber camp. He ought to have been trained for some profession."

"Yes," Mrs. Burton agreed, "they were bent on

making a priest out of him and then that trouble came and his life was spoiled. He was meant for an artist of some kind."

"By the way," said Burton as he rose from the table, "did you know that Lucien had come back from the 'front?' I hear he brought an uncommonly handsome young woman up the lake yesterday—by canoe."

"Good gracious! And he told us nothing."

"And here's another less agreeable piece of news for you: a bear killed one of our calves last night."

"Oh, dear! . . . And they said she was handsome, did they?"

"Who—the bear or the calf?"

Mrs. Burton bore down on her husband with a threatening mien, and he, snatching up his hat, ran out laughing, and took the path to the mill.

"Oh, I forgot," he turned round to say, "I have invited an English sportsman to dine with us to-morrow. He spent an hour at the mill this morning. His name is Hawksworth."

"That's good news," the housewife responded. "We might let Lucien know and have whist."

Hearing a knocking and going to the door a few minutes later, Mrs. Burton found Lucien Mérimée on the veranda. The moment she had concluded

her greetings and inquiries he told her that he had come to ask a great favor, and she promptly engaged to grant it blindfold.

"Then will you give a young lady friend of mine a home here for a few days?"

He saw her face fall, but a moment later her smile returned. "Ah, that is another thing," she laughed. "You have entrapped me, you sly man. But tell me about her."

He said she was Canadian born, but had been brought up in England, at "Redwood," Surrey, the home of a wealthy uncle. Her presence in Canada now was not easy to explain. Apparently her father's marriage was a *mésalliance,* for she was nearly related through her mother to the Hunters, in order to visit whom she had come alone to Canada, not knowing until the previous night of their removal from their poor little farm on Muskeg Lake. She seemed to have proposed to herself an indefinite sojourn with Mrs. Hunter, and could not have known how unsuitable it was.

"How very curious!" said Mrs. Burton, deeply interested. "Depend upon it, there is something wrong in England, or she would not have come. Where is she now?"

"Waiting down there at the landing."

This statement caused Mrs. Burton to start with surprise. How like a man to have done this before arranging things! However, she promptly moved to accompany him down the hill. Alberta sat waiting on a log near the water, an anxious expression on her face. She rose as the two were seen drawing near, and fixed a pair of fearless violet eyes inquiringly upon Mrs. Burton, who involuntarily ejaculated in a low voice:

"She *is* handsome, Lucien."

Then she walked on, smiling, to where Alberta stood, shook her hand cordially and kissed her cheek, saying: "I've heard all about you, dear, and I'm so sorry. Come up to the house. It is your home until you are ready to go to your friends. Lucien's friends are mine."

"And yet you talk about impulsive people!" laughed John Burton, when his wife related all this to him. He did not say she had done wrong, however. He had seen Alberta—and, besides, there was magic in the mention of the great English estate of Redwood where she had lived with her uncle for ten years.

The two ladies went up to the house alone, Lucien having put off at once in his canoe to the village of Rockledge, five miles away, in order to arrange

for the forwarding of Alberta's baggage, and ascertain if it would be possible to communicate with the Hunters. He returned late in the afternoon stating that he had found a trapper who expected to start for the Mink Lake neighborhood the next morning and who agreed to deliver a letter to Mrs. Hunter in the course of the following week. He therefore suggested that Alberta write to her aunt and let him deliver the letter to the trapper that night, which was accordingly done.

Alberta felt secure in her present haven, her heart was warmed by the cordial welcome extended her, but the uncertainty of the future weighed upon her and caused her to lie awake far into the night. The morning brought back her wonted hopefulness and she met her hostess with the most cheerful of smiles. The two women had felt mutually attracted toward each other, and only a few days of continued association were needed to produce a genuine friendship. Alberta was moved almost at once by a desire to confide in her warm-hearted country-woman, and no sooner was Mrs. Burton free to sit down and converse, at the conclusion of the morning's most pressing household duties, then the girl said to her impulsively:

"An angel couldn't have been kinder to me, Mrs.

Burton, and I want to tell you everything, and have you advise me."

"Yes, dear— if you wish it. But don't feel bound. I seek no justification of anything. Lucien's word and your face are enough for me."

IV.

"You already know," Alberta began, "that I was born here in this lake country. My father came here from England. He and my uncle Edward were younger sons of Sir Arthur Ransom, of Cliffton, Kent. They were left to their own resources with no other preparation for life than a university education. Uncle Edward afterward inherited some property by a special provision of the will of a great-aunt who was fond of him, prospered on his own account, bought Redwood, and married well. My father had nothing to start with and was unfortunate. He finally felt compelled to leave England, came here, and lived the life of a frontier farmer until he died. He lived alone for four years and then married the daughter of an uneducated English settler. It is not easy to remain true to one's traditions in a country like this. The girl he married was very young, was devoted to him, and he partly educated her. They had two children, my brother Harry and myself. As long as my father lived we

were happy, for both he and my mother loved us tenderly.

"Our troubles began when my father died. We were always poor, but now we soon became almost destitute. My mother married again within a year, solely in order to have bread for herself and her children, I am sure. I remember that she often wept both before and after her second marriage. My step-father was not a good man and ill-treated us all. About two years later my poor, dear mother died, and it was not long before my step-father brought home another wife—the "new wife" we called her. Harry and I now lived a very unhappy life. The severest tasks were required of us and we were frequently beaten without just cause. We often thought of going to our aunt, Mrs. Hunter, of whom our mother sometimes spoke with affection, but we did not know where to find her, the Hunters having moved away from the lake when we were very small. Finally, one day late in summer, when Harry was fourteen, and I was ten, unable to stand such a life any longer, we ran away.

"We stole off before day one morning and made our way to the wildest spot we could find, about twenty miles up the lakes, avoiding farms and lumber camps for fear our step-father would find our

hiding place and take us back home. We both knew how to fish and how to cook, and Harry was a good shot. We had brought in our birch-bark canoe a little tent, blankets, and provisions, and we were at first very prosperous and happy in our lonely camp. But one day we were upset in a high wind and the gun was lost, and one night the canoe drifted away. Our fishing-tackle had been lost with the gun, and now we were not only prisoners on the shore of that secluded bay, but had no way of securing food. Nobody came within sight or within sound of our cries as we wandered along the shores of the inwinding bays, and finally crept back to camp at night. What we had left to eat was soon gone. Meanwhile Harry took the fever, and at last I was utterly alone, for he became delirious."

"Poor child!" murmured Mrs. Burton.

"Harry would have died and I should have starved if Mr. Lucien Mérimée had not found one of my birch-bark letters and come to our rescue. I wrote funny little misspelled accounts of our condition and situation on pieces of birch bark and left them where I thought passing canoeists might see them. I prayed at night that a 'good angel' might come, and at last one came. For Mr. Mérimée was one. He fed me and nursed Harry, giving up his

canoeing trip in order to stay with us. He told us stories, sang for us, and made us happier than we had been for years. We told him everything we could about our relations and he wrote a long letter to our uncle in England. Uncle Edward was so much moved that he came all the way to Canada himself and took us home with him.

"We lived in his beautiful home at Redwood, and if he did not love us as much as his own children we never knew it. Harry was very studious and seemed satisfied with everything in the new life, but I chafed. There was too much stiffness and form for a little gypsy such as I. Sometimes, as I told Harry, I felt as if I had been 'squeezed into a pipe stem' and couldn't breathe. The trees in the park at Redwood were like the flowers on a bonnet in a bandbox compared with the pathless Canadian woods. There were no wild things, no moose, no deer, no lakes, no canoes, no freedom! I was rebellious and had many troubles. I longed for the old life among the lakes and sometimes tried to live it as nearly as possible. The members of the French class at the boarding school called me 'la Canadienne sauvage.' I ran away from this school once and had to be punished and sent back. It all came of my going for a row, without asking permis-

sion, on one of those little English creeks they call rivers. I went down stream, and too far, and it took such a long time to row back, and it rained, and, oh dear! what a fuss they made about it! They said I would be the total demoralization of that school, and that it was a special Providence that I had not been drowned. Fancy my being drowned in that little baby river! I indignantly informed them that once in Canada when I was only ten years old I got astride of a cedar log and paddled a mile out int the lake after a drifting canoe."

"Go on," urged Mrs. Burton, after laughing outright. "It is better than a novel."

"I could tell you some funny things about that school," Alberta declared. "Girls of my age actually asked me if it was Canada or California that belonged to England, and when I wickedly told them it was California, and that Canada was only about half as large as England, they believed me. They even believed me when I said that out here among the lakes white people had to keep themselves locked up all the time or the Indians would take their scalps. This was after I had been forced to go back to the school and eat humble pie, and wanted revenge. It was about this time that Lucien Mérimée came to see Harry and me on his return

from a stay of several months in Rome. His visit was the most delightful event in my life during the first five years in England, not merely because Harry and I were so devoted to him personally, but because he was a part of my wild Canada and seemed to bring with him the dear lakes and woods.

"But they succeeded in making something more than a gypsy out of me finally. By the time my education was completed I had learned to 'conduct' myself in such a 'proper manner' that even Aunt Amelia Ransom, a very exacting person in such things, admitted that I had wonderfully improved. There would have been no serious trouble if my cousin Harold had not fallen in love with me. Up to that time my uncle, and even my aunt, had been kindness itself. Harold's nonsense had been going on a long time privately, much to my regret, for he could never be more than a brother to me and, besides, I knew that it wouldn't do; but it was not until last spring that he refused to marry a rich girl selected by his calculating parents, and defiantly announced that he would marry no one but me. That was the beginning of my woes.

"Fortunately for him, Harry was away and was saved much pain, for he is gentle and affectionate by nature and likes peace. He had taken his degree

at Oxford and now looked toward scholarship and a professor's chair. Just before our little war began he started off for a long visit to Egypt and Arabia in order to study to better advantage certain Oriental languages, Uncle Edward generously furnishing the money.

"I say 'war,' for that is what it really was. Harold clung to the hope that if his parents should consent I might be won. He stormed, threatened and sulked by turns, but my uncle and aunt were as immovable as mountains. As for me, I frankly told them that I could never love Harold and had discouraged him from the outset. I thought that ought to satisfy them, but it did not. They seemed to be afraid of me and their manner toward me underwent a change. They evidently concluded that the only way to cure Harold of his infatuation was to dispose of me, and they began to be in a great hurry to marry me off. I confess that as soon as this was plain to me I became foolishly angry, and if it had been possible for me to love Harold I would have allowed him to run away with and marry me in spite of them; for he often threatened them with such violent measures.

"I was nearly twenty and had been going into society for about a year, but as yet had received no

offers. Dowerless girls are not apt to be burdened with suitors among the English county families. The men were very attentive, but they only came to look and admire and pass a pleasant hour. They knew and I knew that, though my father had been a gentleman, without a dower I could be only an appendage in the social world in which I moved. Of course I am speaking in general terms. There are always exceptions. It is possible that I might have caused some aristocratic and worldly British mamma agonies by capturing her best beloved if I had tried, but I did not and would not try. The only man who had made up his mind to marry me without charge was a young curate called Egbert Horton. He was of 'blameless antecedents and high connections,' as Aunt Amelia put it. He was also good-looking, but he was stupid, and as soon as I understood that they had pitched upon him as Harold's savior I promptly loathed him. His courtship did not prosper and his avowal was resolutely staved off as long as possible. But he was too stupid to understand, and it came finally. An unconditional refusal did not dispose of him. He insisted that I might learn to love him, and actually bade me consider the fact that he had spoken to my uncle

and obtained his consent! I suggested that he go home and wait for *my* consent.

"The war was really serious after that. My aunt and uncle were more determined than ever, so was Harold, and so was I. The clash of swords was quite alarming. Though they all loved me in their way and I loved them in mine, it was clear that I was fast becoming a *persona non grata* at Redwood. Unknown to Harold, I proposed to go away—to visit my aunt in Canada. My aunt Amelia evidently approval of the plan as a last resort, but my uncle objected. He pronounced such a plan ridiculous and declared that I would be disgusted with life on a Canadian frontier farm in a week. He wanted to see me 'properly settled' in life. He did not positively command me to marry the curate, but he clearly intimated to me that it was 'necessary,' and I knew that peace would be impossible until I did so or cleared the atmosphere by my departure. I gladly chose the latter course, confident that I could be happier here than anywhere in England, for the old homesickness was still with me at times. I had already written and ascertained the whereabouts of my aunt, Mrs. Hunter, and now I wrote to her direct. But as the time for my departure seemed to have come, I waited neither for her reply nor to hear from Harry.

Uncle Edward happened to go away for a week or more in one direction and Harold in another, and this was my opportunity, for neither would have consented for me to go. I packed my belongings and left Redwood on short notice, informing Aunt Amelia of what I was about to do. She tacitly consented, for she offered no objection and did not summon Uncle Edward home by telegram as she might have done. It was scarcely a case of running away; I simply came away, with my aunt's knowledge and tacit consent. Indeed, she offered me money and she sent a servant with me as far as Liverpool. She kissed me good-bye and said:

"'I am so sorry for all this, Alberta, dear, but it is better for you to be out of Harold's sight. When he is married you must come back, for we all love you.'

"So here I am at the end, or almost at the end, of a journey of about five thousand miles, undertaken for the sake of the peace of a family to which I was most deeply indebted as well as for the sake of my own freedom. And what is your candid opinion of it, Mrs. Burton? Do you blame me? Would you have come?"

"No, dear, I don't blame you in the least," was the prompt answer. "In your place I should most

certainly have left Redwood, but—I think your coming here—to Mrs. Hunter—was ill advised. I do not see that it was necessary. Your uncle could have provided a place for you with friends in England or on the Continent that—that would have been so much more suitable. Or he could have sent his son away."

"Another man might have done something of that sort, but not Uncle Edward." Alberta declared positively. "He is a man of an iron will and brooks neither suggestion nor advice. He liked Egbert Horton and simply refused to receive as final my solemn declaration that I could never love or marry him. He was determined to have his own way."

"As to what you ought to do now," said Mrs. Burton, after a moment's thought, "I should say, better stay here until you can communicate with your brother. It is his business to provide a home for you until some other man claims the right."

"And that will not be long," the elder lady reflected, as her eyes rested admiringly on the young girl seated before her. The reflection was justified, for the picture presented of youthful loveliness was an uncommon one. Alberta was slenderly and gracefully made, and her face exhibited both

delicacy of outline and beautiful color. Her dark violet eyes expressed tenderness as well as intelligence, and in her whole atmosphere there seemed to be something rare and fine. Mrs. Burton thought there were few women who would not admire her and few men who would not involuntarily do her homage.

"Then you think a home with my aunt, Mrs. Hunter, is out of the question?" asked Alberta, stifling a sigh.

"Oh, yes—quite. You would see that for yourself as soon as you saw her and her surroundings. ight be well for you to see for yourself. While are waiting here you might go up there for a days. We could arrange to send you, I think, with a party by canoe. I have travelled farther than that by canoe with my husband in my time and enjoyed it."

"It is delightful to think of," Alberta declared. "But even if it were to be dreaded I should feel that I ought to go and spend at least a few days with my aunt."

At this moment a half-breed servant girl looked in at the door, and Mrs. Burton rose saying that she had a question to ask, but would defer it, as a guest was expected for dinner.

V.

ALBERTA was more surprised than pleased to find that the guest was Hawksworth, the Englishman whose acquaintance she had made at the Chevalier's logging-bee dance. Her manner toward him was sufficiently gracious, but he saw that she had not forgotten his offense. She was again forcibly struck with his marked resemblance to some one whose image had been impressed upon her memory in the past, but the more she studied his face the more she was puzzled. A face of such striking outlines and expression was not one to forget, and yet she had forgotten.

The conversation was left largely to him and their hosts, with whom he made palpable efforts to ingratiate himself, and not without success. With the exception of Lucien Mérimée it was not often that they had a guest of the cultivated sort; the entertainment of two at once was an uncommon event in which they could not fail to find rare pleasure.

While the four were seated on the veranda after dinner, the two men smoking, Lucien Mérimée ar-

rived in his canoe, bringing his violin, as Mrs. Burton had repeatedly instructed him never to fail to do. This prevented the proposed game of whist, the company being now composed of five, and when they adjourned to the little parlor, the outdoor air, being a trifle too cool, the remainder of the evening was devoted to music and conversation.

There was much talk of moose hunting, the most exciting sport which the region afforded. Burton told a good story, Hawksworth told several; Lucien might have told many, but left the talking chiefly to the other two men. From the outset Hawksworth declared war. There was an unmistakable challenge in his eye, and his visible disdain as he submitted to an introduction to the young French-Canadian amounted almost to insult. As he told his stories, he practically ignored the third person presumably experienced and certainly interested in moose hunting. The Burtons appeared to see nothing, but Alberta was quick to observe it, and Lucien, though he showed no resentment, was no less angered than surprised. He felt annoyed to see how high this insolent stranger had already risen in the esteem of his old friends, and when later he was asked to play his annoyance increased. For the hunters had now stopped talking

out of deference to the hostess, Burton turning toward the "fiddlin' Frenchman" with a tolerant smile, while Hawksworth stared with a cool insolence not far from open contempt. Obedient to Mrs. Burton's desire, Lucien played two selections, then put away his violin with a final air that could not be mistaken.

As he played, Alberta's glance wandered again and again to Hawksworth's face which was now turned toward the musician, and in her eyes appeared the suggestion of dawning recognition. She had reached the point where she entertained a suspicion but required confirmation in order to be sure. It was this that caused her abruptly to remark, when the violin had been put away:

"You gentlemen have been talking of your exploits, now let me tell you of one of mine."

"By all means," was the unanimous invitation.

"Something has made me recollect it and I see it all as vividly as if it were yesterday, although it happened six years ago," she told them.

Late one night at Redwood, her uncle's home in England—her story ran—being more than usually wakeful, she decided to read an hour or two before putting out her light, although the time for every one in the house to be in bed had already arrived.

There being no book in her room that enticed her, she determined to go down to the library and get "The Last of the Mohicans," at that time her favorite story, telling of the wild forests of New England and Canada and the nobility of the brave young Indian Uncas, the engaging picture of whom had taken a firm hold on her youthful imagination.

Candle in hand, the girl descended to the first floor of the dark, quiet house, passed through a long and spacious apartment hung with pictures, mostly of dead and gone Ransoms, and entered the library, the room best loved of all in the house by her because there were the means, the stories of Cooper in particular, of momentarily escaping from a confined existence and returning in fancy to the wild, free forests of America.

Finding her book, she placed the candle on a stand near a lounge, lay down and read for nearly an hour, in reckless disregard of the injury done her eyesight. Attacked by drowsiness at last, and careless of consequences, she closed her eyes and was soon asleep. Some time later her expiring candle flickered out, and she slept tranquilly in the darkness. When at length she awoke with a start the room was full of light, and some one stood over her.

"Don't move," a voice said softly. "Don't—

don't try to get up! And of all you do, don't open your mouth. If you make a noise, I'll have to gag you, you know, and it would be a beastly shame to spoil your pretty face; it really would, and I hope you won't drive me to it. Yes, I'm a burglar—lie still!—but a decent one, I hope. I never lay violent hands on ladies, if I can help it; and when they are as charming as you are, my dear, they are the objects of my special courtesy."

Alberta lay quite still, in a state of nervous collapse, comprehending that a man was holding her down at the point of a revolver. There were other men in the room, too, or rather in a small adjoining apartment which her uncle used as an office and which contained in addition to ordinary furniture a small iron safe. She could hear movements and whispers there, the jingling as of keys or small tools, the opening and shutting of the drawers of the desk, and conjectured that the lock of the safe was being picked. This was a serious matter, because the safe was the repository of some valuable old family jewels and sometimes contained a large sum of money.

Afterward the girl thought it was the burglar's eye rather than the muzzle of his pistol so close to her face that held her bound as if through fearful

fascination or charm. They were keen, cold gray eyes, alive with the determination that stops at nothing. The face was not the openly sinister and repulsive one that she would have expected. There was a suggestion of the criminal's hardened look, but not of the low-browed, beastly type. There was intelligence in that face, as well as something suggestive of scorn and derision. Evidently this was a burglar who respected himself and his trade, who suffered no regrets, and who perhaps looked upon the majority of mankind as a pack of fools. He was a young man, hardly thirty, and in his bold way handsome. The type was distinctly English, of the middle class; similar faces might be seen in a London omnibus almost any day, and yet the individual lines in this one were vividly marked, and they were indelibly photographed, every one, on Alberta's tenacious memory.

"Don't be frightened," he whispered, smiling. No harm is intended to you. The only thing I *am* tempted to do is to steal a kiss from those pretty lips, but I daren't try it; you'd scream in spite of me. What deucedly fine eyes you have!"

He ran on thus with reckless gayety, though with lowered voice, until the movements in the office ceased and the sound of retreating footsteps was

heard. The moment all was quiet the burglar pointed to a clock on the wall within range of Alberta's vision and told her to lie perfectly still for five minutes longer, or it would be the worse for her; did she but lift her hand or open her mouth, a man standing outside a window behind her, covering her with a revolver, would fire without mercy.

"Now be sure you don't tempt him, for he's a terrible fellow," was the concluding admonition. Then, kissing his hand and smiling, this unconventional housebreaker withdrew, and Alberta heard him as he leaped lightly from a window.

In mortal fear and trusting simplicity, the girl lay motionless in her place until the slow, unfeeling clock measured the five long minutes. Not until then did she dare turn her head in order that the disignated window might be brought within the range of her vision. To her unbounded relief no leveled pistol and no burglar met her glance. Leaping to her feet, she caught up the "Last of the Mohicans," fled to her room and locked herself in. And then, with the sense of safety, came a thought that caused her to flush with mortification. No burglar would linger five minutes in order to help his friends off; she had been duped, and now it was too late to rouse the house and catch the thieves, and therefore best to leave the family undisturbed till morning.

Alberta sat down in her room and thought it all over, anon seeking tranquility of mind in reading; but wherever she looked, even in the pages of the book, she saw continually the cold gray eyes and mocking merry smile of the burglar who had "made such a fool" of her, as she insisted, in growing anger. The face was so vividly impressed on her memory that she believed she could draw its every line and feature. Suddenly it occurred to her to try. Should she succeed might—might not the police be able to recognize the original? What a just retribution! What a sweet revenge!

Fired by this novel idea, Alberta threw aside her book, spread out some drawing paper on her table, and set to work. Encouraged by the result of her first few bold strokes, she brought all her energies to the task and worked harder and more earnestly than ever in her life before, keeping on untiringly as the minutes, quarters and half hours passed.

Drawing was her delight, and she was far in advance of all the members of her class at school, delighting her teacher, who was known to have remarked that the little Canadian rebel was the only girl in the school who might really become an artist. But she had rarely attempted to draw faces. Her best loved subjects were landscapes, and these were

nearly always Canadian, bits of lake and rock and tangled forest, the gliding bark canoe, the moose and deer, with now and then the figure of a woodsman with his "turkey" over his shoulders, a half-breed Indian *coureur du bois,* or a French Canadian river driver in gay stockings.

She was determined to draw a face now, however, and did her very best. When finished at last a living, breathing face looked out from the paper, whether a true likeness or not. "It is just like him," was her own comment, with a sigh of satisfaction.

"And did it—and did it really *catch* him? How delightful!" Mrs. Burton burst in impetuously at this point of the story.

"Yes, my uncle took the portrait to London, it was photographed and sent out from Scotland Yard all over the country, and within three weeks the man was caught. So this was my exploit," explained Alberta. "On account of my knack at drawing I was the means of entrapping one of the most successful burglars of his time."

She interrupted the chorus of admiring exclamations to add that the burglar afterwards wrote to her. His letter, which she still vividly recalled, was as follows:

"*My Little Beauty:* Thanks to a newspaper I was lately permitted to read, I now share with all England the knowledge of how a fourteen year old miss caught the cleverest burglar in the kingdom. Who would have believed it! The next time I am present at a safe cracking and have to mount guard over a young lady I'll know better than to turn on the light. I have to thank your pretty face and my confounded recklessness for that. (A stronger term would be more appropriate, but I am writing to a boarding school miss and must avoid the slang of the profession.) I wanted a good look at you, you see, in the best light possible, and little dreamed what a risk I ran in permitting you a full view of myself. From the conventional idea of burglars, you doubtless think that I am sorry I did not put you 'out of evidence,' as the phrase goes, and so have saved myself from this beastly run of ill luck; but my only regret is that I did not kiss you when I had the chance. It would have been a thing to remember for years.

"Perhaps I may do it yet, my clever one! By the time you are out of boarding school you may be sure I shall have found a way out of this beastly prison— for *I* am clever, too—and we may meet again. If there be such a thing as fate, it will bring

us together, for who could be so fit to mate as the cleverest burglar in London and the little woman who had the wit to catch him? What a pair we should make! With you to back me I could brave the world. But I forget that your conventional education will prejudice you against my profession. For my own part I consider it more respectable than many so-called legitimate trades—I only take from the rich what the rich have taken from the poor. For your sake, however, I might be induced to give it up and go into another line. We could succeed in anything, you and I. Think it over, my dear, until we meet again.

"Those wondrous fine eyes of yours have haunted me constantly, and now that I know your surpassing cleverness I think of you all day like a lover. I will not say goodbye to *the* girl in all Great Britain but only au revoir, for we are to meet again—we *must*. Au revoir, then, my beauty, au revoir!—THE BURGLAR."

"And was that the last you ever heard of him?" asked Mrs. Burton, after Alberta had told them little more of what the burglar had written than they might gather from her statement that he had sent

her "a dreadful, bold, saucy letter that showed intelligence."

"Yes," was the reply, "I don't know what became of him. By this time he may have served out his term, or he may have escaped from prison and is now at large."

"I had not supposed that there was ever a burglar so well educated," remarked Lucien.

"I read of one a few years ago who was said to be a college graduate and quite a 'gentleman'," rejoined Burton.

"Miss Ransom has eclipsed us all," said Hawksworth, gallantly. "Our sporting exploits were commonplace in comparison with her experience, and her account of it shows her to be a born story-teller."

As she graphically described all the details of her adventure, Alberta had kept her eyes away from Hawksworth's face, fearing that otherwise she might become so excited as to exhibit signs of agitation. But she was conscious throughout that his eyes were riveted upon her, and more than once she fancied that he was ill at ease. She looked directly at him only as she concluded with the words —"or he may have escaped from prison and is now at large." She was a trifle disconcerted, but was by

no means ready to surrender her growing suspicion, when she found that he faced the challenge of her eye apparently unmoved. There was not the change of a muscle in his face, though she thought she detected something unreal and hollow in his fixed smile. In Mrs. Burton's opinion the admiring, the ardent, expression of his eyes was anything else than unreal, and she foresaw that Muskeg Lake would know him as long as Alberta was there.

At ten o'clock Lucien rose to go, earlier than his wont, and was soon followed by Hawksworth, who appeared to know that a new acquaintance would not be expected to linger after an old one had gone. Mrs. Burton bade the latter good-night standing in the middle of her parlor, but followed the former to the veranda.

"Miss Ransom has fairly bewitched me," she said to him there.

"It is always so," was the gloomy answer.

"Yes, no doubt. This Mr. Hawksworth—did you notice? She can make that big, contemptuous Englishman her slave if she chooses."

It was too dark for her to see the expression of pain and anger that came into the face of her departing guest as she spoke.

VI.

LUCIEN MERIMEE walked rapidly down to the landing, put his canoe in the water, stepped aboard, dropped to his knees, and dipped his paddle with an eagerness and vigor that were almost fierce. The canoe shot out on the gray, calm, star-reflecting lake, and was kept steadily to the proper course for three quarters of an hour, although the steersman was at every moment preoccupied to an extraordinary degree.

The peace of mind that had been wont to accompany him on these long, silent night journeys was absent now. His mind was troubled, his heart sick. He knew that he was well born, that in the opinion of others, though slightly undersized, he was well-favored, that he was educated, intelligent, capable, and possessed of the ability to make friends. He knew also that the girl who claimed his thoughts in spite of him was, after all, only half an aristocrat, and that she was inclined toward him through gratitude. Nevertheless he was now filled with an over-

powering disgust for himself and the circumstance of his daily life.

What could he offer her? What future was there for a woman who linked her life with that of a book-keeper in a back country lumber camp? There was a time when he might have worked for and won the proper position for such as she, but he had thrown away his opportunities and now he was—nothing! Even if he could win her—glorious thought—what right would he have to sacrifice her? Then there was the annoying question of nationality. Though she might not require wealth, might she not share in the prejudice of her people against natives of French Canada? This insolent, cold-hearted Englishman, Hawksworth, might— no, no, it would be horrible; she must be saved from that, even though he offered untold riches. There were some things infinitely worse than even a life of poverty and isolation beyond the borders of civilization.

Lucien suddenly turned his canoe at right angles and entered a bay to the left. A few minutes later he landed, hid his canoe in the brush and made his way along a dim trail through dense, dark woods. He held his light rifle in readiness as he walked and kept close watch for fear of wandering from the spectral trail—a short cut that even by day was

troublesome at points— but a wild beast so minded might have taken him by surprise that night. He saw none of the glowing eyes, full of wonder, fear or hate, that watched him from shrub-grown rock or tree as he passed. Nor did his fancy run before him through the dreaming forest as at times on nights like this. The dusky sighing trees did not hover about him as if on spectral wings, and the shadowed vistas beneath them were not thick with nameless shapes that sprang up hastily from beds of leaves to hearken with bent heads as storm-strewn twigs broke harshly beneath his tread. He saw only his own oft-repeated thoughts and the visions that went with them.

At length, at the end of a two-mile tramp, he came into an open where the starlight dimly outlined half a dozen low, heavy buildings, apparently huddled together in disorder. Before the door of one of these he halted, glanced upward at the sky, at the dark encompassing forest wall, then fixed his eyes upon the ground at his feet. "I ought to keep my resolve and hold off," he muttered, "but if that bull-dog Englishman—." He did not complete the phrase. He stood silent for another half minute, uttered a final sigh, opened the door, groped his way in, and climbed into his bunk.

He was roused from a troubled sleep at dawn by a pounding on the door. Five minutes later the company's bookkeeper had begun the business of the day by selling a plug of the company's tobacco across the counter in the company's office where he slept. Here also, in the regulation lumbermen's bunks along the walls, slept the superintendent, the blacksmith and one or two other men who held responsible positions. Here the accounts were kept, a few necessaries were sold to the men, and all other business was transacted.

"It ain't three days since I got the last," the purchaser of tobacco remarked to Lucien with a semi-boasting air. "There ain't a chopper in this camp that's the heavy chewer I am."

Other purchasers followed. The "sleeping camp," the largest building in the collection, had long since emptied its gangs of choppers and sawyers into the "cook-camp, where breakfast was served by candle-light, and these were now scattering into the woods where the logs were cut and whence, later in the season, they would be dragged to the lake and dumped on the ice, there to be "boomed" after the spring thaw and taken by the drivers to distant markets.

It was late on the afternoon of the same day that

the English sportsman who gave his name as Hawksworth appeared in Marshall's lumber camp. He was accompanied by his Indian guide and the long-bearded nervous man, the two whites carrying guns and the Indian a game bag. Inquiring at the office if he and his men could get supper, and receiving an affirmative answer, Hawksworth sent the Indian to the "cook-camp" and entering, he made himself as comfortable as a cowhide bottom chair would permit. It was open to the third member of the party to follow his leader, but at sight of the face of Lucien Mérimée he shrank back from the door of the office and moved on hurriedly in the track of the Indian.

The bookkeeper, who was seated behind the counter, looked up as Hawksworth entered and their eyes met. The latter stared insolently but showed no sign of recognition, and naturally all the entertaining was done by the superintendent, the blacksmith, and such other aristocrats of the camp as were wont to sit in the office during their leisure, a right denied the rank and file of Marshall's lumbermen.

Soon after the arrival of the visitors supper was announced, and all hands crowded into the cook-camp, where even the superintendent and bookkeeper were wont to sit down meekly at the long tables

and take their food in company with the common herd. The members of the office party having promptly returned to their reserved apartment, the visiting sportsman was invited to join them in a game of poker. This was proceeding merrily, Lucien meanwhile seated apart reading a book, when the following conversation grew out of some reference to a passing trapper who could speak scarcely a word of English.

"Do you talk French, Mr. Hawksworth?" asked the blacksmith. "I guess you often meet up with that kind on your trips."

"No, what should I learn such a beastly barbarous lingo for?" was the loud, sneering response.

"They tell me they don't talk nothin' else in some o' the camps up above here."

"Yes, those fellows are as thick as flies in some parts, but we don't call 'em Canadians at all. A lot of priest-ridden French rabble—"

"Really, Mr. Hawksworth," interrupted the superintendent in a low voice, glancing toward the bookkeeper, "you must be careful or you'll have trouble on your hands."

"I'd as lief be a Hottentot," persisted the Englishman, brutally, "as a d——d fiddlin' French Canadian!"

And then before anybody could interfere Lucien sprang to his feet and slapped Hawksworth's face. The latter started up, purple with rage, his hands seeking a weapon.

"Gentlemen! gentlemen!" cried the superintendent, rushing between the two infuriated men.

Hawksworth seemed taken by surprise. He possibly may not have expected the insult to be resented, and probably was convinced that in any case one able-bodied Englishman was the equal of two Frenchmen in any contest. But whatever he might think of this as a general proposition, he saw at once that it was a mistake to count on it in the present case.

"Let 'em fight!" cried the blacksmith and others, dragging the table out of the way and crowding round; this promised more entertainment even than the game of poker. "Take away their weapons, if they've got any, and let 'em fight it out, fair and square."

The superintendent's remonstrance remained unheeded, Hawksworth submitted to being disarmed, and they did fight. Stripping to their shirts, they began without loss of time a stubborn sparring contest. Hawksworth was bigger boned as well as heavier by fifty pounds, and his very assurance and

contempt for his antagonist further helped him. For some time he promised to be the ultimate victor. By a skillful feint, he got in an unwarded blow that sent Lucien reeling against the stove and thence to the floor, and cried out with laughter and taunts in the joy of his triumph. But the other had not given up, although he rose staggering and as pale as death. He took a sip of the water that was offered him, halted a few moments to recover his forces, then bounded forward with a tiger's fierceness. After all, the wronged man has an advantage in the very spur of his wrong that tends to equalize the odds against him. Besides, it gradually became apparent that the Englishman's heavier body was not in equal training to endure. The toughening of Lucien's muscles during years of life in the wilds was now to tell in his favor.

It seemed almost incredible to the on-lookers, but was, after all, no great wonder that the termination of the protracted struggle found Hawksworth insensible on the floor, while his foe, though blood-stained and panting, stood whole of limb and otherwise in the possession of his faculties.

While restoratives were being applied, the victor disappeared. There was no more poker that night, and an hour later Hawksworth staggered out of the

"Hawkesworth lay insensible on the floor."

clearing, supported by the Indian guide on the one side and the long-beard on the other. Thus he reached his canoe and was carried to his own camp.

No sooner was he gone than Lucien reappeared in the office and climbed into his bunk. The next morning he did not get up. During the night he had spat blood and vomited; in the morning he had fever. A doctor was brought from a distant point to the camp that day to attend a chopper who had been struck by a falling tree, and having examined Lucien, declared that he suffered from an overstrain and urgently recommended quiet.

Thus it came about that Marshall's bookkeeper sold no more tobacco and kept no more accounts for the remainder of the week. He lay in his bunk for two or three days, and was hardly himself again for a fortnight.

VII.

On the afternoon of the day of Hawksworth's visit to Marshall's lumber camp, as she sat with Alberta on the veranda overlooking Birch Bay, Mrs. Burton sought and obtained an answer to the question which she had found it necessary to defer on the day before. How had Alberta happened to fall in with Lucien during her overland journey?

She had found him at Quebec after a long and disheartening search, the girl related. On landing there an unfortunate accident had occurred. While her baggage was being examined she had lost her purse and believed it had been stolen, but a day or two later found it in one of her trunks where she had unwittingly dropped it while rearranging her rudely disturbed belongings before locking them up again.

This left her stranded and in great distress. There was nothing for her to do but to have her baggage locked up and go in search of Lucien Mérimée whom she supposed to be still a resident of

Quebec. Following a street of the Lower Town until it ended in an iron staircase, she ascended to the Upper Town and spent the whole day exploring the latter in the course of a seemingly fruitless search. No one, English or French, seemed to know of such a person as Lucien Mérimée, though many would evidently have gone out of their way to find him for her had they known how. Some were even too desirous to serve her. One young man, who overheard her question a woman, gallantly offered to conduct her to any or every point she might wish to visit in the course of her search, and when she politely declined to trouble him and moved on, he followed her.

"It was horrible," Alberta declared. "To be absolutely without money, to be stared at and followed! Some one had told me that the place to get news of a young man who had been educated for the priesthood was the cardinal's palace, and so now I went there as fast as I could find the way. But I learned nothing there except that Lucien Mérimée was not now living in Quebec, having given up his purpose to take holy orders and gone west several years before.

"I was now desperate indeed. I had become suspicious and afraid of everybody, and had no idea of what to do next. I ought to have gone to some

public official or English church clergyman, but I spent nearly the whole afternoon on a seat on the terrace overlooking the noble river, admiring the view and shedding tears alternately. I was faint from hunger when I forced myself to make another start, and felt that something must be done at once. But my heart failed me and I did nothing during the rest of the daylight but sit in the cathedral and look at a picture of a beautiful, patient Virgin over the high altar of the chancel. A priest passed me whose face seemed kind and I came near stopping him and asking his advice, but I did not.

"When I came out of the church it was dark. I now walked forward, blindly but rapidly, not daring to be seen to hesitate. How far I walked I don't know, but after a while I began to grow faint and had to stop and lean against the wall of a house. It was then that I heard some one singing:

"'Chante, rossignol, chante,
Toi qui as le cœur gai;
Tu as le cœur à rire,
Moi, je l'ai à pleurer.'"

"I not only recognized the air and words from the old familiar 'A la Claire Fontaine' which Lucien so often sang for us after he came to the rescue of Harry and me in our lonely camp, ten years

before, but I recognized the voice of Lucien himself. I knew that he was in the house in front of which I stood, and I managed to stagger up the steps, find the knocker and sound it, and then, just as soon as the door opened and I had spoken his name, I was silly enough to faint dead away."

"How could you help it, poor child!"

"The next thing I can remember was their giving me a glass of wine, with Lucien looking on and directing. I must confess it made me happy to see him near and to know that I was safe. My feeling of relief was almost as great as when he came to us on the lonely lake shore, although then Harry was delirious and I was starving. He seemed a little older and more manly, but otherwise he was not in the least changed.

"Well, my troubles were over now, of course. Lucien lent me money, took me to the right hotel in a carriage, came to see me every day, and several times took me out for a drive through the quaint old town. By his advice I waited until he had completed his business—a week—and was ready to start on the long journey to Muskeg Lake. So that is how we came to travel out here together."

"It must be a happiness to him to know that good fortune permitted him to come to your rescue

twice." There was something in Mrs. Burton's affectionate glance as she made this remark that caused Alberta a certain uneasiness and led her to avoid a reply.

"I have answered your question," she said quickly, "now can you answer one from me? The priest I talked with in Quebec said it was a 'family trouble' that caused Lucien to abandon the idea of taking holy orders, but he did not explain. Can you?"

Mrs. Burton answered that she could, Lucien having talked it all over with her, and she therefore told the following story:

At the age of nineteen Lucien Mérimée, then one of the most promising students in the Laval University at Quebec, being in danger of losing his health, was sent to the farm of a French-Canadian on Muskeg Lake in order to recuperate, and it was during one of his canoeing trips while there that it fell to his lot to act the part of the 'good angel' of the unfortunate little Ransoms. Returning to his native city some months later, a new man physically, he completed his education and then considered the question of entering the service of the Catholic church. His father being dead and his mother poor, he had been educated by a childless and wealthy aunt, a very devout woman who ardently desired to

see him become a priest. Being of an artistic temperament, and believing that he could cause truer prayers to ascend to heaven from his violin than from any altar before which he might bow, he hesitated, and would have promptly dismissed the thought but for his aunt's persuasions which were the stronger by reason of the debt he owed her.

He freely confessed to Mme. Auclair, his aunt, that the vow of celibacy, though no doubt well for some men, was not to his liking, and that he thought fondly of marital and paternal joys. For answer, he was enthusiastically told to fix his thoughts on the glorious vision of the hundred and forty and four thousand who were clothed in white raiment, and were pure and undefiled with women; and though he thought these high and noble words, they struck him with the sort of chill the man desirious of the sun's rays might feel if told to seek warmth from the stars

Having from the outset directed his education largely with the priesthood as an end in view, Mme. Auclair was not to be persuaded to leave him the perfect freedom of choice that should have been his. Having taken his degree and left college at twenty-three, he was promptly sent to Rome for a stay of several months, in the hope that there under the

influence of the greatness and power and pageantry of the church, and the incomparable beauty of the art treasures inseparably associated with it, his imagination would be captivated, and his interest in ecclesiastical life and work quickened.

But only bitter disappointment awaited the promoter of these plans. Before Lucien Mérimée returned home his mother died and his sister entered the convent of the Ursulines. The former event was partly and the latter was wholly the result of a tragedy which made a profound impression on the absent son and brother, and caused him forever to renounce the idea of taking the priest's vow of celibacy, although he thus severed friendly relations with his aunt, who announced that at her death all her property should go to the church.

When Lucien went to Italy his sister Madeleine was a young girl of twenty, less talented than he was, but distinguished by marked personal attractions and much loveliness of character. Some time afterward it was observed that this young lady had developed great piety. No one was found praying in the churches so often, whether it were the Basilica, Notre Dame des Victoires, or Sanctus Joannes Baptista. Indeed, she was seen often in the smaller churches of St. Roch and St. Sauveur, the

lower town suburbs, and she made not a few pilgrimages to the shrine of St. Anne. Astute observers hazarded the guess that Madeleine Mérimée suffered from a trouble of the heart, and this was true. The unhappy girl was seeking a refuge from her own wilful affections which remained fixed upon an unattainable object, in spite of all her prayers and pilgrimages.

Connected with one of the churches of Quebec was a young priest known as Père Jérome, who would have done well to hesitate, even as did Lucien Mérimée, before he took the vow of celibacy. Père Jérome was not more than thirty, was well formed in body, and of a handsome face; he was also an exceedingly eloquent *prédicateur*. About the time that Madeleine Mérimée commenced her unwonted church pilgrimages Père Jérome began to kneel before his superior and confessor in great anguish of spirit and humbly accept the heavy penances that were laid upon him.

Madeleine might have done well had she prayed in all the churches of Quebec but one, that one with which Père Jérome was actively connected. But she was not strong enough to take this heroic medicine, and, in spite of her resolves and struggles, visited that particular church more often than any other.

While Père Jérome stood in the pulpit and preached, Madeleine, seated well to the front, never removed her eyes from his manly face; and he, although he might forget her in the fervor and zeal of his discourse, as he took his place his eye never failed to search for and find her, and go back to her again and again with their unspoken message of love. Each time poor Père Jérome vowed to look no more, but presently yielded to the sweet slavery of a forbidden passion and looked upon her again.

As time went on, there was more than mere silent intercourse at hours when few supplicants were to be found kneeling in the church. In sorrow and inward groaning, and yet with exultation, Père Jérome marked Madeleine's coming, and, for the moment powerless in the grasp of his love, he would be drawn toward the spot where she kneeled to pray. And as he passed by, lightning leaped from his eyes and pierced her soul. Thus day after day, while the growing weight of sore penance imposed on him made the very life of his body a burden.

The unquenchable fire within him burned deeper and deeper, until one day the looking and passing by did not content him and he stopped and spoke. Then every day he stopped and spoke, and every night was passed awake and groaning on his knees.

The supreme moment of this agony arrived when one morning Madeleine knelt to pray in a little chapel off the left aisle. Screened from the view of the few worshippers kneeling in the body of the church, she wept and prayed and asked for death in her despair. Hither came the sad-visaged Père Jérome and found her. At the sound of his well-known tread, Madeleine rose, and though she said no word, her tender eyes made full surrender of her heart. And he, still with inward groaning, but with mad delight, came close and folded her, unresisting, in his arms, Laughing a low laugh, he pressed his hot lips upon her trembling mouth, and in that moment it seemed to these two travailing hungry souls that they were one and no more twain.

As they stood thus, a brother priest and two women who had finished their devotions passed down the aisle together, looked into the side chapel, and stood rooted to the spot, crossing themselves in their excitement and horror.

"Père Jérome!"

Then, as the awakened lovers broke from each other's arms, the accuser lifted high his crucifix, and with eyes fastened thereon, repeated in a voice that trembled:

"Et vidi, et ecce Agnus stans super Monte Sion,

et cum ipso centum quadraginta quatuor millia, habentes nomen Patris Ipsus scriptum super frontibus suis. Et canebant tamquam canticum novum, et nemo poterat discere canticum, nisi quam illi centum quadraginta quatuor millia, empti de terra. *Hi sunt qui cum mulieribus non sunt inquinati, virgines enim sunt.* Et in ore illorum non est inventus dolus, immaculati enim sunt coram throno Dei."

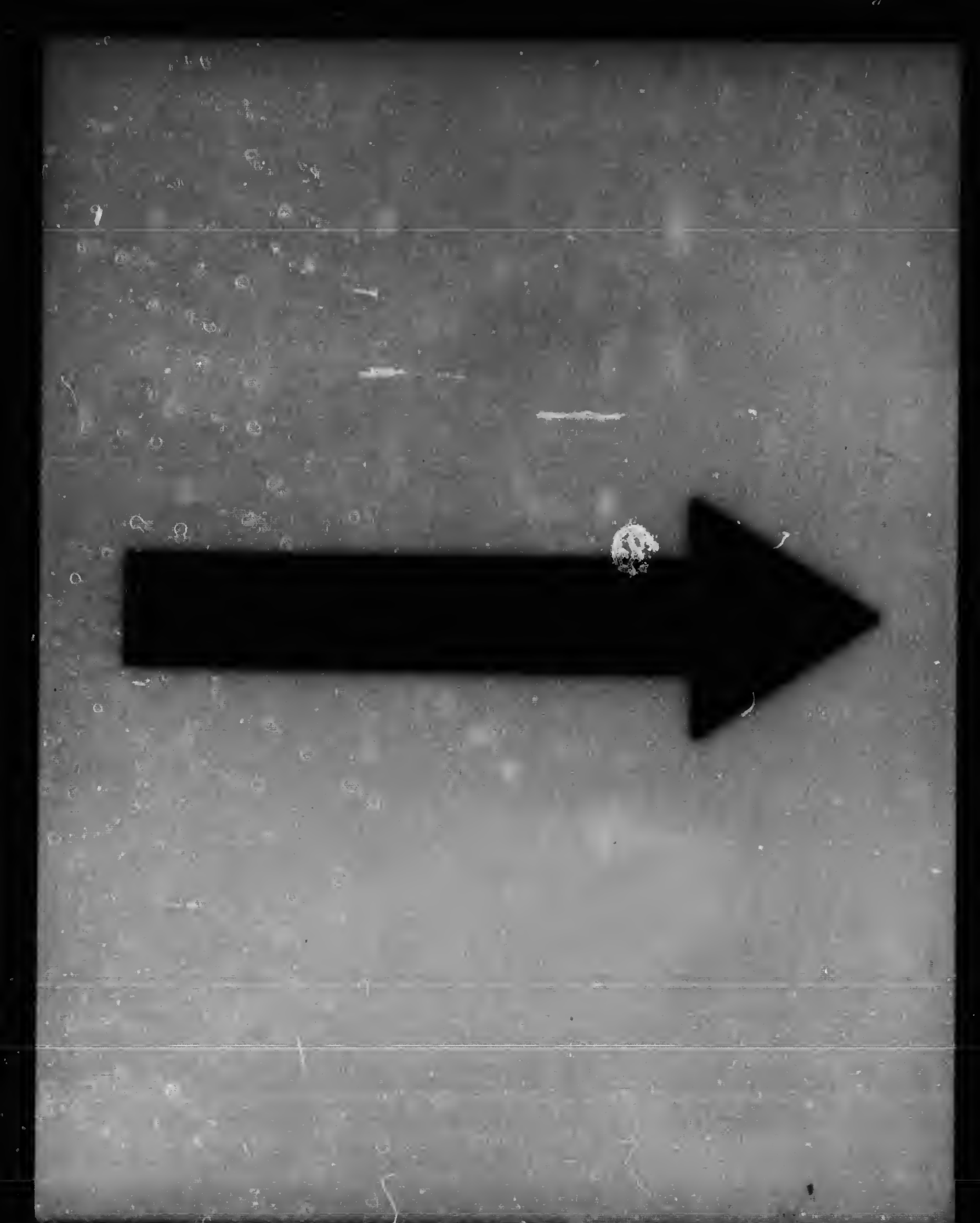
And when he ceased and looked down, Madeleine Mérimée had fled and Père Jérome was on his knees, with head bowed low and hands uplifted to heaven. The accusing priest let fall his crucifix and turned to the two women who still lingered.

"I have spoken," he explained to them in a low voice, "the words of the holy saint who saw the hundred and forty and four thousand of the pure and undefiled with women, et qui étaient sans tache devant le trône de Dieu. And now leave me, mesdames," he concluded, "with this poor mad brother, and let me beg you to speak not in the town of what you have seen, pour l'amour de notre Dame!"

When the returning traveller arrived at his home he found, as has been stated, his mother buried and his sister retired from the world in the Ursulines. He found also that Père Jérome had not waited to

be transferred to another field of usefulness, but had left Quebec abruptly, going none knew where. As for Lucien, the thought of an ecclesiastical career, never inspiring, was now intolerable. The vow of celibacy, which Père Jérome had taken to his own undoing and that of poor Madeleine, had become as something horrible to contemplate. The city of his birth, moreover, was now to him a place of sadness and he gladly relinquished such opportunities as might have been his had he remained there and adopted a more desirable profession.

After some last futile interviews with his broken-hearted and resentful aunt, he left hurriedly for the wild lake country which had become dear to him long before, and whose vastness, isolation and peace seemed to offer the healing balm which he craved.



VIII.

THE friendship of Mrs. Burton and her visitor advanced so rapidly that it was impossible for the existence of Lucien's manuscript novel to remain long a secret. The fourth day of Alberta's sojourn at the house on Birch Bay was spent by her in reading "Père Lorette," over which she smiled and was tearful by turns, moved now by a quaint drollery of expression and a keen insight into the humorous side of character, and now by a pathos as genuine as it was effective. She suspected that the style was by no means flawless, that there were faults of construction, and that the story might be cut down and thoroughly revised with advantage, but felt sure that even were the author unknown to her and the scene of his romance unfamiliar she would have been uncommonly interested.

Whatever its imperfections, the book produced in her case a deep and lasting impression. Some of the scenes, in fact, seemed to her as vivid as life itself,

and on going out to sketch one day she involuntarily began to draw one of those that had taken a strong hold on her imagination. One sketch succeeded another before any definite aim of illustrating the story found lodgment in her mind. Such a purpose was formed only after a suggestion from Mrs. Burton, who enthusiastically commended the drawings and urged that the work be continued. To return the book to its author illustrated, she thought, would be a compliment only such as he deserved and would highly esteem.

Three weeks passed, after Alberta's arrival, before word was received from the Hunters. During that time little was seen of Lucien at the house on Birch Bay and much was seen of Hawksworth. The latter appeared almost every day, and his intentions were soon so evident to all that Mrs. Burton became alarmed and contrived to curtail his opportunities of being alone with Alberta, much to the latter's relief. The Burtons were pleased with their intelligent countryman, but knowing nothing of his antecedents or connections, they agreed that Alberta ought to be shielded from him until she could be consigned to the protection of her friends. The girl's dislike for his company, and her suspicion of him, increased; but, observing that his visits gave

pleasure to her hosts, she passively submitted, the more willingly because the man interested her.

Once, during the second of those three weeks of waiting, Hawksworth did not appear for three days, and when he did show himself he was conspicuous for a black eye, of which—John Burton thought—he gave an unsatisfactory explanation. Lucien called once after his first visit, and then they saw him no more for ten days.

Meanwhile, though surprised and secretly annoyed by this apparent neglect, Alberta worked hard until she had produced a desirable number of small but vigorous and life-like sketches faithfully reflecting the spirit of "Père Lorette," the scene of which was largely placed in her native wilds.

Walking alone in the clearing by the lake shore one afternoon, Alberta's attention was drawn to a small boom of logs that was being towed to Burton's mill by an "alligator." What interested her was not the curious amphibian contrivance itself, half-steamboat, half-locomotive, gifted with the power of travelling by land or water at pleasure, but two "drivers" in knee-breeches and bright hose who were skipping about over the boom, long sticks with hooked spikes at the end in their hands, these

being made use of as the men leaped from one sinking log to another.

Alberta's eye wandered from the boom to a canoe that was approaching the landing. Its occupant, half-sitting, half-kneeling, as he dipped his paddle, was a young half-breed trapper who was a familiar figure in Birch Bay, the Burtons often buying his game. He called himself Hibou Rivière, the surname being that of his French father, and Hibou (owl) being the French equivalent of his Indian mother's ancestral patronymic. Among the English-speaking people of the lake he was called simply Owl, and sometimes, jocosely Blind Owl, his eyesight being remarkably keen and his superior qualifications as a sportsman's guide being well known.

With a friendly "B'jou'!" Owl leaped ashore and brought to view some half dozen partridges, enquiring of Alberta, as she drew near, more by signs than by words, if she cared to buy them. Having suggested that he take the birds to the house, Alberta abruptly asked:

"Do you ever go to Marshall's lumber camp?"

"Sometime, for s'" "— He could not remember the word "game" and by a motion drew her attention to the birds instead.

"How long is it since you were there?"

"Three day."

"Did you see the bookkeeper, Mr. Mérimée?"

"No. He seek, cook say: he ver' seek."

"Sick! How long has he been sick?"

Owl could not say, but when asked if he expected to visit the camp again soon he announced his intention of doing so on the following day.

"Then stop here on your way. We may have some word to send."

"Bien—all righ'."

Alberta went forthwith to Mrs. Burton with this news. "Do you think it can be serious?" she asked anxiously.

"It seems to me we should have heard in such a case. As soon as John comes he must go and see about it," said Mrs. Burton, referring to her husband, who had gone down the lake on a matter of business.

"But he will not be here until the day after to-morrow."

"Mr. Hawksworth will probably be here this evening. We might get him to go."

Hawksworth indeed! Alberta's face plainly indicated that the proposal did not please her. "I told Owl to stop here on his way to camp to-morrow," she said, with sudden color, "but—but his

report will hardly be reliable." She paused with the manner of one who has not finished.

"No woman is ever seen in one of those lumber camps," remarked Mrs. Burton, speculatively, after a searching glance at her companion, "and one must consider appearances even in these woods, but I think—perhaps—you and I might go there with Owl."

"Why not? It may be very serious, you know."

"And he *may* have recovered." This was a disturbing possibility. They looked into each other's eyes inquiringly. "I could take my gun and it could be said that we were hunting and stopped to see the camp. Lucien knows that I go out with my gun now and then," said the elder lady, after a moment's thought, and the younger looked relieved.

When Owl, the half-breed, stopped at Burton's landing on his way to the lumber camp next morning he was mildly astonished to find that he was to carry two ladies instead of a message. Under the additional weight his long slender craft of birch bark sank until the gunwales were within two inches of the water, and some danger was apprehended. Fortunately the lake was calm, and the distance not great. Mrs. Burton was the only one to hesitate, Alberta and the half-breed willingly taking the risk.

Less than an hour after they embarked a landing was made from an inwinding arm of the lake called Cedar Bay. Concealing his canoe and paddle in the brush, Owl led the way along a dim trail through a dense forest of maple, birch, hemlock and balsam—the same short cut Lucien was wont to take. In order the more successfully to convey the impression that their real object was hunting, Mrs. Burton seized the opportunity offered *en route* of shooting a couple of partridges (she called them pheasants), the delay occasioned being evidently grudged by Alberta. The latter's impatience to proceed suddenly gave place to reluctance when they reached the borders of the camp.

Just before entering Marshall's clearing the party encountered a gang of choppers, French-Canadians, with trousers stuffed inside of red and blue stockings, who stared curiously and shook their heads when inquiry was made as to the health of M. Mérimée. They appeared to know nothing of the matter.

"I wish we had not come," faltered Alberta. "Can't we send the Owl to inquire and wait for him here?"

"Useless," was the emphatic response. "Everybody will know that we were here."

So they walked forward and entered the camp, finding very few persons about. It was now twelve o'clock and the men had already dispersed into the forest, eleven being their dinner hour. The cook, a corpulent, florid Englishman, stepped forth with something of an ill grace to meet the visitors. Amazed to see ladies, not knowing what was expected of him, and being at all times more or less ill-tempered, he frowned rather than smiled as he informed them that the superintendent was absent and asked if they wished to see any one in particular.

"We were hunting in the woods on Cedar Bay," said Mrs. Burton, "and came on here to see your camp and ask about Mr. Mérimée. We heard that he was ill."

"Yes, mum, he's been under the weather, but he's hup and hout to-d[illegible]

"What was th[illegible]?"

"He 'urt himse[illegible]tin'. The doctor said he strained himself."

"Good gracious! Fighting?"

"He 'ad a tussle with a Hinglish sport 'ere one night. I don't know nothink about the bookkeeper's business, but they tell me the sport hup and hinsulted 'im without cause, and then, oh s'y! they 'ad

it. The Hinglishman was most big enough to 'a eat 'im hup, but they say the bookkeeper knocked him out fine. I didn't 'arf believe it was in 'im, e's so quiet; but you carn't jest always tell about them kind. Mr. Meerimy won't 'ave another fight on his 'ands soon, he won't; it's what you call a ticklish business. He'll come out on top or kill 'imself. It's what you call grit."

The sullen cook was disposed to unbend, nothing being so much to his taste as the discussion of a fight. "Them Frenchies is surprisin' sometimes," he added confidentially. "It don't do to fool with 'em with yer eyes shut."

"Do you know the Englishman's name?" Mrs. Burton hastened to ask.

"'Awksworth, I think it was."

The two ladies looked hard at each other, and the elder muttered, "Ah!"

"I guess the bookkeeper's gone off fishin' down the creek. I seen him fixin' 'is flies this mornin'."

"Let us go before he comes," Alberta whispered urgently.

The cook then invited the visitors to have some tea and a "snack," and saying, "We *must* rest, you know," Mrs. Burton followed into the cooking camp, an 'll-smelling place and otherwise unattrac-

tive enough. Seated on a bench at one of the long rough tables, the two ladies were served with preserved apple pie, currant biscuits and boiled green tea, dished out in quart bowls made of tin. The cook apologized for these latter, explaining that there was not a "piece of crockery" in the camp. "Crockery aint fit for a lumber camp," he added; "breaks too easy." The ladies would not have mourned the absence of "crockery" had the tin not been so discolored and manifestly half clean.

Having eaten a few morsels, swallowed a portion of the rank tea, and rested half an hour, Mrs. Burton agreed to shoulder her little gun and start homeward, after asking for a sheet of paper from the office and writing a note to Lucien. She repeated the fiction about the hunting expedition, expressed regret at not finding him in the camp, asked after his heal. and hoped that they would soon see him in Birch Bay. The half-breed ha' disposed of the game he had brought and was n ready to accompany them. He noted curiously that the younger of the two ladies was at first in great haste, pushing forward eagerly until they were well out of sight in the forest, after which she appeared to be quite satisfied with a more deliberate gait.

Sometime after the departure of the vi..tors a

young man, carrying a fishing-rod, entered the camp from the opposite direction. He was haggard and his manner listless, but as he read Mrs. Burton's note color came to his cheek and fire to his eye. Two minutes later he was hurrying forward on the writer's track. He literally ran over the trail until he saw the water of the lake glistening through the trees.

But he was too late. Just as he appeared on the shore Owl's canoe was seen rounding a point a quarter of a mile away and in a few moments was lost to view. He put his own canoe into the water, but promptly reconsidered and carried it back to its hiding place in the bushes. He then absently retraced his steps along the forest trail, often with a smile on his lips, and always with hope in his heart.

IX.

Not until the following afternoon, however, did Lucien Mérimée appear at the house on Birch Bay, by which time his state of exaltation had passed and he was again filled with many doubts.

"You look as well as ever," remarked Mrs. Burton, who had sighted his canoe and gone down to meet him at the landing.

"It was nothing," he lightly replied.

Then why have you not been here before?" she asked sharply, a challenging look in her eye.

"I might tell you, but some things are the worse for discussion."

"I have suspected that there was something wrong with you. Don't be foolish, Lucien."

"I have been trying very hard not to be."

"Some men are very stupid."

"No doubt."

"Are we not friends? Tell me what is the matter?"

"It is a question of morals." He smiled, then

added: "I have been asking myself two questions, and have not succeeded in answering them. One is this: Has an honorable man a right to take advantage of a young girl's gratitude and force himself upon her attention while she occupies a trying and, we might say, defenseless position?"

"If I didn't know that you were more conscientious than you need to be," declared Mrs. Burton, indignantly. "I should suspect you of vanity in its worst form. Let me tell you that a girl of high spirit is not so readily impressed, not so easily harmed, even when her position is 'defenseless.'"

She saw the look of horror on his face and repented before he put out his hand to stop her.

"You misunderstand. I have no hope—none," he protested. "I did have for a while after I knew that she had come with you to the camp to inquire about me, but I soon saw there were no real grounds for it. All I meant was that it seemed honorable and right to curb my impatience and move slowly, under the conditions."

"That is well enough, but it can be overdone. Now what is your second troublesome question?"

"Has an honorable man, who is poor and has no prospects, a right to seek to win a girl who has been brought up to every luxury?"

"Every right in the world, provided the girl accepts his company as that of an equal."

"He need not even think of the hard life before her in case she should consent, or of his own misery if she should refuse?"

"Of his own misery, no. Love is a game of chance, like any other, only the stake is high. If one loses one must face the consequences, but one must not hesitate to play simply for fear of losing."

"But I was referring chiefly to a poor man's responsibility for the hard life he would bring upon such a girl."

"I know. It won't hurt him to think of that. He ought to think of it," Mrs. Burton declared, "and he ought to determine to do everything in the world to prevent her life with him from being hard; but he has always the right to give her the opportunity of deciding whether to share with him his lot, whatever it may be. And her choice is often a surprise to the worldly-wise, as you ought to know. What a true woman loves is not a life of ease but a *man*, and the two do not always go together. But we are talking platitudes; it is all so clear to every one, or ought to be."

"I find your platitudes intensely interesting."

"Besides," Mrs. Burton resumed earnestly, "sup-

pose there should be another man in the field and determined to win by the shortest possible process? Suppose there is a doubt of him, but in spite of it, that he is strong and persuasive?"

"You mean—?"

"The man who was once knocked senseless in a lumber camp, according to report, but who was not disposed of and, in spite of his bruises, has since been particularly active. He is here every day, and I am alarmed. Some one is needed to stand between her and him, or would be, if this should go on long. A woman likes to be wooed."

"I thank you for this. I have done with scruples," said Lucien Mérimée.

Mrs. Burton now feared that she had gone too far, but she liked the atmosphere of manly determination that enveloped him as he walked beside her to the house in silence. Alberta was pleased also to observe a change in him. During the hour that he spent at the house, partly in the company of both ladies and partly alone with the younger, it was manifest that all traces of his former constraint of manner had vanished. And thereafter scarcely a day passed without a visit from him.

Finally he came one afternoon to tell Alberta that a message had been received from the Hunters, and

found her seated on a stone near the landing. She was busy with her last sketch illustrating "Père Lorette," and her attention was not drawn from her work by his noiseless arrival. A portfolio containing all the sketches and a few pages of the manuscript lay in her lap.

"Oh, it is you," she said, coloring slightly and quickly shutting her portfolio, as she saw him within a few feet of her.

He then told her of the message from the Hunters. The man who brought it reported that Mrs. Hunter had been seriously ill for more than a week, and Mr. Hunter could not leave her. He, however, sent word that if the young lady could get somebody to take her up to Mink Lake they would be glad to see her.

"If my aunt is ill I ought to go to her," said Alberta promptly, "though it may not be best for me to remain there long."

Thereupon Lucien eagerly offered his services, should she decide to go, proposing to get leave for a few days and take her in his canoe. He said he would engage Owl, the half-breed, and his Indian wife to accompany them. The latter would do the cooking and help to make Alberta comfortable. A small tent would be carried for the use of the lady

and her Indian maid, the men sleeping under their canoes. For the distance was considerable, there was much portaging, such a party could not hurry as men could alone, and it would probably be necessary to spend two nights on the road. Alberta declared that such a trip would be delightful, but that they must talk the matter over with the Burtons.

"May I ask what is that you have there?" enquired Lucien abruptly.

He had seated himself at her side, and his eyes were fixed on the portfolio in her lap. A portion of one of the sheets of manuscript was exposed, and on it he recognized his own handwriting. Alberta saw that the innocent little secret could no longer be kept.

"You have caught me," she said, smiling and blushing. "I should have been more careful. Don't blame Mrs. Burton. She let me read 'Père Lorette' and I liked it so well that—I became so full of it that—that I felt that I had to illustrate it. See here," she opened the portfolio and spread out the drawings.

One swift glance was devoted to the pictures, and then his eyes sought her face. The gladness, the tender fire, in them startled her. The hand that was involuntarily put forth, covering her own, caused in

her a strange new thrill, the significance of which she preferred not to acknowledge even to herself.

"And you did that—for me!"

Her frightened eyes broke away from the mastery of his and she withdrew her hand, but not as quickly as she might have done—he exultingly reflected.

"I made the drawings for you, yes, and for my own pleasure," she told him lightly, now in complete possession of herself. "But you don't appreciate them. You don't seem to care to look at them."

Laughing like a happy boy, he then proceeded to examine the drawings one by one, admiringly commenting on the striking points of each in turn. "They are beautiful, all of them," he said. "They give a distinction to my make-believe book that many a real writer would envy. They repay me for all my labor. Thank you—thank you."

They were so much absorbed in the drawing and in each other that they did not see a man coming along the path from Burton's mill. Not until he turned toward them came up from behind, and satisfied himself as to what it was they were so interested in, were they aware of the proximity of a third person.

"I see you still draw, Miss Ransom."

Alberta turned her head like a startled bird, and her eyes grew cold as they fell upon Hawksworth. She closed her portfolio and rose, as did Lucien.

"Yes, I still draw," she answered, a curious intentness in the gaze she fixed on the Englishman's smiling face. "I still draw, but I shall never really be an artist because I don't advance. My greatest success was the portrait I drew from memory one night six years ago. You heard the story. I came across that portrait on going through my collection this morning. When we go into the house I'd like to show it to you."

"Delighted, I'm sure."

Lucien looked from Alberta to Hawksworth in surprise, not comprehending. In this instance, as always on meeting at the home of the Burton's after the memorable episode in the lumber camp, neither of these men did more than barely acknowledge the other's presence with a distant nod of recognition. So much of a concession they felt compelled to make out of consideration for Alberta and their hosts. The appearance of Mrs. Burton at this moment was a relief to all.

"Come to the house, all of you, and have a cup of tea," she said.

As later the hostess sipped her afternoon tea—a

home custom to which she clung tenaciously even in exile—Lucien told her of the news from the Hunters. and was pleased that his plan to transport Alberta to Mink Lake met her hearty approval. With the consent of both ladies, the hour of departure was at once settled. It was now Tuesday afternoon; on Thursday morning the two canoes would leave Birch Bay before dawn, the intervening day being sufficient for communicating with Owl and making the necessary preparations.

Hawksworth listened to the discussion of the arrangements with evident interest, but without remark, until he found opportunity to speak with Alberta aside.

"And so you are really going?" he then said, with much more than a mere polite air of regret. "It is time for me to move on, too. I should like to vary my route so as to see this Mink Lake district and pitch my tent for a few days near your friends. They tell me that the shooting is fine up there. Do I have your permission?" he concluded, his glance ardent and his smile persuasive.

"Don't ask me. Mink Lake is no private domain of mine as you know."

Irritated by the coldness and indifference of her

speech, he allowed himself to make an incautious retort.

"That beggarly French-Canadian seems to be more fortunate."

"I think you insulted him once before."

"He did not come whining to the ladies about it, surely."

"It is not usually the victor who whines after the fight is done."

Hawksworth was not ready with a rejoinder, and was doubtless glad of the entrance of John Burton, which caused the conversation to become once more general. Alberta rose abruptly, with heightened color, and left the room, returning after a few minutes with a drawing in her hand.

"You remember the story of how I caught a burglar," she said to Burton, her voice so pitched as to attract the attention of all, and her eyes showing excitement. "I found the sketch this morning and here it is."

Every one moved forward to look at it, including Hawksworth, who drew a long breath through his open mouth, as if making a great effort at self-control.

"Why, Mr. Hawksworth, it resembles you!" exclaimed Mrs. Burton, amazed.

"Indeed? Really—I believe it does, in outline," he admitted, after leaning over to look at the picture. "How very extraordinary! I have no relations in the house-breaking business that I know of. It *is* like me in some ways, but younger."

"More like the way you looked several years ago, perhaps," suggested Alberta, smiling.

"Well, y-es."

Hawksworth's smile did not seem forced, but sudden perspiration glistened on his brow and there was in his atmosphere as well as in the sound of his voice the suggestion of suppressed excitement. Neither the Burtons nor Lucien appeared to be conscious of this, they being prompt to attribute the resemblance to mere coincidence. But to Alberta Hawksworth's manner was a distinct betrayal, and her eloquent eyes were not slow to inform him of her conviction. He met them full, without fear or resentment, his own expressive of nothing but a sustained and devouring admiration.

Mrs. Burton hastened to divert the conversation from a subject which in its very nature could only be disagreeable to one of her guests. Alberta said no more, the burglar's picture was put aside, and twenty minutes later Hawksworth made his adieux with all his accustomed self-possession. The mo-

ment he was out of the house, however, Alberta ventured to predict that they should see him no more.

"Why not?"

"Because he and my burglar are one and the same man."

"Utterly absurd" was John Burton's deliberate judgment, after much excited discussion, his wife inclining to his view. As to Lucien's opinion they could only conjecture, his departure having preceded that of Hawksworth.

"We shall see," said Alberta, unconvinced.

But she was staggered when Hawksworth appeared as usual the next day. He called at the mill to see Burton and was then paddled up to the landing opposite the house. Leaving his canoe in charge of the long-bearded man, he walked up the hill and spent half an hour with he ladies. He was there to say good-bye, he told them, and to thank them for the pleasant hours he had spent in their company. Such society was rare even in civilized centers, and it was this good fortune which had caused him to change his original plans and remain encamped so long on Muskeg Lake. Now, however, it was necessary for him to proceed on his journey. There was so much of genuine courtesy and gratitude in his

manner that Mrs. Burton was more than ever inclined to laugh at Alberta's suspicions.

"He talks about a necessary journey, but his next camping place will most likely be on Mink Lake, within a mile of the Hunters," she remarked, with a significant smile, when he had gone.

But Alberta stubbornly replied that she thought otherwise.

X.

About the hour that Hawksworth made his parting call at the house on Birch Bay, his Indian guide, whom he had nicknamed Jeremiah, entered Marshall's lumber camp and was seen hanging about for some time. He carried a gun and a bag of game, and it subsequently developed that, in return for the present of several partridges, the cook invited him to wait for his supper.

Meanwhile he strolled with seeming aimlessness about the camp, but took occasion several times to peep into the office, and each time his glance was directed toward the vacant corner behind the counter where usually the bookkeeper was to be seen.

At the time Lucien was seated on a log a little way out of the camp, conversing with a priest. The latter was a missionary who periodically visited remote villages and lumber camps throughout a large section of country. He belonged to the order of French-Canadian priests, who, from the pioneer

days of New France to the present time, have shown a quenchless enthusiasm and energy in the propaganda of their faith. Neither winter storm nor summer sun, wearisome tramps by land nor trying canoe trips by water, neither hard fare nor hard words nor profane sneers, could weaken his determination or turn Père Turcotte from his purpose.

He had reached Marshall's lumber camp that morning and spent the day in the exercise of his office. The ring of the axes led him to the places where different gangs were at work, and many a good Catholic dropped his tools that day and retired a little way into the forest with Père Turcotte to be shriven and blessed. And now he sat on the log conversing with Lucien Mérimée, who did not ask to be shriven.

"I was informed of your case and told to seek you out and plead with you," said Père Turcotte earnestly, speaking French, "and to exhort you to return to the true faith from which you are wandering."

"How did you hear of me?"

"The laborer who worked in this field before me reported that you avoided him and never confessed."

"It is true."

"Alas, that you should have come to this, my

son, you who, they tell me, were educated for the priesthood. What led you so astray?"

"If you mean what caused me to disappoint my friends by not taking holy orders, I did so for two reasons: I was not fitted for the work, and something happened that made me loathe the thought of taking the vow of celibacy. Later I lost my belief in the necessity of the institution itself. The celabate idea is founded on the persausion that marriage is only a permitted evil, while I believe that a true marriage is of all things the most blessed and holy."

"Alas, alas!" murmured Père Turcotte.

"I do not say that celibacy is a sin, mark you. For those who believe in it and act according to their convictions, it may be a good thing. I believe it is according to our will and motives rather than our acts that we shall be judged. I honor you, Père Turcotte, for your self-sacrifice and devotion to your ideal, but for me to vow celibacy would be to sin, believing as I do that marriage is divinely appointed for men—all men. I know that I should become a better man through marriage, provided I truly loved and was so loved in return. A true union of one man and one woman is the ideal state, and I believe

all good men and good women will attain to it, in another world if not in this."

"This contract of the flesh! Ah, your speech is wild."

"That is where we differ, good father. I do not believe it is of the flesh primarily, but of the spirit. Souls are united in a true marriage and such a union is therefore eternal."

"Nom de Dieu! what madness is this? Who has seen this 'true marriage'? Where is it?"

"In only one case in a thousand, perhaps; but it exists, it is the ideal, the goal, of human existence."

"You have been lured into love, my son, and your mind runs riot with poetical dreams."

"I assure you that is not all. I have not reflected upon my unhappy sister's experience for nothing,—but of that you are ignorant, No, I speak from profound conviction."

"Then, you do indeed renounce the teachings of our mother church?"

"Yes—if you must put it so. That is why I avoided the confessor who preceded you. In doubting the doctrine of celibacy for the clergy I came to doubt others. In deciding not to take holy orders, personal feeling may have been too greatly involved

at first, but the doubts that came to me then have been confirmed by the sober reflection of years. I am no longer a churchman, and yet I believe that I have a religion. I am not a bigot, Père Turcotte. I believe there is that which can help to save in every religion of the world, for it is the earnest acting according to conviction, even though the conviction itself come from error, that makes man better and prepares him for a higher life."

"Ah, no, no; not when those convictions are contrary to the teachings of the sainted Apostles and all the holy men who have succeeded them. But go on; tell me what is your religion."

A living faith in the only God and a future life for all men—was the substance of the reply; the will and determination to shun what is evil and love what is good, as these are seen by the light of revealed truth; the heartfelt desire and intention to "do justice and love mercy," to cultivate duty, honesty, faithfulness, patience and forbearance, decorum, reverence for law, patriotism. "Can you say this is not religion, Père Turcotte?"

"It belongs to religion, but it is not enough."

"Anyhow, I am content with it, and if I live according to it more and more, as I hope to do, you need not despair of me."

The two men talked on with great earnestness until the bulk of the lumbermen had gathered to the cook-camp, eaten their supper, and collected for the most part in the sleeping-camp, there to sing, dance, or play poker until bed time, as they might severally be inclined. Oblivious of everything but the subject before them, Père Turcotte and Lucien were finally recalled to their surroundings by the appearance of the corpulent cook who irritably inquired if they expected to eat anything that night, and went off grumbling.

"Wh a d——d h-ass that bookkeeper is," he muttered. "He'd rather talk than to eat, he would."

"He is a heretic in faith," mused Père Turcotte, as he hurried toward the cook-camp, "but his heart is not evil. He is not hardened, he does not sneer, —vraiment c'est étonnant."

The object of these reflections, after a moment's halt at the office, followed promptly to the eating-camp, and found there only Père Turcotte, the cook, and the Indian guide known as Jeremiah. The latter was seated near the bookkeeper's accustomed place, still eating. A conversation on a subject of minor importance had scarcely been begun by Lucien and the priest, when they were diverted by a

great shouting and laughing outside the door, where two men were now wrestling.

As they turned to look, and the cook ran to the door, Jeremiah slid noiselessly along the bench, whipped out a small vial into which thirty drops of laudanum had been carefully measured, and poured the contents into the bookkeeper's tea.

He was back in his place again before any one looked round, and, none the wiser, Lucien swallowed his tea to the last drop and asked for more during the course of his meal.

Immediately after supper the priest departed, walking the two miles through the forest to his waiting canoe before it was quite dark. Jeremiah had preceded him over the trail by ten minutes, and was now paddling rapidly toward Rock Point, where Owl, the half-breed, and some half dozen Indians and their squaws camped during the summer and early fall, being tempted temporarily to leave wilder and more agreeable regions farther north by the rewards offered for their services as the guides of sportsmen and travellers.

Within half an hour after supper Lucien began to wonder at the unwonted drowsiness stealing over him, but was by no means ill pleased, as he wished to rise at half past two next morning in order to

make sure of meeting Owl in Birch Bay at four. His preparations for the journey being complete, he made no effort to keep awake, but climbed forthwith into his bunk, where he at once fell into a deep sleep.

At half past ten next morning the cook appeared at the office to ask the loan of a newspaper. The door stood open, but the room was empty; no, not empty, for some one lay in one of the upper bunks, breathing heavily.

"Oh, s'y, 'oo's asleep this time o' day?" Stepping forward, the disgusted cook climbed up and looked at the sleeper's face. "Oh, s'y! look 'ere!" he cried out, putting his hand forward roughly. "Thought you was goin' on a trip."

But the sleeper only turned over, sighing and was not awakened. "Hall right," said the cook scornfully, turning away,—"if that's what you got leave of absence for, to lay in that bunk all day like a lazy sheep, hall *right!*"

The sleeper again attracted attention when the blacksmith and other habitués of the office gathered there after supper and began to play poker. But no one attempted to wake him, the suggestion to do so being disposed of by the careless remark: "Oh, let him be. Guess he's stove up—must a' been out all night."

It was eleven o'clock, all hands being now in bed and the lights out, when Lucien suddenly sat up and stared about him stupidly. Leaping out of the bunk, he struck a light and looked at his watch. Wondering, he returned to bed. It seemed strange that he should have waked so soon, stranger that he should have a headache and feel hungry. To suspect the true situation under the circumstances was impossible. Little dreaming that he had already slept twenty-seven hours, he lay down and resolutely put away the crowding thoughts of the morrow's journey, fearing that his night's rest would be broken.

When he woke again it was about four o'clock in the morning. Discovering that his watch had stopped near midnight, he opened the door and anxiously looked out. "Nearly daylight—overslept," was his disturbed thought. Hastily completing his toilet, he shouldered his gun and literally ran away from the camp over the trail that led to Cedar Bay. By the time he reached the spot where his canoe was hidden in the brush it was broad daylight, and when he rounded the point of land and entered Birch Bay the sun was rising.

Another canoe entered the bay from the opposite direction almost at the same moment, and the two

shot rapidly toward Burton's landing. The second contained two persons who were presently seen to be the half-breed and his squaw.

"So the Owl overslept, too," cried Lucien, as the canoes drew near each other in the vicinity of the landing. "What a couple of sorry laggards we are!"

"Two night one day, M'sieu', *she* say," answered the Owl, jerking his head toward the squaw and smiling sheepishly. "I no understand, me, that grand sleep. Comment?"

"What do you mean? I saw you yesterday."

No, Owl declared it was the day before. He had his squaw's solemn word for it that he had slept all one night and until the next before she could rouse him. After a struggle with him, late in the morning she had called in a passing friend who pronounced him drunk. Then she let him alone till evening, when she finally succeeded in driving him out of his bed. She reminded him of the broken engagement with 'M'sieu.' but it was too late to move that night. Towards morning they made a start, and here they were—a day behind, but ready to fulfill their obligations, if not too late!

"You have been dreaming," laughed Lucien.

Their story appealed to his sense of humor, and

he preferred to laugh rather than to scold, for the delay of an hour or more in getting off was really no serious matter. Owl hung his head, smiled sheepishly, and looked puzzled, but the squaw vehemently reaffirmed the truth of her assertions. At this juncture John Burton was seen hurrying down the path from the house.

"Why, Lucien, what's this?" he called out in a tone of very great surprise, as he drew near. "You are not back from Mink Lake already?"

"Back? I haven't started yet. We all overslept."

"But you sent an Indian and his squaw for Miss Ransom before daylight yesterday morning."

"What? We were to go *this* morning, and Owl and his squaw are there before you."

"Oh, but it wasn't the Owl. They said you weren't able to engage him after all. They said you had to go to Rockledge on pressing business—something you had overlooked the day before—and that you told him to call for the lady and join you there in order to save time."

Lucien leaped out of his canoe, staring wildly at the speaker. "Have we all lost our wits?" he asked. "Where is Miss Ransom?"

"You don't mean you didn't send for her? Good heavens! We thought it strange, of course, but

couldn't suppose there was anything wrong. *She's gone*— yesterday morning, with those Indians who claimed to have been sent by you!"

XI.

As he swayed sidewise and steadied himself only by an unusual effort of will, Lucien recollected that he had eaten nothing for thirty-six hours. He looked on like one bewildered as Owl and the squaw also la·ded and repeated the strange story of the "grand sleep." Burton demanded to know if any stranger had visited the half-breed's camp before he fell into that deep sleep, and both the latter and the squaw answered in the affirmative. Jeremiah, the English sportsman's Indian guide, had visited them in the evening and remained some time. He brought with him a bottle of whiskey and he and Owl made merry together.

"Ah! Now, Lucien, who was with you?"

"No one but Père Turcotte," was the answer, with a perplexed expression. "Except—yes, that same Indian guide was hanging about in the afternoon."

"Could he have had an opportunity to tamper with your drink?"

"I think not, but he sat near me as I ate my supper."

"You were both drugged," declared Burton. "Hawksworth is evidently at the bottom of th. ."

"You mean that *he* has carried her off?" cried Lucien, his momentary weakness gone. He looked about him with eyes of fire and moved toward his canoe.

"Wait," said Burton, seizing his arm. "You must come to the house for some brandy."

They made him eat as well as drink before they let him go, and meanwhile Mrs. Burton heard all. "The poor girl was right and we wrong," said she, tears in her eyes. "No one but a professional outlaw would think of kidnapping any one even here in this wild region."

After a brief stay at the house, Lucien hurried back to his canoe, and dispatching Owl to see if Hawksworth's camp had been vacated, he rushed off to Rockledge to make inquiry. The village on Muskeg Lake consisted of a lumberman's supply store and some half dozen dwellings, the largest of which offered accommodations to passing travellers and was called "the hotel." The spot was at the foot of a gently sloping hill overlooking

a little bay, on which several other canoes were coming and going as L[illegible] arrived. On being hailed, one of these halted.

The little French-Canadian farmer, Sandy Chevalier, listened in great astonishment and concern to the strange story Lucien had to tell, and hastened to impart a valuable bit of information. He related that as he was returning in his canoe from a trip to Pine Lake the day before, at about ten in the morning he met a party consisting of an Indian, a squaw, and a young white woman. He would have passed them without remark if he had not recognized Miss Ransom. The Indian was evidently disinclined to stop, but could not avoid it and the two canoes drifted within a few feet of each other for several minutes. Miss Ransom informed Sandy that she was on her way to visit her aunt on Mink Lake. M. Mérimée was behind and was expected soon to overtake the party; something unforeseen must have occurred to detain him, or he would have done so long since. She seemed a little uneasy. Sandy endeavored to reassure her, but when he failed to meet M. Mérimée in all the way back to Muskeg Lake, the matter began to look strange to him, too, though of course the real truth was never suggested to his mind.

"You didn't see Hawksworth and that long-bearded fellow in another canoe?" asked Lucien eagerly, believing that he devined certain features of the kidnapping scheme.

"No."

"They dodged you no doubt and kept out of Miss Ransom's sight, too. Are you sure that the canoe was heading for Mink Lake?"

"I saw it turn into Snake River. That's the route, you know."

"Well, Sandy, my friend, if you hear of their being seen by any one else, let Mr. Burton have all the particulars. We must inquire in every direction."

"Bien."

A few minutes later in the store at Rockledge, Lucien told the strange story to the proprietor and several men who were found there, earnestly requesting all to circulate it among trappers and guides, and to give notice that any definite information of the whereabouts of Miss Ransom and the soi-disant sportsman Hawksworth would be liberally rewarded, if carried to Burton's mill on Birch Bay.

"There's a sport named Ransom at the hotel," one of the men remarked. "He come last night.

Jim Groover says he wants a man to take him down to Burton's mill this mornin'."

Lucien supposed the name to be a mere coincidence, and was returning to his canoe when he saw approaching from the direction of "the hotel" a tall, light-haired young man dressed in dainty and expensive outing clothes. As he drew near he was seen to have a handsome, clean-shaven face, an intelligent gray eye, and an air of determination.

"I beg pardon," he began, his accent at once suggesting an Englishman. "I am told that you are Mr. Mérimée and can give me information about Miss Ransom. I am her cousin, Harold Ransom. I followed her from England as soon as I knew that she had come here." He spoke frankly and courteously, but his manner was distant. "Is my cousin well?" he concluded.

"Perfectly well the last time I saw her, but—Mr. Ransom, I regret that you did not come sooner," said Lucien hurriedly. "A very strange—a dreadful thing has happened. Miss Ransom has disappeared."

"What can you mean?" Fierceness and suspicion showed in the gray eyes of the Englishman as they were now fixed upon and sought to pierce the depths of the dark eyes of the French-Canadian.

The latter hastened to explain. It appeared that she had been carried off by the agents of one Hawksworth, a man of supposed desperate character, whom Miss Ransom suspected of being one with the burglar once arrested in England by means of a portrait drawn by her from memory. Lucien also briefly told what had been his own relations with the young lady up to the morning of the proposed journey to Mink Lake, and described the means whereby this plan had been upset and the present perplexing situation had been brought about.

"Only let me find that man," said Harold fiercely, when he had heard it all.

"If I am not ahead of you," was the quiet but significant reply.

The eyes of the two men met, their arms moved by a common impulse, and their hands were clasped.

"I am with you," said Harold. "What is your plan?"

There was a slight clue, Lucien explained. As far as Pine Lake and Snake River the way was clear, but after that the trail must be found by inquiry of woodsmen and trappers. It would be slow and difficult work, but it must be done. They would start at once, calling at Birch Bay en route. So much

agreed on, they went to the tavern, Harold opened his luggage, and Lucien advised him as to what to take and what to leave.

An hour later they reached the landing in Birch Bay, where Owl was waiting with the report that Hawksworth had broken camp and departed. Harold was taken to the house and presented to Mrs Burton who sent post haste to the mill for her husband. In the grave consultation that followed Burton took a hopeful view. He thought the news brought by Sandy Chevalier encouraging. If the canoe was really heading for Mink Lake, then the whole affair might after all be only a practical joke on Hawksworth's part, involving the substitution of his own escort for Lucien's, whose privilege he envied. An asinine proceeding, of course, that could result only in the anger of the lady and the mortal enmity of her chosen escort; but, remember, the man was in love, and lovers were often fools.

"If you follow straight to Mink Lake," he concluded, "you may find her with her aunt and Hawksworth camped near them."

Mrs. Burton and Lucien both shook their heads doubtfully, agreeing that as Hawksworth had become master of the situation by means of a cunning

and dishonorable scheme, he might be expected to use the advantage gained in order to further his ends.

"Let us be gone," urged Harold.

"Such an attempt seems to me simply incredible," insisted Burton coolly. "I think you had better go to Mink Lake anyhow, unless, of course, you get further news."

All agreed that they must go as far as Pine Lake and Snake River in any event, and that Lucien, Harold and the Owl should start at once with two canoes. Burton urged them to return directly to Muskeg Lake if Alberta were not found with her aunt, as valuable information might meanwhile be received, and also because he wished to be one of the pursuing party then organized. But the two young men made no definite [illegible]e, desiring to be free to follow up a new clue a[illegible]y moment.

It was ten o'clock when the canoes started. Owl's was freighted with a small tent, a rifle, blankets and such other scanty baggage and supplies as were indispensable. Lucien paddled the other with Harold as a passenger, their only freight being two shot guns, two revolvers, shells, cartridges and fishing tackle. Mrs. Burton stood waving her handkerchief, tears in her eyes, as they paddled away.

Just before the start Harold had contrived to speak to her aside. She was his country-woman, a lady, her heart evidently tender and true; but he was less sure of the men.

"Mrs. Burton," he said, "I am all in the dark here. I want to ask you a question. Tell me your honest opinion of that young French-Canadian."

"I have known him a long time. Excepting my husband, there is no man I more fully trust. Miss Ransom knew him before I did, you know, and I am sure she feels as I do."

"I am glad to know this," said Harold, ill at ease. "Frankly, I at first distrusted him. But is he disinterested? Is he—in love with her?"

"He has not shown it by his manner, but—I think he is. However, I am sure that he has not told her."

"Then, he has not taken advantage of the opportunity her predicament gave him?"

"Never—in the way you mean. Indeed," she added, with hesitation, "it has sometimes seemed to me that your cousin would have preferred to see more of him."

A scarlet flush swept over Harold Ransom's boyish face. "Thank you; it is as well for me to know this," he said brokenly. Then he shook the lady's

hand in farewell and turned hurriedly away, but not before his eyes had seemed to say to hers: "If she love him, he shall be my friend, not my enemy."

Mrs. Burton was touched to the heart and looked after her young countryman's retreating form with a mother's yearning tenderness. She believed that nobleness of purpose as well as a hopeless love had been laid bare to her eyes, and she would have been confirmed in her impression could she have known that before the day was done the young Englishman's first distance of manner toward Lucien Mérimée had disappeared.

The canoes entered Pine Lake about one o'clock and moved straightway toward a lumber camp which was the only settlement of any kind on the shores of this eight mile stretch of water. Diligent inquiry there resulted in nothing to the purpose. It appeared that Sandy Chevalier alone had seen the canoe of the kidnappers as it crossed the open expanse on its way to Snake River. From this point on the pursuing party, should they proceed as Burton advised, might expect to encounter only an occasional trapper, for the region was a wild waste of uninhabited hills, every valley being a lake, and these communicating one with the other only by rivers, creeks or portages. If definite information

were not received from time to time, it would be impossible to track the fugitives through such a wilderness, all travel going by water except for the occasional portages, which were little more than blind trails through the forest.

From their present position the guide calculated that the distance in an air line to Mink Lake was about forty miles, but their course through winding lake and river would cover twice that distance. Unless they travelled at night, which was scarcely practicable even under the most favorable circumstances, they could not reach their destination under two days. The canoes and baggage must be carried over many portages, and the chances were that on some of the larger lakes head winds and rough water would further retard their progress. The thought of so much delay was maddening, particularly in view of the time and effort wasted should Alberta not be found with her aunt, but having now no further definite knowledge to go upon, it seemed as well to seek information in the direction of Mink Lake as elsewhere.

So after a short halt and a hasty lunch at the mouth of Snake River, the canoes pushed forward up that stream for about eight miles, nearly half of which distance had to be portaged on account of a

series of impassable rapids. This was necessarily slow work and it was late in the afternoon when they reached the open of another lake and night caught them on the succeeding river. Harold wished to push on, but the Owl objected, and Lucien agreed that the danger of going utterly astray would be too great. As soon therefore as they saw the open expanse of still another lake before them they landed for the night, the two young men cutting hemlock brush and putting up the tent, while the half-breed cooked their evening meal. The latter slept soundly on a bed of brush under his canoe, but Lucien and Harold, in spite of their fatigue, lay awake for the most part, being unable to shut from their minds the one all-absorbing anxiety.

Two hours before dawn Lucien was up, building a fire, and by the time the east began to brighten breakfast had been dispatched and the canoes were on the water. The weather was favorable and they travelled at an extraordinary speed, slaving at their paddles and almost running over the rough portages.

Under ordinary circumstances Harold, to whom such a country was entirely new, would have found delight in so unconventional a journey, but now the unending scene of lake, river, portage, hill and for-

est, the skurrying ducks and shrieking loons, the scolding red squirrels, the fleeing deer, the vast maple woods, the gardens of white birches, the dark crowding firs,—were shorn of their charm and were only the background of a painful nightmare.

It was late in the afternoon when the canoes entered Mink Lake and finally glided up to a landing beneath a small clearing which had been discovered only after a lengthy search. Harold looked about him upon the dreary scene in amazement and pain—this was the home his peerless Alberta had come so far to seek!

"Does Mr. Hunter live here?" asked Lucien of a tall, roughly-clothed white man who came down the slope to meet them.

"Ab Hunter? Yes."

"Did a young lady arrive here in a canoe with two Indians yesterday?"

"Not as I know of, and I'd know."

Lucien and Harold looked at each other in helpless grief, and for a few moments no word was spoken. "How is Mr. Hunter's wife?" asked the former at last.

"She's dead."

"Good heavens!"

"We buried her day 'fore yesterday, and Ab he's been drunk ever since."

Another silence, broken at length by the half-breed, who rose in his canoe, stepped guardedly ashore, fell grunting on the ground and stretched out his cramped legs. He had been kneeling in his canoe since daybreak with the rest and change of only an occasional portage. The condition of Lucien's limbs was no better.

"We'll have to stop," the latter said mournfully to Harold. "If we don't take time to rest and eat, we shall soon be unfit for travel."

XII.

In reply to further questions the trapper intimated that Mrs. Hunter had come to Mink Lake in a low state of health and apparently grew weaker continually. She grieved over her husband's failure as a farmer in the more civilized region of Muskeg Lake, and was unhappy in her new home, to which they had come as a last resort. Here they could at least live on fish and game in the summer and fall, and trap enough fur-bearing animals in winter to secure the actual necessaries of such an existence as would be theirs. It was the way the Indians lived, and might do for rough and hardy white men, but it was trying for Mrs. Hunter, who was the only woman on Mink Lake. Thus she had the more readily fallen a prey to typhoid fever, of which she had died at the expiration of two weeks.

The visitors were now led up the slope and invited to enter the larger of the two cabins, or shacks, which the clearing contained. The smaller had been the home of Hunter and his wife, and the larger was

the central camp and store-house of four trappers. Both were built of hemlock logs and the visitors saw that the latter had only a rough-hewed puncheon floor. The furniture consisted of a stove, a rough table, a few benches, and several sleeping bunks filled with hemlock brush. Only a few pelts hung on the walls and these were not valuable. The trapping season would not begin until winter. For the present only such animals were taken as came within easy reach of a gun, it being difficult to preserve the skins in the summer or early fall; and of late the chief employment of all hands had been net-fishing, the smaller prizes going into the pot and the larger being salted down for winter.

So much the visitors gathered from the trapper as he built a fire and made them some tea, serving it with cold food left over from the midday meal. On hearing the story of what had occurred, their host advised them to halt until night. At least two of his three partners would then return from long trips in different directions, and it might be that they would bring news. As it was already within an hour of sunset, this was promptly decided on without much discussion. The failure to find Alberta at the trapper camp on Mink Lake confirmed their worst fears, but the strain of their anxieties was in a measure re-

lieved by the grateful food and drink, followed by a soothing pipe, and in spite of the dark outlook before them they were led to take a somewhat more hopeful view.

Stepping out upon the open a few minutes later, Lucien and Harold observed a short, thick-set man coming unsteadily toward them from the smaller shack, and were told that this was Hunter. The trapper had gone to inform him that visitors had come on business with reference to his wife's niece and this caused him to start up from a drunken doze.

"She's comin', eh?" he asked, trying to keep his balance in the presence of the two young men. "She's welcome. Maria's gone, but she kin stay; she kin take Maria's shack and I kin bunk with the men. Mebbe she'll do mer cookin'. Maria was a grand cook." He lurched sidewise and leaned against a tree for support. "If she's the grand cook Maria was," he added, "she'll be mighty welcome in this camp."

"Little did the poor girl dream what was before her when she started on this mad journey," thought Harold, as he turned away in disgust and went down to the landing. Lucien promptly followed, leaving to the trapper the task of making the situation clear to the widower's alcohol-befuddled brain.

Harold had stepped into one of the canoes and was now making an effort to paddle it. "While we are waiting I had better learn how to do my share of the work," he said. "It is quite another thing from rowing."

"Balance yourself on your knees, lean back against the thwart, and dip the paddle over the left side," directed Lucien. "Or the right side, if it is handier. I prefer the left."

Harold did as he was told, but found that, unless he lifted the paddle from side to side every few moments, the canoe described a wide circle instead of gliding straight ahead. Paddling first on one side and then on the other would send it forward, but over a zigzag course, which was a waste of time and force; besides, in a contrary wind there was no time for such an exchange. The only satisfactory method was to paddle altogether on one side, gui" ıg the canoe's course by a twist of the blade in the process of the dip, a "trick" at first hard to catch. But Harold proved to be an apt pupil and it was soon evident that practice only was needed to give him dexterity and endurance in the work.

Shortly after nightfall the two expected trappers arrived. Both were pointedly questioned, but neith-

er had any news to communicate. More than two hours of daylight had thus been sacrificed in vain, intensifying the feeling of disappointment with the visiting party, who were now compelled to remain over night at the trappers' camp.

The next day was cloudy and blustering, a stiff southwest wind covering Mink and the neighboring lakes with a rolling white-crested swell. The two canoes did not proceed far before encountering heavy and dangerous work. Owl shook his head sagaciously and advised a run in shore until the wind went down, but neither Lucien who appreciated the danger nor Harold who was ignorant of it would agree to the delay, and they pushed on in the teeth of the wind. Once, as it shot through an angry breaker, Lucien's canoe shipped so much water that it was found necessary to run in on a lee shore and dump it out, but the halt was brief.

The wind continued high all day and their progress was very slow. Though no longer in danger, they were much retarded by head winds on the second day also, and in spite of themselves were forced to camp over night the second time before two-thirds of the return journey had been covered. Not until the fifth morning after their departure from

Burton's landing, in fact, did they re-enter Pine Lake where Alberta was last seen.

During the whole of the return journey from Mink Lake they had not sighted a single canoe, but now as they emerged from Snake River one was seen making straight toward them across Pine Lake. Its occupant proved to be a wrinkled little man of middle age as brown as an Indian, with keen black eyes and an alert air. His skin cap, rough threadbare clothes, and his whole aspect, suggested the trapper.

"I thought I knowed ye," he surprised Lucien's party by calling out as soon as within speaking distance. "Ye're from Muskeg, ain't ye,—huntin' the young lady?"

"Yes, who are you?"

"My name's Myrick. That mill man over thar on Muskeg gim-me this letter for—one or t'other of ye."

He produced a soiled letter, which, on being opened, was found to be from Burton and to read thus:

"I have concluded to send Myrick to meet you. It will save time. With Miss Ransom's inclosed letter in your hands it would be a waste of time to come back here, unless you feel the need of a larger

party and more supplies for the journey. Perhaps you can engage Myrick to go with you. Sandy Chevalier says he will go if you need him. As for me, to my great mortification, I am out of it, I fell through the scaffolding at the mill yesterday and broke my left leg. It has been set and will mend nicely if I keep quiet. As for supplies, if you have enough tea and salt to last some time, your guns and fishing-tackle ought to keep you from starving at least. Our worst fears are realized. You and Mr. Ransom will of course decide what to do, but I should be disposed to start at once for the region indicated by Miss Ransom, whom may God in his mercy protect."

The accompanying letter was written in pencil on thin splittings of the white inner bark of the birch, two sheets some five by eight inches in size, almost without a flaw. It was as follows:

"DEAR MR. BURTON: This may never reach you, but I write it in order to have it ready if there should be a chance to send it. It is noon of the third day since this strange journey began. The Indians are cooking dinner and are paying no attention to me as I scribble this. They have constantly pretended that we were bound for Mink Lake and that Mr. Mérimée has not overtaken us on account of

some accident. At first I believed them, but became suspicious when they refused to go back or stop and wait for him. Last night all doubts were set at rest. Hearing voices, I peeped out of my tent and saw the Indian talking with that long-bearded person who was so often seen in Hawksworth's canoe. Yesterday I noticed several times a canoe containing two men at a long distance behind us. I now feel sure that it carried Hawksworth and this man, who are following us all day and camping near us at night. I have been entrapped. Where I am to be taken, and wherefore, I can only conjecture. Jeremiah, the Indian, professes ignorance of the names of the lakes we pass and I am unable to tell you where we are. Since meeting Mr. Chevalier the first morning, the Indian sees to it that we pass near no one, though I have seen canoes in the distance only once or twice. Our course seems to depend much on the windings of the lakes, but from the position of the north star at night I think we must be going northwest. It is likely that we are not far from the Lake Hiawassee, for I have heard that name uttered several times. I also overheard Jeremiah and the long-bearded man speaking of a 'Lone Lake' and of a 'Retreat," which called to mind what their master told me of his kingdom in

the north. I am probably being taken there. What can have become of Mr. Mérimée and the Owl? I hope—

Here the letter ended abruptly, as if the writer had been interrupted and unable to complete it. Handing both letters to Harold, Lucien turned eagerly to the trapper.

"Where did you get this?"

"On that lake full of islands 'bout half way to the Hiawassee—Island Lake, I call it."

"I know it—the Lac du Labyrinthe. Did you see Miss Ransom?"

"Yes; and she give me a gold sovereign and she says, 'You take this here letter to Burton's Mill on Muskeg Lake,' she says, and I done it. I was on a still hunt in the thickest bush you ever seen when I run up on 'em and heard that Injin and his squaw a-talkin'. 'I've come across a piece o' the lake again,' I says to myself, 'and here's a camp,' I says. So up I sneaked easy and quiet and peeped through the bresh, and there they was—the Injins bilin tea and fryin' fish, and the white lady settin' on a stone writin' on that piece of birch bark. One o' them pesterin' little squirrels skipped away from me a-barkin' jest then, and she looked up and seen my face in the bushes. But the Injins didn't see nothin', they

was too hot after somethin' to eat.' And soon as ever she seen me she looked quick at the Injins and made a motion to me to stay where I was. Then she folded up that birch bark letter and wrote on the back of it, and got up and come walkin' toward me as slow and careless as you please, pickin' leaves and stoppin' to 'zamin 'em, makin' out like that was all she was up to.

"When she got right close to me, with her back to the Injins, she says to me in a whisper, 'Be very quiet,' she says. 'Better squat down so they can't see you,' she says. 'What's to pay?' I says. 'I'm a prisoner,' she says; 'they're carryin' me off,' she says. 'How dast they?' I says, wonderin' if she was crazy. 'I'll knock the lights out o' that Injin quick if you say so,' I says. 'I ain't a-scared o' one lone Injin,' I says. 'He ain't all; there's two white men not fur off,' she says. 'How fur is your canoe?' she says. 'Close on two mile,' I says. 'I'd like to run for it with you, but they'd ketch us and maybe kill you,' she says. 'I'll have to wait. You take this money and carry this letter to Muskeg Lake,' she says. 'Take it to Mr. Burton at the saw mill and he'll pay you more,' she says. 'You can go to Muskeg Lake, can't you?' she says. 'Like a shot,' I says. 'Well, then, go, travel night and day

and tell him where you seen me,' she says. 'If you meet a young white man with a Injin in a canoe, and he tells you his name is Lucien Mérimée, then you can give the letter to him,' she says. 'Be careful you don't let them two white men see you; they're round here some'rs,' she says.

''Bout that time I seen the old squaw comin', and I squatted and started crawlin' away. I heard her tell the lady in that French gibberish that the dinner was ready. I crawled on out of hearin' and then went runnin' for my canoe. I never seen nothin' o' them two white men. Well, I paddled hard, gentlemen, and got to Burton's mill last night, and now here I be on the back track."

"Surely we don't need to go to Muskeg Lake now?" were Harold's first words, huskily spoken.

"No, we go straight to the Lac du Labyrinthe and the Hiawassee,' replied Lucien. "Can we engage you to go with us, Mr. Myrick? We are willing to pay you well."

The trapper slowly shook his head. "You'll have a tartle to ketch them Injins," he said. "I'm gittin' old—aint up to sich hard paddlin' no more; and if your guide tuck me in *his* canoe you'd only have a bigger jag. I wouldn't mind goin' with you to Island Lake, but them Injins will run you a race to

the north end of Hudson Bay or the Mackenzie River, for that matter, before they'll let you ketch 'em."

"Can you take us there, Owl?" asked Harold, impatiently. "You can name your own price."

"I take you quick, me," said the Owl with a knowing smile. "Yes, m'sieu'."

"Owl is the guide and you the captain," Harold said to Lucien, as they talked over the route and their plans in camp that night. "I'll have to be the company. At any rate I can act under orders, and I promise you to take a hand when the fighting begins."

XIII.

"I FOUND a little blank book and a pencil in my bag to-day and decided to make note of passing events," reads Alberta's diary, date of September 10. "There is something wrong. Instead of finding Mr. Mérimée and the Owl and his squaw at the landing yesterday morning, this Indian—who says white men call him Jeremiah— and *his* squaw were waiting there. Owl could not be engaged, he said, and Mr. Mérimée awaited us at Rockledge.

"I disliked starting off with two strange Indians before daylight, but the Burtons did not seem in the least alarmed and I acquiesced. Mr .Burton said he would accompany us as far as Rockledge if I liked, but I knew that he had important business on hand and would not suffer it. We had not gone half a mile when a man whose face I could not see in the faint light, paddled up to us and said that urgent business would keep Mr. Mérimée at Rockledge several hours; he had, therefore, sent word for us to proceed slowly on our way, promising to overtake us before noon.

"This struck me as odd, and hardly such an arrangement as I should expect Mr. Mérimée to make. For a while I contemplated demanding that I be taken back to Birch Bay, but refrained for fear of disarranging Mr. Mérimée's plans. Another thing that troubled me was that the rate at which we travelled was not slow but very rapid. I knew enough about canoeing to see that. When the sun rose we were no longer on Muskeg Lake, and I did not recognize our whereabouts. We were in a large creek. Later we entered another lake and about ten o'clock passed Mr. Chevalier. After talking with him I felt better, for he seemed to think nothing was wrong and said we were heading in the right direction for Mink Lake.

"Noon came, we stopped for a hasty lunch and pushed on again, with still no sign of Mr. Mérimée. About mid-afternoon we spent an hour crossing a portage, a faint path through dense, beautiful woods, and I found the walking a great relief. Jeremiah carried the canoe and the squaw staggered along with the baggage. They did not want me to carry anything, but I insisted on carrying my bag and travelling rug.

"Jeremiah is ugly enough, with his huge misshapen nose, expressionless black eyes, and scarred brown face, but the squaw is even less attractive.

Her tangled black hair is as coarse as the mane of a horse and she has not one pleasing feature. But she is kind and so is he. They try very hard to make me comfortable. While she cooked the supper last night, he put up the little tent and then cut a great pile of spruce tips, over which I spread my rug and made a soft cushion-like bed. The tent space is about eight by ten feet and ample for two. The squaw told me that she would sleep outside under the canoe or in one corner of the tent, as I might decide. I preferred the former, and asked her if she would not like better to be with Jeremiah. She acquiesced in what she took to be my decision without remark.

"We camped on a little bay, two hundred yards or more back among the trees. I objected to this, telling them that our camp ought to be where Mr. Mérimée could see our light if he passed. Jeremiah's answer to this was that Mr. Mérimée could not travel at night without losing his way and would not attempt it. I asked if we should reach Mink Lake by the next night, and he shook his head doubtfully. I could get no satisfaction out of either of them. They often do not understand what I say, or pretend not to. They seem to understand almost no English at all and very little French.

"All questions yesterday were answered by the monotonous statement that we were travelling toward Mink Lake and that Mr. Mérimée would soon overtake us. After supper I retired into the tent and tied up the door as securely as I could. I was very tired and slept, but started up in fright many times before morning. I often heard a scratching noise in the underbrush around us, which I suppose was made by porcupines striking their quills against obstructions as they moved. Harry and I used to hear them years ago in our lonely camp at night. There were other sounds, too, made by a variety of little forest dwellers as they stole up guardedly to see who were these strange sleeping intruders and then, startled, pattered away over the dry leaves.

"We made an early start and have travelled hard all day by lake, river and portage, with still no sign of Mr. Mérimée. Twice I saw two men in a canoe far behind us, but they must have gone another way, as we have not been overtaken. I waved my handkerchief to them, but they took no notice of it. Once I saw another canoe across the lake to our right. The country is wild and deserted, but beautiful. How I longed for just such a trip during those years in England, and now all my pleasure is spoiled by anxiety. Something is certainly wrong.

We are now encamped the second night and should be near Mink Lake, but somehow I feel as if we were farther away from there than at the start. The most of this was written this afternoon in the canoe.

"Sept. 11. There has been foul play. Late last night I heard voices and looking out, saw Hawksworth's long-bearded man in conversation with Jeremiah over the fire. They were speaking of the *Hauteur des Terres,* and I gathered that we had either just passed or were about to pass the Height of Land, though I had seen little sign of anything suggestive of what I had supposed the great divide was like, except two or three blue hills in the distance yesterday afternoon. They also spoke of 'Monsieur' and of 'the lady,' and referred several times to a 'Lone Lake' (Lac Isolé) and 'The Retreat' suggesting what I had heard Hawksworth say of his 'kingdom' in the north. But as I was not near, and they spoke a French *patois* hard to follow, the result of my efforts to overhear definite information was scarcely encouraging.

"The moment I recognized the long-bearded man I comprehended that he and Hawksworth were in the canoe seen behind us yesterday, and that it is their plan to follow us and camp near enough at night to permit of frequent conferences. This can mean

only that I have been kidnapped. For we should have reached Mink Lake last night, and it is now late afternoon and we are still travelling. The only doubt is whether even this man would have the *audacity*. Yet how can there be a doubt? His record is that of a man who would dare anything. I entrapped him once, and now he has entrapped me. The tables are turned.

"But I have not been idle, and hope to outwit him after all. While the Indians were cooking lunch to-day I stripped off some birch bark and wrote a letter to Mr. Burton, telling him everything; no, not everything, for I forgot to mention about the 'Hauteur des Terres.' This does not matter, however, for the man I sent the letter by knew and would tell where he saw me. As I was writing the last words I saw a man's face peering at me out of the bushes. I contrived to speak to him, engaging him to deliver it to Mr. Burton. But that I knew our invisible escort was near and on the lookout I would have made a dash for liberty with this trapper, for his face inspired confidence.

"Sept. 12. Last night I told the squaw that I felt afraid and would like her to sleep in the tent. She accordingly arranged a pile of hemlock brush on the farther side from my bed and slept there. She

is not clean, but the nights are cool, and I felt better to have her there. I did not start up in fright so often. Yesterday afternoon I looked Jeremiah in the eye and demanded to know why we had not reached our destination. He answered, without the change of a line in his stolid face, that he had lost the way and was trying to find it again. We are lost, and yet we are pushing forward with never a moment's indecision as to which way to turn! My questions to-day are answered in the same way; we are still lost and still seek the way! I made up my mind to run off into the woods at the first favorable opportunity, but when we stopped at sundown my heart failed me. I waited till morning and again felt afraid. What could I do without a gun and without a canoe, or even with them, in this vast wilderness? Besides, I should no doubt be tracked and caught, and to resist would invite violence, which would be insupportable. The alarm would also bring our invisible companions from covert and I should have to face that man.

"Let that be delayed as long as possible, and meanwhile I shall contrive to leave behind indications of the route we are travelling. This is my plan for the time. So, while they were cooking breakfast this morning, I procured a suitable sheet

of birch bark and sketched our camp, the tent, the two Indians cooking, etc., against the forest background. When the squaw at length called to me, '*C'est prêt*', the picture was done, in rough outline at least, and as I sat down to eat I showed it to the Indians. They stared at it in wonder and seemed pleased. Intending to drop it in the portage path leading to the lake shore two hundred yards away, I wrote at the bottom: 'Drawn by Miss Alberta Ransom, who is being carried off against her will by two Indians, the agents of one Hawksworth, a white man. Please send to John Burton, Rockledge, Muskeg Lake."

"I had just finished eating when two men, each carrying a canoe over his head, appeared on the portage path. A glimpse of their faces told me that one was a half-breed and the other a very dark bronzed white man. Here was my chance. 'B'jou!' cried Jeremiah, and turned again to his food, evidently not wishing them to stop. 'B'jou!' the half-breed responded, and after a momentary pause and stare around our camp they walked on, their canoes sloping almost to the ground behind them and lifted high in front in order that they might see the way. I was on the point of calling out to them when I changed my mind. If I appealed to them openly,

they would be threatened with the vengeance of our invisible guard and be afraid to take me with them, no matter what price I might offer.

"I let them pass on, then rose quietly and went into the tent, where I put a few bits of birch bark against one side, struck a match and set them on fire. Going out, I waited until I saw the flames leaping up, then gave the alarm. The Indians started up with cries of concern and rushed to the rescue. Jeremiah threw water on the flames, and the squaw ran into the tent at the risk of her life to secure her blankets.

"Meanwhile, unobserved by them, I ran as fast as I could along the path to the lake. But it was too late. I had taken too much time in starting the fire. When I reached the lake I found that the two men had already embarked and were disappearing round a point of land. So then I turned and ran back, reaching camp before the excitement was quite over. The squaw had succeeded in saving my rug and bag as well as her own belongings, though at the cost of singed hair and a scorched face. A spring of water within a few feet had enabled Jeremiah to put out the fire after one whole side of the tent had been burned. It was only a small 'A' tent and is henceforth useless. They evi-

dently had not taken note of my flight, and Jeremiah now suggested to me that a spark from our camp fire must have started the flames. The tent cloth that had been saved was bundled up as usual without the poles which were cut fresh every night. As we started off I dropped the birch-bark drawing in the path unobserved.

"The greater part of the morning was spent in paddling up a river with several impassable rapids around which we portaged. We met no one, but about two o'clock, just as we were about to enter another lake, I heard a faint halloo far ahead. Jeremiah immediately turned shoreward and we landed. Pretending that we were portaging, he led us half a mile or more off into the dense bush and then threw down his load. After tea had been made and a lunch eaten, there were no evidences of the usual eagerness to start. The squaw, in fact, lay down and went to sleep. Jeremiah also lay down, but remained watchful. When I asked him what this meant, he said that as all hands were worn out with travel, it would be better to rest a few hours, and then push on during a part of the night. Later, thinking, he was asleep, I got up softly and stole away toward the river, hoping I might again hear that welcome halloo. But I had gone scarcely a hundred yards be-

fore he overtook me and requested me to return to camp. He said the forest was full of bears and he could not allow me to walk about alone. I felt afraid of the threatening look in his black eye, not of the unseen bears, and promptly returned with him.

"I have spent the afternoon writing this long entry in my diary, and in drawing another picture with my name, 'condition of servitude,' etc., written beneath it. What grand plantations of fir, maple and beech these lake forests are. The restless little squirrels, and now and then a bird, the former full of daring curiosity and venturing very near the big, strange, silent intruders upon their domain, have been a comfort to me during this dreadful afternoon. They at least have no evil designs upon me.

"Sept. 13. After we had our supper of bread, fried duck, and tea at sunset yesterday, Jeremiah shouldered his canoe, bade me follow him, and the squaw bringing up the rear with the heavier loads, we trudged out of the woods and took to the water again. By this time it was dark. No sooner had we left the river behind and glided out on an open lake than I saw a light on the shore to the left, indicating a settlement of some kind. If not an Indian or trapper's camp, it was a post of the Hudson

Bay Company, for I have been told that there are no lumber camps north of the Height of Land, where the waters no longer flow south and the logs cannot be floated to market. On seeing the light I was confirmed in my suspicion of Jeremiah's reasons for lying *perdu* in the bush all the afternoon.

"We travelled by lake and river far into the night, portaging several times over dim trails beneath dark, towering, spectral trees, and once around a great thundering *sault*, or rapid. It must have been as late as three o'clock when we halted for the night, for after we had pushed about a mile into the woods, selected a camping site and built a fire, we had not rested long before the light of the new day began to filter through the tops of the great trees and slowly dissipate the gloom around us. Weary to desperation, I had thrown myself down on my travelling rug by the fire, indifferent to everything in my despair; but as I watched the miracle of dawn, hope and determination were restored to me.

"While the squaw cooked breakfast, Jeremiah looked after my comfort. Against the side of a precipitous rock a tree had fallen, the upper end lodging on a projecting ledge some five feet from the ground and the trunk remaining fixed at a dis-

tance of about three feet from the face of the rock. The long canoe, turned bottom up, furnished a rain-proof roof with which to cover this open space and a rubber blanket served as a curtain or wall for the outer side. On the ground space within spruce tips were piled to a depth of half a foot. A blanket was spread over these, and as soon as I had eaten, I lay down, drew my rug over me, and fell asleep.

"When I awoke some hours later it was raining. Looking out, I saw the squaw huddled over a little fire under the remnant of the tent which had been spread over several upright sticks. She looked very cold. Her worshipful lord was not to be seen. I felt sorry then that the tent had been uselessly sacrificed. If it continued to rain my own retreat would doubtless suffer. After another nap I looked out again, and there stood Jeremiah skinning a deer in the rain. He cut off a hind quarter and walked away with it. Hearing him speak, I leaned far out to see what this meant (for the squaw still shivered over the fire), and there not more than fifty yards away among the trees stood the long-bearded man, who took the meat and disappeared.

"The Indian then came back, bringing a new tent cloth in a roll on his shoulders, which had no doubt been purchased by our unseen travelling com-

panions the night before at the Hudson Bay post, or whatever the settlement was, that we passed. I could sleep no more after this, but lay still while the squaw proceeded to fry a choice bit of the deer and Jeremiah to convert portions of the rest into portable strips. When alone they usually spoke in their native tongue, but I now heard Jeremiah say in the French *patois:* 'Raphael says Monsieur is not well.' The long-beard is Raphael, then, and 'Monsieur' is the criminal Hawksworth.

"The rain continued until late in the afternoon, within an hour of our preparations to abandon our camp. I spent the time in writing part of this and in drawing another picture with the usual inscription below it. My object in leaving pictures behind instead of letters is to disguise my purpose. The Indians can not read and will hardly notice the few words written at the bottom. Jeremiah volunteers to keep me supplied with sheets of birch-bark, and probably regards my picture-making as a harmless and useful pastime."

XIV.

"SEPT. 14. We re-embarked yesterday just before dark. The Indians were busily engaged and did not see me put the drawing under a stone on a floating log. How I prayed that it would be picked up and sent to my friends! But even if it reaches them it will not tell them where I am. The person who picks it up can only tell them where I *was*. My case seems quite hopeless. O Harold, O Harry, O Lucien!—where are you all, that I should be allowed to come to this? My only hope is in the clue sent Mr. Burton by the trapper. That we are bound for Hawksworth's 'kingdom in the north'—wherever that may be—there can be no doubt.

"We had paddled about a quarter of a mile when a canoe containing two men shot round a point of land and passed near us. It was not yet so dark but that I saw that one of them was a white man. I called to him instantly, but he made no reply. Turning, I saw Jeremiah touching his forehead with his finger and shaking his head. At the same time he called out something rapid in the

patois, but I caught no more than the word '*folle.*' I now saw that I must speak French. 'He lies,' I said. 'I am as sane as he is,' and I repeated my frantic appeal for help. This time I was evidently understood, for the man seemed moved and disposed to ask questions. But Jeremiah, jerking his head toward the bay behind us, said:

"'Demandez au canot en 'rière de nous. Monsieur is there and will tell you it is with Madame as I declare.'"

"Turning, I saw far behind a canoe with two persons faintly outlined in the haze of twilight. 'Bien,' was the answer; 'if he say so, then it is true enough.' So the canoe passed on, leaving me in a state of utter collapse. Being followed and watched by Hawksworth and his man Raphael, it is useless to think longer of escaping en route. I can only go on to the end and await the coming of my friends—forlorn hope! Even if I have the opportunity to tell my story, who will believe me when contradicted by four others? I am Mme. Hawksworth, of unsound mind; I do not ride in the canoe behind with Monsieur because it is a peculiar feature of my malady that I am more difficult to manage in his presence. This or some similar story will be put forward, of course.

"Sept. 25. I have not written in my note book for more than a week and am not quite sure of the date. I have not had the heart. Despair has overwhelmed me. And yet, strange to say, I have eaten my food with an appetite and found refuge in sound sleep. So much for bodily fatigue and life in the open air. I have slept, eaten, sat in a cramped canoe by the hour, walked, carried my load over the portages, and in all things have done as I was bidden like a child that fears the penalty of rebellion. I have moved as one in a dreary, unending dream. Day after day we have travelled by lake, river, and forest. We have crossed several apparently interminable portages and travelled upon rivers, creeks and lakes without number. It seemed to me yesterday that we should have gone far enough to reach the end of the world, and we were indeed near the end of our long journey.

"Last night after dark we reached our destination; we arrived at last at 'The Retreat,' at my kidnapper's kingdom in the wilds. The halt appeared to be at an island in a lake. I saw some distance up the slope a light and the dark outlines of a house. A woman stood by as I was assisted stiffly from the canoe. 'Will Madame walk up?' she asked in French, and I followed her in silence up the path.

"She bade me enter the house and I did so, seeing nothing of what was there until I found myself in a bedchamber, at the door of which the woman waited for my orders. Both my brain and body were worn with fatigue, and in that moment rest was my whole thought. The woman meekly asked if I would have supper. I sent her away, barred out all intrusion, threw myself upon the bed, and scarcely moved a finger for sixteen hours.

"The whole time was not spent in sleep. The later hours slipped by in periods of mental torpor and others of dreary regret that I could not have died while I slept. Not until one o'clock, after the woman had knocked repeatedly on the door and begged me to let her come in with refreshments, did I rise, open the door, and consent to eat. What slaves of the physical senses we are! After bathing my face and drinking a strong cup of tea I felt so much better that I no longer wanted to die, but rather to fight.

"'Who are you?' I asked coldly of the woman, a half-breed, young and rather handsome. She answered in French that she was Colinette, the wife of Raphael and niece of the squaw who had attended me on the journey. Raphael was a French-Canadian, she said, a man of great learning who had

once lived in the city of Quebec. She said it was her baby I heard crying this morning. Then this was M. Raphael's house? No, it belonged to Monsieur, who loved the northern wilds and had it built for his convenience, importing many unheard-of luxuries; for Monsieur was a man of wealth.

"'And who, pray, is Monsieur?' Surely Madame had heard of M. Hawksworth, the English gentleman! I asked where this 'gentleman' might be now and was told that he was at 'the shack,' having arrived last night shortly after I did. She explained that the shack was a small log cabin a short distance from us down the island shore. 'If this is his house, why is he not in it?' I asked, wondering. 'This is reserved for you now,' she answered. 'But I am to stay here with you, and Raphael will sleep here at night, so that you will not be lonely or afraid.' She added that Monsieur had bade her say that he would not trouble me until I was willing to see him. 'Monsieur is so good,' she added reverently.

"This was too much,—a criminal in the rôle of benefactor and courteous gentleman! I laughed derisively and Colinette looked uncomfortable. 'Can I do anything further for Madame?' she asked, after a moment. Evidently she has some education,

her French being comparatively pure. '*Mademoiselle* would prefer to be alone,' I said, not very kindly, and she promptly retired.

"Sept. 26. I have spent two days at 'The Retreat' without even a glimpse of Hawksworth, but I have spoken once with Raphael and seen much of Colinette, who is kindness itself.

"The house is large, and remarkably comfortable in view of its great distance from the sources of supply in the south. The walls are of hemlock logs, made air-tight by filling the interstices in with mortar. The roof is covered with rived shingles. The floors are of the rough 'puncheon' order, but for the most part are covered with the soft cured skins of various animals. The windows are small, but provided with panes of glass. There is a long veranda across the front. Of the four rooms of moderate size on the first floor, two are occupied by Raphael and Colinette, who are, I suppose, good Catholics, judging from the cheap pictures of the Virgin and saints on the walls which I have noticed in passing their open doors. The other two lower rooms are kitchen and dining-room, the latter, where I am now given my meals by Colinette, being quite an attractive place.

"The upper floor contains a large sitting-room

(two-thirds of the whole space), a bedroom, and a long narrow store room which has no window. The bedroom has two windows, a clean, white bed, an easy chair, and a roughly-made dressing table covered with a red cloth above which hangs a small but good mirror. The sitting-room has three windows. The rafters and under side of the roof are visible, but this is not a drawback, since it makes the room more airy and is in keeping with the general roughness. There are numerous cured skins on the floor, a lounge, a table for writing, several camp chairs, an easy chair and a large stove. A book - -e, evidently made on the island, contains a small but interesting collection of standard English novels, books of poetry, histories, etc., and a large supply of modern paper-back literature. On the walls are several colored lithographs of hunting scenes, but the space is mostly taken up by moose and caribou horns and all manner of trophies of the chase. On the wall between this hunter's hall and the two smaller rooms hang several snowshoes, an old rifle and two swords crossing each other.

"My first survey recalled Hawksworth's remark that I should be surprised to know what he had 'packed' up here in his time. It must have been

difficult indeed to bring so much so far merely by means of Indian canoes. The whole upper floor is reserved for me. No one ascends the stair but Colinette and she only when her presence is required. I had not expected so much consideration.

"The immediate vicinity is similar to the usual lake shore of which I have seen so much of late. The island, which I am told is about a mile long and much less wide, is densely wooded. The land slopes up to a rocky hill some distance behind the house and descends almost perpendicularly to the water. Under this cliff, Colinette says, the water is very deep, and there Raphael catches many of the fine fish that we eat. Lone Lake, or as the Indians call it, the Kaweagotami, is not of great size. The island lies near its center, and the longest distance to the mainland does not exceed eight miles.

"I walked out to explore our immediate surroundings this morning and came upon Raphael suddenly as he was preparing for a fishing trip. He started nervously as he saw me and actually seemed to tremble. He has a good face, and but for that long disfiguring beard, those unsteady eyes, and his curious, shrinking manner, he would really be handsome.

"'I hear you are a learned man and have lived

in civilization,' I said to him without preliminary, 'and yet you have assisted in kidnapping a defenseless woman.'

"'I could not prevent it,' he answered hurriedly, with an uneasy look over his shoulder toward the trees which screened the shack from view. 'He said you were his—you belonged to him—and at first I supposed this was literally true. Afterward I understood that he meant only that you *ought* to belong to him. I was sorry for you, but it was not in my power to interfere. He told Colinette the same, and she thinks you are his wife, though estranged from him. I have not undeceived her.' Then he stepped hurriedly into his canoe and paddled off round the island. All the while he was speaking he seemed to tremble, and there was a peculiar expression in his eye. I wonder if he is of perfectly sound mind. He must in any case have suffered some terrible shock that made of him practically a nervous wreck.

"Jeremiah and the old squaw have disappeared. Colinette says there are several summer encampments of Indians on the lake and to one of these they have gone. They camp here and fish until cold weather, then go into winter quarters at points distant some days' journey. I have seen their canoes

in the distance several times, but none of them has as yet visited the island. I was glad to hear that they often do. If they are not superior to the power of money, I may yet dispatch a letter.

"I like Colinette. She leaves me to myself, but is always within call and anticipates every want. She is devoted to her baby. To-day she sat outside in the sun the whole afternoon, rocking a little home-made cradle with her foot, knitting, and singing in a soft contralto voice a queer little lullaby, beginning:

"'C'est la poulette grise,
Qui pond dans l'église;
Elle va pondre un petit coco,
Pour le p'tit qui va faire dodo.'

"She must have sung the same over and over for two mortal hours. I wearied of hearing so many times of the gray pullet that 'lays in the church,' of the black pullet that 'lays in the cupboard,' of the white pullet that 'lays in the boughs,' and even of the impossible green pullet that deposits her eggs in secret places, as well as of that most wonderful

"'———poulette brune
Qui pond dans la lune!'

"And so I finally interfered. Going out, I said that I liked her voice, but would she not sing some-

thing else? She took the suggestion in good part, her baby being asleep, and sang 'Isabeau s'y Promêne,' a pathetic little ditty about a sailor boy who was drowned while gallantly diving for Isabeau's ring. Then she began the touching and dramatic 'Malbrough s'en Va-t-en Guerre.' When she came to the—

"'Monsieur Malbrough est mort,
Est mort et enterré,'

of the ninth verse, something made me rush into the house, lock my door, fling myself down and weep, weep! Was Mme. Malbrough half so desolate as I? Where were Harry, Harold, Lucien—all the good men and true—that I should be left to such a fate? Like M. Malbrough, they might as well be 'dead and buried,' every one.

"These were my first tears since this strange experience began, and I think they were a relief. Growing calmer, I heard Colinette singing the old familiar 'Claire Fontaine,' which brought fresh thoughts of Mr. Mérimée. Twice in my life has he come to my rescue, and he will not fail me now."

XV.

ALBERTA'S diary, date of September 27, continues: "I saw his majesty 'Monsieur' this morning. 'It is time for this farce to cease,' I said to Colinette at breakfast. 'I wish to see Mr. Hawksworth.' Accordingly, as I went out for a little stroll an hour later, he appeared among the trees in the direction of the shack and came toward me. He was clean-shaven and neatly dressed, a marked contrast with the unkempt Raphael, and his keen, cold gray eyes seemed softened by an expression of half-pitying tenderness that surprised me and gave me hope.

"How often have I gone over in mind what I should say to him! How many whips of flaming words with which to scourge him had I prepared! And yet, now that he stood before me where I sat on a rock, with that look in his eyes, waiting with respectful deference for me to begin. I spoke to him meekly enough. Whatever he might intend, as long as he had begun by treating me with so much

consideration, and it was important that this should continue to the last possible moment, I felt that it would be unwise to anger him needlessly.

"'I wish to know your plans,' I said with inevitable haughtiness, but quietly. 'Nothing can be so bad as suspense. But before you answer I want to tell you that there is at least one desperate remedy for my situation within my reach, and you need not hope that my courage will fail me when the time comes to take advantage of it."

"The look of horror on his face, if not genuine, was well assumed. 'You are very wrong,' he said earnestly, his voice pitched low. 'I have brought you here to make you a queen, not a slave. My object is to win your love by fair means.'

"'Such as kidnapping?'

"'That was only a desperate means to an end. I hated to resort to it, but you held me at arm's-length and it was the only way to get near you. I love you to distraction, but it is my honest purpose and determination to *win* your love in return."

"'And you think that is possible?'

"'I do,' he said, smiling. 'You remember that story of Charles Reade's about a man and woman cast alone on an uninhabited island, the man loving the woman, and the woman hating the man; she

is dependent on him and he studies to please her; little by little, as the months pass, her hate becomes friendship, and her friendship love. Time, patience, opportunity—these always conquer."

"'I know that story,' I said, 'and it strikes me that the comparison is not well taken. *Their* situation was the result of shipwreck, not of force on the man's part. Besides, though personally unattractive, he was an honorable man, not—' Here I stopped, afraid to go on.

"'A retired burglar,' he completed, laughing good-humoredly. 'I knew that would stick in your mind and keep us apart, and that is precisely why I had to resort to this unusual method of securing a fair chance at you. No, the two cases are not quite parallel, but I spoke of Reade's story as a suggestion of the gradual, subtle change likely to take place in your mental attitude toward me during, say, a year of such association as will be ours here, where your comfort, pleasure and happiness will meanwhile be my constant thought and aim.'

"'A year!' I gasped. 'I shall have been dead of a broken heart long before that, unless my friends come and take me away.'

"'No you will not. You will become reconciled like the Sabine women of old,' he assured me with

a low, merry laugh, and I knew then that I hated him with an incurable hatred. I turned haughtily away from him, but dared not speak out or hurry away. 'My desire for your happiness,' he continued, 'you will find to be so constant, genuine and tender that you will gradually like me better in spite of yourself.'

"'You are not at all sanguine,' I permitted myself to remark sarcastically.

"'It is natural for me to be sanguine,' he said, 'because I always get what I want—in time. I am a masterful man, and the men of that breed know no such thing as failure in anything they seriously undertake.'

"My impression of "masterful" men,' I told him hotly, 'is of those who are strong, not through genuine force of character, but through wilfulness and conceit, and sooner or later they come to grief.'

"'I'll take my chances,' he said, laughing, and added, with the air of a gallant uttering compliments: 'Though I am by nature masterful, I am willing to be ruled by one woman.'

"I turned my face away in disgust, and after a moment he spoke as follows: 'You will be wrong to trust in the coming of your friends, for they will never find you. This lake is practically inaccessible.

Nothing but a Hudson Bay company's post or two and scattering Indian encampments can be found within a radius of hundreds of miles. The nearest post is a journey of a week, and the trail is travelled only by Indians, and the Indians are my devoted friends—for what they get out of me, I might add. You might be here two years and never see a white face except my own and Raphael's. Besides, in a few weeks the whole region will be one vast field of trackless ice and snow until the late spring thaw. And, you see, your friends have no clue. Those clever, tell-tale little drawings on birch-bark dropped on your way were all picked up and are now among my most cherished possessions.'

"I stared at him helplessly, my heart sinking; even the recollection of the letter sent Mr. Burton by the trapper brought scarcely a ray of hope. 'No it will not pay to trust in your friends,' he concluded.

"'Then I trust in God.'

"'That will not pay either. Like the god of the priests of Baal, you will find that he is talking or pursuing, or taking a journey, or that he is asleep, and will not help you.' I turned my face away in horror, and he continued: 'It is a waste of energy to trust in a myth. Those who do it always find

that their enemies triumph in the end and they are left in the lurch.'

"'It may seem so often to the impatient, but the wicked do not triumph in the long run, nor do the innocent suffer forever,' I answered, trying to show confidence, but in reality dreadfully depressed by what he said. He laughed and was about to go on, but I told him positively that I wished to hear no more.

"'Well, I'll leave you to think it all over,' he said, and turned to go. Raphael was waiting with the canoe; they were to go off fishing. 'There is one thing I want you to understand,' he came back to say, 'I am sincere in saying that I seek your love, and I give you my word of honor that if I have failed to win it within a year's time, I shall send you back to your friends. Meanwhile you will be as safe here as in the house of Mrs. Burton. On my word of honor.'

"'Is there honor, then, among—' I was about to say 'thieves,' but ended with 'kidnappers and burglars.' I was unable to check myself, although surprised and in a way touched.

"'That is hardly gracious, in view of—everything,' he answered with a slight frown, 'but I must make allowances for your natural indignation at my

high-handed methods.' Turning to go, he added: 'The average burglar is a better man at heart than the average respectable millionaire. Burglars only take from the rich what the rich have ground out of the poor.'

"I made no reply to this sophistical, anarchistic sentiment, and with a bow and a smile he went on down to the canoe. I wish I had asked him if the average burglar gives back to the poor what the rich grind out of them!

"Oct. 1 I have written nothing for several days. During much of the time I have tried to get away from my anxieties in the pages of absorbing tales. I have had no more talks with Hawksworth or Raphael, but many with Colinette, who interests me. She says her father was a French-Canadian in the employ of the Hudson Bay Company. It seems that he had the grace, *malgré* her illegitimacy to send her to a convent school far to the south, where she received a fair education. Every day she has gone out with me in a canoe, but until yesterday, we never went far from the island shore. Her excuse has been the danger of sudden squalls, but the real reason no doubt was that she has been forbidden to let me cross to the mainland.

"Even in the course of our short trips we met

several Indian canoes, huge affairs of birch bark with sometimes a whole family on board, the squaw in the bow and the 'buck' in the stern, both paddling. Even the children hang over the gunwales wielding little paddles. The solemn-visaged papoose alone is inactive, swathed in cloth wrappings and strapped in an upright frame or hod, like a little live mummy. On the last day of our long journey I saw a squaw lacing up her youngest in this contrivance, afterwards standing it aside out of harm's way, and finally slinging it on her back when she was ready to tramp over the portage. The poor little creatures never seem to cry and appear to know already that they are part of a world where self-repression is the great lesson of life.

"The canoes of these half-clothed, mild-looking Indians are coming and going on the lake almost at every hour. They have nets set at some points of the island shore as well as elsewhere. Their wild, free life has its charm, no doubt, and they probably could not be induced to give it up for all the money in the world. They interest me greatly and I have several times expressed a desire to visit one of their camps. Colinette at first objected, but yesterday she said that we might do so, having no doubt asked and obtained permission. We did not

go alone, however. Raphael and Jeremiah—who visits the island nearly every day—followed us in a canoe and kept in view of us the whole time. I have forgotten to state that twice during the journey up here I offered Jeremiah a large bribe to desert his master and carry me back to my friends. But nothing could induce him to be untrue to Hawksworth, for whom he seems to cherish a superstitious reverence. It will doubtless be as useless to attemp' it with the other Indians, but I shall nevertheless allow no opportunity to go unimproved.

"On our way we saw several caribou start up and plunge into the island bush. Colinette says that the island woods are as full of animals of all kinds as the forests of the mainland, and that they are sometimes seen swimming back and forth. The Indians always give chase and find the swimming beast an easy prey. I was myself a witness of a chase of this kind, as we were returning yesterday. A moose was seen swimming to the mainland and instantly the Indians raised a shout and put out after it in their canoes. The poor thing could not swim as fast as they could paddle, and they overtook it before it landed. They paddled up near enough to throw a lasso over its horns, and as soon as it reached shal water they began striking it stun-

ning blows with clubs. This required great care, for one blow from its horns would have shattered a frail bark canoe. It staggered ashore at last and while held by men swinging on the ropes on both sides, was beaten into insensibility with clubs. Thus the Indians triumphed without wasting a single bullet. I looked another way when they rushed upon it with their knives to skin and cut it up. The whole thing seemed cruel and unfair.

"Before this we had landed at a camp on the west shore. I noticed one skin tent of neatly-dressed hides and a couple of birch-bark wigwams, but nearly all the tents in these temporary and movable summer camps are made of the ordinary white tent-cloth which is secured from the trading posts of the Company in exchange for furs. Colinette says that in the permanent winter camps the skin tents are banked around with snow and are as warm as any house. The flaps of all the tents were tied back and I could see the usual carpet of hemlock brush, bundles of rabbit skin blankets, and now and then an unsightly old squaw. The younger women and girls were moving about the fires, cooking and fetching water. They were modest in their manner. Such men as were in the camp lolled indolently about the tent doors, and some dozen boys were playing about the

vicinity, shouting, wrestling, or teasing the dogs, of which there were many and evidently half fed. A party returning with fish from the nets while we were there, threw the less desirable to the dogs, which fought over them and devoured them raw.

"I was surprised to find cats also in the camp. In every case these were tied with strings about the neck to tent stake or tree. Fish hung drying over some of the slow fires, and a few half-dressed furs were stretched and exposed to the air on trees. Some of their rabbit-skin blankets were also hung out in the sun. Colinette says that the skins of which these are made are taken in winter when the fur (of the arctic hare) is quite white. There is one of these Indian blankets in my bedroom here at 'The Retreat,' but I have not as yet made use of it. I am told that nothing in the world is so warm.

"My visit was taken in good part and I was free to look about me as much as I liked. The men held aloof, but the women seemed mildly pleased and greeted me with welcoming smiles, though it struck me that there was a furtive watchfulness in their manner. No doubt the fiction that I am Hawksworth's wife and am not of quite sound mind has been circulated among them. I tried to engage them in conversation, but found none who knew a

word of either English or French and was forced to leave the talking to Colinette, who found much to say in the native dialect. This, by the way, is rather pleasing to the ear. The younger women are by no means ill-looking. They have clear, ruddy-brown complexions. They and all their tribe are lighter in color than the Indians of lower latitudes.

"Before our departure we were invited to partake of venison that had been roasted before the open fires. When we had returned to our canoe I noticed that a boy about eleven or twelve years old had followed us down the slope and was staring at me curiously. His sole garment was a rabbit-skin jacket which doubtless usually hung open at the front, but was now carefully held together with one hand, leaving his chest and legs still exposed. He was quite handsome, for an Indian boy, and the expression of his face pleased me. Indeed my heart yearned to him as one young and innocent as well as kindly.

"'What is your name, my little man?' I involuntarily asked, after smiling at him.

"To my surprise he answered in French that it was 'Little Cloud.' Colinette then explained that he was a son of her uncle, a chief, and that she had seen much of him and taught him a little French.

His relation to her, I suppose, partly accounted for his boldness in the present instance. Acting upon an impulse of the moment, I called him to n ɛ, took a ring from my finger and put it on one of his own. 'Little Cloud is now the friend of the white lady,' I said to him, 'and he must come to the island to see her often.'

"He did not answer one word, but his eyes shone, and he looked as if he worshipped the ground I stood on. My action was entirely impulsive and disinterested. It was not until later that it occurred to me that, though I might fail to bribe any or all of the Indian men and women, I might use the friendship of this boy to my advantage."

XVI.

"Oct. 5. Little Cloud took me at my word and came to the island in Jeremiah's canoe the afternoon after my visit to the Indian camp. Colinette says his father, the chief, first sent and asked Hawksworth's permission and that it was readily granted. I thought he might object, but he probably fears no danger from such a source, and is glad to consent to anything that will gratify me. Colinette tells me that he intends to have the Indians come to the island in force some day soon, distribute presents among them, and have them entertain me with a dance.

"The boy has been here twice since. At my suggestion Colinette had a pair of trousers ready for him the second time and promptly slipped them on him, and now he does not need to tire himself out holding his buttonless coat together in front. She made the trousers out of an old bag and there is a stripe down one leg and none down the other! A quaint little picture he makes, clothed in such a gar-

ment and a rabbit-skin jacket. He does not know how funny it is, and is almost as proud of his trousers as of his ring. He is a serious little man. He accepts what I give him and says little, but looks volumes. Those eloquent eyes will make some Indian maid's heart leap one of these days. We are the best of friends. I have shown him all the wonders of 'The Retreat,' drawn pictures for him, let him paddle me in the canoe, and made Colinette give him plenty of good things to eat. He evidently regards me as a sort of fairy, who is to be loved and almost worshipped.

"It is said that George Washington was disgusted when he saw a French marquise fondling the baby of one of his negro slaves. My instinctive race prejudice is probably as pronounced as that of the father of the American States, but I have kissed my little Indian friend nevertheless; not because I build hope on him, but my heart really warms toward him in my le- -n. I suspect that to Little Cloud a kiss is something new and strange, and not quite to his taste, but he submitted with a good grace, being ready to admire anything whatsoever that I may do.

"Oct. 6. His majesty the masterful man has not entered 'The Retreat' since I came. He de-

clares that he will not until I invite him as a friend, and I 'keep on' not inviting him. The man is a curious parodox. In spite of what he has done, I sometimes think he is sincerely anxious to gain my respect and affection. Colinette evidently adores him. Of course she loves Raphael first, but Hawksworth is a revered benefactor, a grand seigneur and a romantic figure in her imagination. She continually praises him to me, but with caution. To-day she set a dish before me that resembled beef. 'That is moose steak,' she said. 'Monsieur risked his life to get it for Madame. Raphael says that they had a terrible fight. And yet Madame never even smiles for Monsieur, who is so good.'

"I bade her say no more about 'Monsieur.' Even Satan was doubtless 'good' to his devoted followers. The comparison is not inapt. In his own small way Hawksworth does resemble the Satan of Milton, who was quite sublime in his wickedness. Every day when I step out of the house for a little fresh air he comes and talks with me, and is always courteous. As he has talked of a thousand things, I have seen clearly that his moral sense is utterly perverted. To him, what is right is what he wants, what is wrong is what stands in his way. That is the whole of it. And yet, in spite of myself, I feel

a certain admiration for his audacity, his fearlessness. Even his serene lack of anything like remorse excites curiosity and wonder. He suffers none whatever, apparently, and goodness and wickedness are to him mere meaningless terms.

"'As I believe in no God, no future life of rewards and punishments, why should I trouble myself about what is pronounced good or bad by the countless, conflicting and puerile myth-religions of the world?' he asks. 'Why should I be any more concerned because Christians say it is a sin to dance than I am because the Kamtchatdales say it is a sin to tread in the tracks of a bear?'

"I suppose there is a certain logic in this, and yet he is not altogether consistent with his theory, for he seems to have a regard for decency, he is not a brute, his heart is not shut to kindness and pity. I am constantly forced to acknowledge that his treatment of me is remarkable for its consideration. Had he only chosen the good instead of the evil, with his talents, his naturally refined instincts, his personality—which is persuasive in spite of everything—it seems to me he ought to have made one of the best and most attractive of men. He only laughed when I suggested that the really regenerate man, as I understood it, was engaged in cultivating

the love and practice of what is true and good, without any thought of rewards and punishments. This is doubtless the key-note of his moral make-up; he is incapable, wilfully incapable, of comprehending the unselfish, and his present considerate treatment of me is simply a part of a selfish scheme to win my regard for the sake of what he believes will give him happiness.

"Oct. 7. As the days pass my heart sinks, sinks. There are times when I lose all hope. I have now been here two weeks, and with every passing day the chances of rescue are diminished by the approach of winter and the obstacles it places in the way of travel. The novelty of my surroundings has now worn away and the monotony of my life adds to my depression. Amusing myself with Little Cloud when he comes, talking with Colinette, listening to her songs, watching the exhibitions of her pretty baby, going out in the canoe, sketching, reading, writing—all this is too little for one of my impatient, restless nature. Sometimes in my secret soul I actually welcome the degradation of a talk with Hawksworth. We have many battles of words, and in spite of everything, I find myself entertained.

"I have often wondered how a man of education and such evident talents could have been induced to

adopt a criminal profession. One would think he might have succeeded in many lines. In the course of his talk to-day he intimated that family troubles led to the beginning of it. He said his parents were respectable, conservative Londoners of the middle class. They intended him for the bar and he received a liberal education. Then came the troubles (what they were he did not say), his mother died, a temptation came in his way, he yielded, felt little or no regret, and so went on until he became one of the most successful burglars of his time with no belief in or fear of anything but a possible run of ill luck. A prosperous career of ten years, barring one or two mishaps, steadily increased his fearlessness and piled up his ill-gotten gains. Being prudent and calculating, he was able to call himself a wealthy man when he finally escaped out of England, many profitable American investments having been made. He had seen the inside of a prison once before, but it seems that the picture I drew of him that night at Redwood was the means of really checkmating him for the first time. It brought about his capture, and he was tried and sentenced to ten years, but before the first year ended he effected his escape and fled the country.

"Throughout his narrative I was struck with the

curious moral obliquity of the man's mind. He seemed to regard his vicious exploits as heroic achievements. As he viewed it, he was in every respect the hero of the play, while the representatives of the law hounding on his track were implacable wretches totally unfit to live and worthy of the hatred and contempt of all reasonable men. He had over scorned the police and detectives, but it seems that ten months of hard labor made an impression even upon this bold spirit, and he concluded to show himself no more in England, where, 'thanks to a plucky little girl,' his face was public property. He says he has since lived on this side of the Atlantic, increasing his 'pile' through speculations and getting as much 'fun' out of life as possible. From boyhood he was devoted to out-door life, he prefers travel away from the beaten track, and this, together with his fondness for the gun and rod, accounts for the existence of this truly sequestered 'Retreat.'

"Oct. 9. The monarch of the Kaweagotami, otherwise Monsieur, otherwise Hawksworth, entertained the Indians here yesterday, and had them dance for my special gratification—so I was informed. Though not gratified, I was not a little interested. Fully a hundred men and women responded to his invitation, and to judge by the ex-

pression of their faces when they departed bearing gifts, the picnic was a great success. Jeremiah and two Indian women came the day before to assist Colinette in the preparations, and thus it was possible to give each one of to-day's visitors as much barbecued meat, bread and tea as he or she could comfortably dispose of. Each man was also given enough whiskey to make him merry, though actual merriment can scarcely be predicated of these people. The gifts to the men were bullets and powder, and to the women large needles, spools of coarse thread, and a few yards each of colored cloth.

"The dance was a disappointment. The men who took part in it exhibited little agility and no grace. At times their capers and grimaces were positively idiotic, and there was nothing to please any one in their discordant howls. I liked the chanting of a rhythmical hunting song much better.

"Oct. 10. I heard from Hawksworth the other day that Raphael was once a priest. After breaking away from his brotherhood he abandoned civilized centers and gladly engaged to take charge of 'The Retreat.' 'The poor fellow was tempted of the devil,' laughed Hawksworth. While yet he wore his cassock, it seems, he was seized with an overpowering love for a woman who returned his love. Both

resisted the temptation; the woman went into a convent and the priest departed for a distant scene of labor. But the latter's trial was more than he could bear. One day he tore off his gown, put on citizens clothes, fled into the outside world and plunged into dissipation. The first time Hawksworth saw him he was drunk. Once domiciled at 'The Retreat,' he had never wished to leave, and there he returned promptly to orderly habits of life and was faithful to his duties. Among her Indian kinsfolk on the Kaweagotami he found Colinette. They pleased each other and in the end travelled out to the nearest mission and were married by a priest.

"All this recalled the pathetic story of Père Jérome and Madeleine Mérimée. I recollected, too, that Colinette told me her husband once lived at Quebec. Raphael was more than likely a mere Christian name,—might not this man be Père Jérome himself?

"To-day I put the matter to the test. Raphael was down at the shore, bending over his upturned canoe, filling the cracks with melted pitch. I walked up softly and called out suddenly—'Père Jérome!' I believe the man leaped half a foot from the ground. He uttered a nervous cry, threw out his hands as if to ward off a blow, and faced round,

"Then I have twice wronged him."

trembling violently. When he saw who had called he dropped on the ground and sat with his face bowed in his hands, trembling and muttering.

"'Poor man,' I said, 'you see I know your secret, but I can do you no harm.'

"'How did you know?' he gasped.

"'Lucien Mérimée is my devoted friend, and I know the sad story of his sister Madeleine and Père Jérome. What your employer told me of you led me to suspect that you and that poor priest were one.'

"'And you are the friend of Lucien?' he asked, a piteous look of distress on his face. 'Then I have twice wronged him.' He hid his face in his hands and groaned.

"'Yes, you have twice wronged him, but you can undo the second wrong, if you only will be brave enough. You think your soul is lost, but I believe you can still save it. Be true to Colinette, who is a good woman, and that will be your salvation. Be true to her, and do your duty toward me.'

"I doubtless expressed myself more freely than I should have done had he shown less weakness. 'It appears to me,' I said, 'that your remorse is for the wrong thing. Your really serious offense before God is not in marrying Colinette, but in helping to

kidnap me. Repent! Merely to be sorry is not to repent—you must undo what you have done. Defy Hawksworth, if you are a man! Take Colinette and me away from here. I ask it in the name of Madeleine Mérimée, the woman you once so loved, the woman you should have married before you knew Colinette. Alas, since marry you must, why did you not marry *her* before it was too late?'

"The man seemed to quiver in every limb, but said nothing. 'Lucien Mérimée is now seeking me,' I continued. 'Every night I pray that he will soon find me here, and he will. Be beforehand, then; take Colinette and me and go to meet the man whom as you say you have twice wronged.'

"I spoke hurriedly and eagerly, employing less well chosen words no doubt than those I have quoted above. After a while he stood up and looked out over the lake, his face averted from me. 'As I told you before,' he said, his voice shaken, 'I could not prevent your being brought here. What I can do for you now it is difficult to see, but I shall think over what you have said.' He then hurried away.

"Another case of curious moral obliquity. In his view assisting his master to kidnap me was a mere peccadillo in comparison with the enormity of

marrying Colinette, by which latter he doubtless believes that he surrendered himself to the devil for all time. And yet I have some hope in him, although since our conversation he has shrinkingly avoided me, and although he is a pitiable nervous wreck.

XVII.

"Oct. 11. The man Hawksworth made me very angry to-day. He again brought up the subject of his intention to win my love by 'fair means,' and I was unwise enough to tell him frankly that there was absolutely no hope of his success.

"That's because you think you love that beggarly French-Canadian,' he said, with a laugh that frightened me.

"Had I been a free woman I should have turned my back on him and walked away, but I dared not provoke him too far. To make matters worse, he gleefully related how he had caused both Lucien and the Owl to be drugged on the eve of our prospective journey, thus being able to substitute his own Indian escort and take me in a trap. 'That's the way I served your poor hero,' he said, laughing exultantly. After struggling hard to curb my wrath, I quietly remarked that I did admire and honor Mr. Mérimée, but that the question of my loving him would not come up for consideration even in my

own mind until he had honored me with a declaration of his love.

"'You needn't be in doubt. He couldn't help loving you, of course. But what has he to offer you? I could take you to Paris, to Italy—make you a queen. But what could a poor devil of a lumber camp bookkeeper do for you? He could put you in a shanty on Muskeg Lake—no more.'

"'If he could make me love him, he would be doing very much "more,"' I replied.

"'As yet,' Hawksworth insisted, 'you don't appreciate what you would be giving up for such a life.'

"Perhaps I don't. Harry has often accused me of a want of appreciation of the advantages of wealth, and certainly what is necessary for his happiness is not for mine. He likes to sit at long formal dinners in great company, to chat with handsome women in evening dress, and then to linger over the table with witty and learned men, sipping maraschino, smoking and discussing, while I should really be happier dining on a piece of salmon-trout and a cup of tea with one chosen and true friend. Is this the plebeian side of me predominating, I wonder? Harry must live in London, I suppose, to have what he craves; but I could find all the elements

of real happiness on the wildest of Canadian lakes, I think. Should Lucien—should we love each other, even in 'a shanty on Muskeg Lake' we should have more to be thankful for than perhaps the very best of men and women deserve; for life, love, the world of nature, for rain and sunshine, land and water, for summer and winter, for seed time and harvest, for food, clothing and shelter, for health and reason, for a thousand benefits that are new every morning. And so long as we should love each other devotedly and do no wrong, we should have true happiness and the blessing of Almighty God. My situation makes me thoughtful and humble, and sometimes I think I see into the heart of things as never before.

"I was foolish enough to say something of this to Hawksworth, after suppressing the angry tears provoked by his words. 'Do you know,' he made laughing reply, 'I, even I, the confirmed law-breaker, admire fine sentiments when I read them in a well-written book, or hear them recited by pretty lips. I am quite touched by your eloquence, I really am; but what a pity that such noble phrases should be associated with that poor, commonplace French-Canadian!' And then he went on to speak

sneeringly and disrespectfully of Lucien in terms that I shall not repeat even in my diary.

"'Whether it be Mr. Mérimée or another,' I at last flamed out, 'the man who wins my heart will be he who comes to my rescue and horsewhips *you!*' Forgetting caution, everything but my outraged feelings, I turned from him with a withering glance and hurried toward the house.

"'I glory in your spirit,' he said, following me and laughing. 'From the day I knew your cleverness had done what all Scotland Yard could not do I have loved the thought of you. I knew then that you alone were a fit mate for me. I am more sure of this now than ever. You cannot escape me, my proud, beautiful Alberta! It is fate that brings us together and fitness that will bind us.'

"At this point I shut the door in his face, fled up the stair and locked myself in the upper apartments, where I paced back and forth in a great rage.

"An hour later I was less angry and more fearful, and when Colinette knocked and announced that Little Cloud had come, I felt that my only hope was in this Indian boy, young and powerless though he was. I opened the door and told Colinette to send him up, shutting and locking it again as soon as he entered the room.

"'Little Cloud, dear Little Cloud,' I said, taking his hand, as he stood on the wolf skin before my chair, 'do you believe what I tell you?"

"'White Lady does not lie,' he answered, evidently amazed at my question. (Colinette says all the Indians speak of me as 'White Lady.')

"'Then believe me when I tell you that this Hawksworth, whom the Indians love, and who has taught them to call him Red Man's Friend, has a black heart and a false tongue. He has told your people that I am his wife, but it is a lie.' And so I went on and told the whole story, my voice pitched low for fear of being overheard. Little Cloud listened in silence. Had I not looked into his eyes, he would have seemed impassive, almost indifferent, but I could read both sorrow and anger there. When, in conclusion, I asked if he believed me, he reasserted his conviction that 'White Lady' could not lie.

"'Have you no men to come and kill him?' he then asked suddenly.

"'Yes, but they are far away, and can not find me. And so my only friend is you, Little Cloud, and you are only a boy.'

"'I am only a boy, but I am a chief's son and I am not afraid. Let White Lady tell me what to do.'

"I was so pleased, and he looked so proud and brave, that I could have kissed him then and there. I asked if he could send a letter for me to the south, and he promptly said that he would try. He then told me that Hawksworth would send his Indian packers south for more supplies in two days' time.

"That is our chance,' I said. 'Would you be allowed to go with them, Little Cloud, and if not, can you not bribe one of the packers to carry my letter?' He could not say, but he was willing and eager to try every possible scheme, and when he left the island he carried not only a letter addressed to Mr. Burton and one to Lucien, but two gold pieces to reward the bearer of them southward.

"Oct. 12. Little Cloud's face was gloomy when he came this afternoon to report the result of his efforts, and I knew before he told me that he had failed. He dared not approach any of the older men, and spoke only to two well-grown Indian youths who are his friends and who are to go south with the packers. Each agreed not to speak of the proposal made them, but refused to carry the letters even after seeing the gold. 'White Lady is sad,' Little Cloud says that he told them; 'she desires to send word to her kindred in the south, from whom she hears nothing.' The first shook his head in an-

swer and said; 'Let Red Man's Friend bid me take his woman's letters and I will. I want no trouble.' The other said: 'Her man should send her messages. I will not meddle.' Nothing could persuade them, so Little Cloud went to his father, the chief, and asked that he might go with the packers. Was he not big enough to carry loads, and was it not right that a chief's son should travel and see the world? This also failed, for there is room only for strong and well-grown men in such service.

"White Lady did well to say I was only a boy,' he concluded mournfully. 'I have failed.'

"'You have failed in this,' I said, 'but can you not at least cross the lake in your canoe, follow the trail of the packers a little way, and put my letters where some white hunter or trapper may find them?'

"The boy brightened instantly at the suggestion, promising to do this and more. He would carry the letters a day's journey on the trail—indeed he would carry them much further, perhaps even to the distant trading post of the Hudson Bay Company.

"'Have you ever been so far, Little Cloud?'

"'Yes—with those carrying furs.'

"'How long was the trip?'

"'Five days.'

"'And you think you could find the way?'

"'Little Cloud never forgets.'

"Here I became so excited that I actually trembled. Could he really find the way? Could he shoot? Was his bark canoe light enough for him to carry it over the portages? All these and other questions he answered in the affirmative.

"'Then let me go with you!' I said, quite radiant. 'I could slip out in the middle of the night and go with you in your canoe. Little Cloud is not afraid, White Lady is not afraid—we could do it!'

"For a few moments he was as radiant as I, then a shadow fell over his face. It was the thought of pursuit. As soon as it was found that I had gone, he said, the Indians would be set on our track and they would soon overtake us. Of course they would. In a moment my high hopes were wrecked, and tears showed on my face as I asked: 'Is there no way at all, then?'

"Yes, there was a way, Little Cloud declared, evidently moved to the heart by my tears. Then in his slow, quaint way—for he knows little French—he outlined his plan. We should travel over the portage to the next lake on the course, then, instead of crossing to the second portage at its farther side,

turn to the left, follow a long narrow waterway and land at the base of a wild range of hills. In these we should hide for days while our Indian pursuers pushed on to the trading post, believing we had gone there. At the post they would ask for a mad white woman and an Indian boy, and the white factor would answer that he had not seen them. Doubting this, the Indians would camp about and watch and wait, or go further on the southward trail. Finally they would return and look for us by the way, but if they landed to search our place of refuge the scent would be so old that neither they nor their dogs could follow it. So at last they would return hopeless to the Kaweagotami, and then we might go down to the trail and reach the post by travelling at night, if need be, and hiding by day. Such was the plan chosen in a moment by this cunning Indian boy, and, if 'White Lady' could stand cold nights and hungry days, it might succeed. He wanted me to know in advance that hard days were probably before us, for the canoe was small and we could carry little.

"'I can stand anything,' I said. 'I would face tigers in order to leave this place.'

"So it is settled that we are to try the adventure. To-morrow morning the packers are to start, and to-

morrow night we are to follow. Little Cloud is to secure food and I am to carry blankets. When I hear his signal I am to tiptoe down stairs with my bundle, softly unbar the door, and join him. I have one day in which to prepare, and must write letters to leave behind me on the portage paths at the last moment, should our adventure fail."

XVIII.

It was one o'clock in the morning when Alberta, sitting wide-eyed and expectant in the darkness of her room, heard the low howl of a wolf from the direction of the lake shore. The moment the sound was repeated she rose and stole guardedly to the nearest window.

She had at first expected to creep down the stair and escape by the door, but investigation had shown that both the doors of the lower floor were provided with locks as well as bolts, and that, as a precautionary measure, the keys were taken into Raphael's room every night. An upper window, therefore, offered the only opportunity. Every necessary preparation having been completed hours since, she now needed only to drop her bundle and then let herself down by means of a rope made of bed coverings.

Little Cloud had engaged to secure provisions, but, fearing that he would bring nothing more than flour, salt and pemmican or jerked meat, Alberta

took the risk of a visit to the dining-room at midnight, in order to appropriate a small canister of tea and a tin in which to boil water. These had been rolled up in the blankets with such care, that, as she now fearfully dropped her bundle from the window, there was no sound further than a gentle thud which could attract no attention. To crawl through a narrow opening and swing to the ground on the makeshift rope was a more serious matter, but she accomplished it without noise, caught up her bundle and hurried down to the lake shore, where the boy was found awaiting her, kneeling in the stern of his tiny bark canoe.

Stowing her bundle beside the bag of provisions amidships at his whispered bidding, and seating herself in the bow, Alberta lifted the paddle awaiting her hand, and they were off. Fortunately the wind was down, and no perils faced them as they glided over the gray-white surface of the Kaweagotami, now almost calm enough to reflect the stars. The canoe shot swiftly forward, both being glad to dip their paddles vigorously, not merely for the sake of speed but for the sake of bodily warmth, the still air being sharp with frost.

The first hour spent in skimming over the quiet, glistening lake entailed no hardship, but the long

portage was another matter, both being burdened with a heavy load. It was with a light heart that Alberta shouldered hers, however, and followed the dark shape of the upturned canoe slanting backward from Little Cloud's shoulders.

The dim winding trail with its unknown surprises, the dusky, towering trees, the dark vistas on either hand crowded with nameless shapes of the imagination's begetting rising from the formless gloom and listening with wide-eyed watchfulness as the intruders passed, the flutter of a bird, or the startled plunge and noisy retreat of some shy animal—these were to Alberta the welcoming signs of her deliverance, rather than the source of fear. The northern panther, the gray timber wolf, a maddened moose, or a bear at bay, were indeed the menace of the unwary, but she did not think of them now. The pathless forest was her refuge, the forest denizens were her friends, even the winds and waters might be trusted; man alone she feared.

Day was breaking by the time the weary portage was a memory and the succeeding lake had been crossed to the desired point. Little Cloud brought his canoe up at the side of a low flat rock whose smooth surface would reveal no tell-tale footprints, and from this point they picked their way up the

forest-clothed slopes nearly a half mile before the boy thought it safe to leave the canoe hidden in a tangle of brush.

As they halted here in the full light of the new day and refreshed themselves with cold food, a bull caribou, migrating southward with his slender cows, passed within easy range. But Little Cloud merely regarded them with the young hunter's kindling eye, being determined not to shoot except in self-defense. The furred and feathered creatures that watched from far and near, with more or less hostile eyes, as the intruders passed, were this time safe from harm.

The hiding place finally chosen at the end of a five mile tramp was a hollow among the hills through which ran a small, clear stream. Here their fire at night and their smoke by day could be seen only by near eyes. Here they would rest quiet and wait, having food for several days, and shelter from possible storms beneath an overhanging rock of the steep hillside.

The remainder of that first day was soon gone, being full of duties, as the cutting of spruce tips for beds and the collecting of wood for a continuing fire. Afterward the time dragged, there being little more

than tea-making and toasting dry meat before the fire to engage their attention.

The boy became restless, and Alberta sought means of entertaining him as well as herself. French being her next accomplishment after drawing, she found no difficulty in telling Little Cloud stories of life in the far land of the white men. Though he did not always understand, he listened with a grave face and absorbed attention. And after some persuasion he was led to talk in turn, in his slow quaint way, of the Indian tribes of the north, their customs and legends.

The constellations of the Great Bear, Cassiopea, and the kite-like Boötes being pointed out to him on the second night, and being told the legends connected with them that have been handed down from ancient times, he proceeded to impart some of his own knowledge concerning the sky realm by declaring the lightning to be a serpent which Kitchi-Manitou, the Great Good Spirit, vomits up, and the thunder the hissing accompanying that remarkable operation. Alberta was also gravely informed that Kitchi-Manitou keeps the rain spirits from drowning the world by "tying them with the rainbow."

The clearest account he gave was of the old Algonquin legend of Michabo, the giant rabbit, sent

by Kitchi-Manitou to create the world. Alberta gathered from Little Cloud's solemn recital—part unfinished French phrase, part gesture—that in the be .g of things there was only water and upon the shoreless ocean floated a raft whereon were many animals, including Micabo, the great rabbit. As the ardent desire of all was for land upon which to live, this mighty rabbit ordered the beaver to dive in search of it. The beaver obeyed, but even after the most exhausting effort failed to find bottom. Then the rabbit sent down the otter, but he also returned unsuccessful, whereupon the animals upon the raft were in despair, for who could succeed where the best divers had failed?

At this juncture the female muskrat offered her services and was laughed at by all except the great rabbit, who permitted her to make the attempt. She dived down, and remaining under water a whole day and night, they gave her up for lost. But at last she floated to the surface unconscious and apparently dead. Hastily the animals dragged her on the raft and examined her paws one by one. Great was the rejoicing when they found in one of them a small bit of mud. While the others brought the muskrat back to life the giant rabbit took the tiny fragment of soil and moulded it, and as he moulded

it, it grew and grew—into an island, into a mountain, into a country, into the great earth we dwell upon. As it grew, the wonderful rabbit walked round and round it, to see how large it was; and to this day he continues his journey, walking forever around the earth and increasing it more and more.

The animals of the raft found homes on the new earth, but it was still uncovered by forests and men were not born. Therefore the great rabbit formed the trees by shooting his arrows into the ground, and by transfixing the tree trunks thus made with other arrows, he provided the branches. As for men, some said he formed them from the dead bodies of certain animals which thus became the ancestral totems of the Algonquin tribes; but others said that he married the muskrat, and from this happy union were born the ancestors of the various tribes of men.

Being asked if he thought there was any truth in this extraordinary legend, Little Cloud gravely replied that Colinette and Raphael had taught him that it was only fancy, but that many of his people believed it religiously.

The first night in their wild refuge was passed in sound dreamless sleep, the result of extreme fatigue, but during much of the second Alberta lay awake

and fearful, listening for hours to the cold wind as it roared through the dark balsams on the heights about them, now and then whirling down into their hollow with a shower of red-ripe leaves and causing their fire to sway wildly.

But it was neither the manifest signs of approaching winter nor the wild cry suggestive of the tawny northern panther, a harsh, screeching wail, now and then borne to her on the wind from one of the wooded heights of the vicinity, that troubled Alberta. The hopelessness of their plan to reach the Company's trading post unmolested, as she now viewed it, and the difficulties in which her generous little Indian partisan would find himself in the event of their capture—these were the source of the thoughts that banished sleep.

No sooner had breakfast been prepared and eaten next morning than Little Cloud proposed that he go down to the lake and reconnoitre, offering to leave his gun for White Lady's protection and go armed merely with a knife. Alberta consented for him to go, but cautioned him to be careful and insisted that he take his gun, assuring him that she would be safe enough at camp without it.

Little Cloud reached the lake shore in due course, and spent some time watching in vain for passing

canoes and in searching for suspicious footprints near the water's edge. He moved abc . warily and scanned the ground with care, br :w nothing to give cause for alarm.

When, however, some four hours had elasped and he was w..hin a mile of camo on his return tramp, he suddenly squatted in the brush, having marked the swaying of a sapling on an upward slope several hundred yards away. Filled with confidence at the apparently encouraging outlook, he had been moving less warily than heretofore, and his quick resort to cover was more or less involuntary, the result of habit, his first thought being that some large animal had shaken the sapling in passing.

He was both surprised and startled, therefore, as he now saw the head and shoulders of a man appear near the jostled tree. This man, an Indian, stood still a few moments, casting eagle glances in every direction, then drew back and was seen no more.

Some time later, after a hurried but stealthy journey through the forest by a round-about way, the boy gained the crest of a hill overlooking the hollow. As soon as he looked down he knew that no intruders had been there, for the first object that met his eye was White Lady lying asleep on her bed of spruce. Hoping that they might yet escape, he

hurried down the slope and was about to run across the open, when he halted abruptly, with dilating eyes.

Not twenty feet from the sleeping girl crouched a long, lank animal of a tawny hue, its twitching tail uplifted and its small flat head lowered. Inch by inch it drew nearer the prey upon which its eyes were fastened with a devouring stare. To shoot was to bring to the scene the Indian or Indians lurking in the neighboring woods, but Little Cloud could not hesitate.

Awakened by a loud report, Alberta started up in time to see the panther leap into the air with a horrid snarl and come down with a soft thud within a few feet of her—lifeless. Her exclamation of alarm was interrupted by the boy, who ran up, bidding her be quiet and follow him. Significant look and gesture alone informed her that they were beset by peril from another source.

In the rocky and steeply-sloping hillside to the left and some forty feet above the level of their camp Little Cloud had the previous day discovered a small niche well covered by ground vines and likely to pass unnoticed, except under the glance of the most practiced eye. Here the two now took refuge, there being nothing better to do, to venture

beyond the borders of the hollow in any direction being regarded as extremely hazardous.

Alberta was still breathing heavily from the exertion required to gain their retreat when an Indian was seen descending the opposite slope, looking about him with a sharp eye. The great dead cat soon caught his notice, and as he moved toward it the watchers in their hiding place recognized the familiar face of Jeremiah. From the cat he transferred his attention to the camp, in and out of which he walked, scrutinizing its every feature. Then he stepped quickly out into the open and swept the walls of the hollow with his eye, evidently assured that the fugitives were as yet scarcely escaped beyond its boundaries.

After a second and third deliberate survey, his eye fastened itself upon the vine-covered niche with an appearance of certainty that was confirmed in a few moments by his forward movement with the evident intention of investigating.

A single tear rolled down Alberta's cheek as he drew nearer, but she said nothing. Little Cloud also remained speechless, though there was fire in his eye and anger in his heart. Suddenly he raised his gun and aimed it at the advancing Indian.

"No, no!" whispered Alberta, laying hold of the

leveled weapon. "It won't do. It would make you an outlaw among your people. Besides, it would be useless. Look!" she added, pointing toward three more Indians who were picking their way down the opposite slope.

At "The Retreat" two days later, after describing her unsuccessful adventure in the company of Little Cloud, Alberta wrote as follows in her diary: "I begged Jeremiah to tell the boy's father that I persuaded him and he was not to blame. I also humbled myself to the extent of asking the jubilant and laughing Hawksworth to intercede for him. But Three Bears loves 'Red Man's Friend' and was full of wrath when he knew that his own son, a chief's son, had committed an indiscretion so bold and alarming. And so—according to Colinette—my poor, dear Little Cloud has not only been beaten, but severe tasks have been imposed on him, and he will not be allowed to visit the island again. A pity that I corrupted him! After all our brave planning and great effort, nothing is left me but misery of regret at the thought of the consequences of failure."

XIX.

It was to be a cold October night even in that high latitude. The air was sharp with frost and the snow lay two inches on the ground. The latter had been cleared away for several feet around, the tent was up, brush had been cut, supper had been cooked and eaten, and now the two travel-worn men and their guide could rest.

But Lucien Mérimée alone was inactive, lying on a pile of cut brush between the tent and the fire and watching the flames with restless, melancholy eyes. Meanwhile the Owl busied himself with overnight preparations for breakfast and Harold Ransom, provided with razor, hot water, soap, and a small hand-mirror, was shaving himself as carefully as if he expected to step into a drawing-room in half an hour.

Harold's expensive outing clothes now exhibited the wear and stains of weeks of continuous travel. Having consulted with Lucien on the day of their departure from Muskeg Lake, he found that it

would be impossible to carry a second suit, the portaging of the canoes, the tent, blankets and food supplies necessitating extreme self-denial so far as personal baggage was concerned. But though only a single change of underclothing was taken, and for an extra tip the Owl at night frequently enacted the role of washerwoman in consequence, the young Englishman would as willingly have left his tooth brush behind as his shaving outfit. No matter how worn out he might be, he never allowed more than one night to pass without employing his razor, but he sometimes envied his travelling companion, who was saved time and painstaking on the one hand, and an unkempt appearance on the other, by wearing a short brown beard which he trimmed at longer intervals.

While the shaving was in process the half-breed constructed an oven out of a collection of stones, building a hot fire within, around and above it. Then he squatted before an open sack of flour, into which he poured from time to time, water from a tin cup held in one hand, meanwhile deftly stirring with the fingers of the other.

"Hello there, Owl! What does that mean?" demanded Harold, as he rose to put away his precious razor and looking-glass.

"All right, m'sieu'—no harm. Mix bread—grand loaf."

Stepping forward, Harold saw a neat round ball of dough in a deep circular depression that had been hollowed out in the flour. "And what's all that fire on those stones for?" he asked, after perceiving that all the water poured into the bag was safely mixed in the dough.

"For cook, m'sieu'. Mix loaf—so—put him in hot stone all night—to-morrow grand loaf bread. M'sieu' like bread some more, eh?"

"Well, rather!—after nothing but flapjacks for a week. Owl, you're a jewel."

Lucien knew that the others talked, but his preoccupation was complete. His thoughts were concerned only with their long and vain wanderings over vast spaces, searching, searching, day after day, with little or no encouragement. Not until that morning had they come upon the faintest of clues and this, though they meant to follow it up, would probably prove a disappointment. At old Fort Glengary, a trading post of the Hudson Bay Company, they were told that a white man and woman, husband and wife presumably, were living among the Indians on Lake Kaweagotami, five days distant, and having taken explicit directions as to

the course, they were now on their way thither, determined to investigate.

"By the way," said Harold, turning to Lucien, "I picked this up behind you on the trail to-day, put it in my pocket, and at the end of the portage forgot to give it to you. I see your name is at the bottom of it." He produced a folded letter, consisting of a single sheet, unprotected by an envelope.

Taking it and glancing into it, Lucien folded it and put it in his inside pocket with the brief remark: "It is about some property in Quebec. It came the day we left Muskeg Lake, and I had no time to answer it. I have scarcely thought of it since."

Harold Ransom regarded his friend curiously but without disapproval, as the latter's melancholy gaze returned to the fire. "He must love her indeed if he has 'scarcely thought of it since,'" was his immediate reflection. For Harold had read the letter almost to the end before he saw Lucien's name and knew that it contained important information. It was nothing less than a notification from a lawyer that one Mme. Auclair (referred to as the aunt of the person to whom the letter was addressed) had left no will conveying her property "to the church," as she had so often expressed her determination to

do, but had merely donated to a religious order in person some months before her death a sum equal to the value of one-fourth of her estate. As it was now definitely settled that no will existed, in the eyes of the law Lucien and Madeleine Mérimée were heirs to the remainder.

"Should Alberta decide to marry him, this will be most fortunate," reflected practical-minded Harold. With this thought uppermost, he wondered as to the size of the "remainder," concluding from the impressive tone of the letter that in the view of the writer it was at least a comfortable fortune.

Suddenly the Owl got upon his feet and looked toward the lake with an air of absorbed expectancy, observing which the others listened until they heard the sound of a voice and the dip of paddles. Then came sounds unmistakably indicating that a party had landed and were beaching their canoe. Lucien had just ordered Owl to go down to the lake and investigate, when a white man appeared within the circle of firelight, followed by an Indian carrying loads.

"This is a kind of surprise on both sides," he remarked in an open friendly way, when salutations had been exchanged. "You didn't expect to see a tent pitched this late, and I wasn't countin' on white

faces this side o' Glengary. I calculated to get there to-night and we've been pushin' hard, but we'll have to give it up and camp on this portage."

"You are welcome to put your tent up right here and use our fire," said Lucien.

"We only left Fort Glengary to-day at noon," said Harold.

"That's where I belong," explained the newcomer, a big red-bearded man. "My name is Fate MacDonald; I've been with the Company fifteen years."

Without more ado he proceeded to put up his tent, accepting some assistance from Lucien. Meanwhile the Indian prepared his supper. An hour later, as the three white men sat about the fire talking and smoking, MacDonald, the Company's man, spoke of a matter that deeply concerned the party he had thus unexpectedly encountered.

"I've had about as many ups and downs and uncommon experiences in my time as any other man in the north," he said, "but I run up on somethin' to-day that beat the record. It's just a letter, but it's the strangest one I ever laid eyes on. Solomon, my Indian there, picked it up on the trail three days ago 'way on the other side o' the divide. He thought it was just a nice piece o' paper and he

wanted it and put it inside his cap. But to-day when it dropped out I saw there was writin' on it and picked it up."

He produced a folded paper from an inside pocket and extended it toward Lucien with a "Did you ever see the like o' that?"

The inscription on the single sheet of ordinary writing paper, without signature or address, was as follows:

"Whoever finds and reads this is earnestly requested to take it to the nearest Hudson Bay post and give it to the factor. The writer is a white woman—Alberta Ransom by name—who was kidnapped and forcibly brought to this wild place by an Englishman calling himself Hawksworth. In reality he is one Arthur Biggs, a convict escaped from an English prison. Miss Ransom was brought to this man's hunting lodge (on an island in a lake called by the Indians Kaweagotami) from Muskeg Lake, far to the south, where she has friends, among whom are Mr. Lucien Mérimée and Mr. John Burton. Tell them, or any and every good man it is possible to reach, where she is to be found and bid them come to her aid before it is too late."

Absorbing the information contained in these closely written lines with incredible quickness, Lu-

cien passed the paper to Harold and started wildly to his feet. Harold's excitement was no less visible and immediate, and he, too, rose, as if to take action at once.

"You don't mean—you *know* her?" exclaimed MacDonald, also rising.

"My name is mentioned in her letter as one of her friends," said Lucien, huskily.

"We were going to that lake on the chance, hearing that a white woman was there," said Harold. "We've been hunting h- for weeks."

"Well! And I thought she must be crazy."

"Can't you turn back and go there with us?" asked Lucien. "We could make it in much quicker time."

"If it's a matter of—money—you can name your—" began Harold.

"It's not a matter of money," he was interrupted, "and I'll go quick if you'll wait till I can go to Glengary and back."

"We can't wait."

"That would mean a day lost."

MacDonald shook his head. "Now that I'm this close I must go in and report. Duty is duty."

"Then draw us a map of the route," urged Lucien.

A piece of paper and a pencil were produced and a rough sketch of the lakes and streams in the course was drawn, all the portages being carefully marked and the estimated distances in miles set down. This done, MacDonald asked more questions and heard the whole story.

"Well, this day beats the record for sure," he declared. "We heard about that Englishman from the Indians. He's had his big shack there for several years, but as he was not a fur trader we didn't trouble ourselves about him at Glengary, though we wondered why he never paid us a visit. This year we heard he had brought a wife in with him, but that was not surprisin', and anyhow it was not our business. And so that's all been goin' on right under our nose!"

This was meant literally, a five days' journey being a mere trifle to a Company's man. "You may count on me to put the facts before the factor," he concluded, "and some of us will most likely overtake you before you get there. We represent the law up here, such as it is, and the factor'll want that thing looked into."

The talk ended here. It was agreed that a start for the Kaweagotami must be made by four o'clock, and meanwhile rest was necessary, though sleep might be impossible.

XX.

In the gray twilight of a cold, cloudy, tempestuous day, Hawksworth and Raphael stood on the shore below The Retreat, watching a canoe that braved the foul weather and steadily approached, although the swell broke in white caps all over the lake. As it drew near, they saw that the solitary occupant was an Indian.

"He must bring news, to be coming in such weather," said Hawksworth, a suggestion of anxiety in his tone.

"It is Jeremiah," said Raphael.

Having run his canoe into the haven and laid hold of a projecting spar of the landing, the Indian made his report. It was in substance that two white men and a half-breed guide were encamped for the night at the south end of the first portage on the outgoing trail, three miles from Serpent Rock on the south shore of the Kaweagotami. These men could reach The Retreat at a very early hour next day, and it was thought that Monsieur would like

to know. Evidently Monsieur was much concerned to know. He asked numerous questions as to the appearance of the two white men, and finally inquired of Jeremiah if he expected to reach the camp of Three Bears that night.

"Yes, m'sieu'; I go straight."

"Then tell him to come in the morning with four or five men. Tell them to come early and come armed. We are only two to their three," he added, turning to Raphael, "and we may need help. It is well to be on the safe side."

"You have reason," answered Raphael, musingly.

Jeremiah promised compliance, backed out his canoe, and paddled away. Three Bears would no doubt come; he would be glad to serve his white friend, to whom he was indebted for so many substantial favors. Counting certainly on assistance from the Indians, if needed, Hawksworth dismissed anxiety and prepared to spend the night as usual.

Half an hour later he sat down to dinner with the captive lady, Colinette standing by and waiting on them. He still occupied the shack, but for some days past—ever since the capture of Little Cloud and "White Lady" in their hiding-place among the hills, in fact—he had dined at The Retreat every evening, an innovation that was tolerated without

objection or remark, Alberta wisely refraining from any reference to his proposal to wait for an invitation.

He drank claret at his dinner and was continually gay and entertaining, though always no less respectful than persuasive, keeping in view his aspiring plan to win her esteem. But little by little, by almost imperceptible degrees, he seemed to advance toward a more familiar footing, and Alberta marked with terror his growing disposition to forget or ignore the self-imposed rules which had at first governed their intercourse. Each day, therefore, she conducted herself more and more prudently, not scrupling at last to employ every art known to a woman at bay in order to play upon his hopes for her own advantage. She no longer disdained to make smiling response to his mirth-provoking jests and contrived to gratify his vanity in innumerable ways. Thus the deluded law-breaker, who sought a willing surrender, not forced acquiescence, was led to look forward cheerfully to the early fruition of his desires.

He was no less gay than usual on the evening after Jeremiah brought disquieting news, thinking that, come what might, he was secure, and little dreaming that there was a traitor under his roof,

Raphael had long meditated how he could serve the wronged lady whose reproaches stung him with remorse. He had not dared to take her with Colinette and fly, but now he saw his opportunity. If these strangers were in truth her intending rescuers, he could work secretly for their aid, and when the moment for decisive action came he would place himself on their side.

Raphael seriously considered the question of stealing away with Alberta before morning dawned and conveying her to the camp of the strangers, but was restrained by the fear of crossing the stormy lake in the dark and the apprehension that the men in camp might prove not to be her friends after all.

He resolved upon preliminary action in another direction. While Hawksworth was at dinner he invaded the shack and carried off every ounce of ammunition found there, even extracting the shells from two loaded guns. Making a heavy bundle of the whole, he watched his opportunity and conveyed it to the second story of The Retreat, secreting it in a chest in the windowless closet or lumber room. Here also, at a later hour, he concealed such further stores of ammunition as the house contained. And when Hawksworth retired to bed in fancied security, his possibilities of defense were reduced to the

small loaded revolver carried on his person, and the two crossed swords on the wall of the upper sitting-room. It was Raphael's intention to surrender when the rescuers came, and by concealing the ammunition he hoped to compel Hawksworth to a like course, thus preventing bloodshed; for otherwise bloodshed there would be, he felt assured. The plan might of course fail if the rough weather did not delay the arrival of the Indians.

The morning dawned late. Lowering clouds covered the sky and the waves broke white before the wind. Hawksworth was up and out betimes and swept the lake with a field-glass. In the direction of Serpent Rock he promptly located two canoes that were steadily approaching the island in spite of wind and foam-crested swell. Reassured to observe that the approaching party consisted of only three men, he turned to look into his defenses. He thought it advisable to house all his resources under one roof, that one which must stand the siege should the approaching party be reinforced before the arrival of Three Bears, and decided to remove the guns and ammunition from the shack. Their disappearance was thus brought to his knowledge and he hastened to question Raphael, who affected blank astonishment.

"Who could have done this?" demanded Hawksworth. His eye was fierce, but it never occurred to him to suspect Raphael, mild, pliable, nervous Raphael.

"Perhaps there are two parties," suggested Raphael darkly, "one of which is already on the island."

"They must have landed early last night and robbed the shack while I was at dinner," said the startled master, instantly accepting this plausible solution. "And now"—he glanced apprehensively toward the heights of the island where the balsams were bending and groaning in the gale,—"they are up there waiting for the other party to come. What a fool I have been! I should have ordered Three Bears to come last night."

Even this bold, reckless spirit was seized with a species of panic at the thought that enemies were crossing the lake in front of him and other enemies were already in the woods behind him. Seeing Colinette about to light a fire, he promptly ordered her to put it out and bade her prepare a cold breakfast. Raphael was then told to bar the doors until the Indians arrived.

"Trouble is coming," the ex-priest had said to

Colinette late on the night before. "It may be that the avengers are at hand."

She questioned him and learned what Jeremiah had reported. "Ah, but is not Monsieur in the right, then?" she asked. "Had he not the right to bring Madame here? The good Monsieur has not done wrong, eh, Raphael?"

"He is a good friend to those who please him, yes; but you have misunderstood, my Colinette. So did I at first. She is not his wife, she is of sound mind, and she is here against her will—against law and right. If these strangers are her friends, we shall have trouble."

Colinette held her sleeping child closer to her breast as she ventured to ask: "What will you do, Raphael?"

"We shall see. What is right, I hope."

Raphael took paper and began to write. Folding up the sheet, he ascended the stair and knocked at the door of the upper apartment. Seeing that a light burned within and hearing footsteps, he hastily thrust the communication under the door and retired before it was opened.

"Mademoiselle, be on your guard," he had written in French. "There are strangers encamped three miles from the south shore of the lake. They

may be, I trust they are, your friends. We shall know early to-morrow. The night is too stormy to permit of a successful attempt to join them. Therefore remain quietly in the house and meanwhile be discreet. Do not provoke Monsieur. Should he bid you shut yourself in your chamber to-morrow, I think it will be wise to obey him. Do not fear. Raphael and Colinette are your friends and will not neglect your interests. Destroy this."

He might more easily have spoken his message, but Raphael was a cautious, timorous man, bred in the cloister, and better suited to repose than action. Moreover, Colinette would have overheard, and Colinette was as yet confused, and her devotion to the "good" Monsieur might betray her into some indiscretion.

Alberta did not lie down until one o'clock that night, even then deciding not to remove the dress worn during the day. In the early tempestuous morning she was aroused by the sound of Hawksworth's voice below. Starting up in eager expection, she bathed her face, meanwhile taking note that the front and back doors of the lower floor were noisily shut and bolted. A few moments later she heard a knock at the door of the outer room.

It proved to be Colinette who came to say that

Monsieur had business on the upper floor and would like to come up.

"Tell him the door is open," directed Alberta. She did not retire to the inner room, but stood waiting. "What is the matter?" she asked, as he appeared in the doorway and bade her good-morning, smiling amiably.

"The matter is a possible siege," he answered, a suggestion of nervousness in his laugh and manner as he advanced into the room. "I have had the misfortune to offend Three Bears," he glibly continued, "and it seems he is coming here with his Indians to give me a roasting. How would you like to be carried off by an Indian? That would make you think better of your present quarters, would it not?"

Alberta was seized with an intense desire to say that as between an Indian and a convict kidnapper the odds might be in favor of the former, but she merely replied: "I thought the Indians were your friends."

"It is a[illegible]with our friends that we quarrel, you know. I wanted to tell you," he continued, smiling persuasively, "that it would be risky to show your face at a window after they arrive. It would be tempting fate. It would make every one of them the more determined to put an end to me,

your only protector. Really, I think it would be wiser for you to hide in this lumber room during the trouble. The day is cold and that square hole up there will allow you plenty of air."

While speaking, he opened the door of the windowless closet or store room, caught up a candle, lighted it and placed it inside on a box. The interior, a space of some six by twelve feet, being only partly occupied by chests and boxes, was ample for the present purpose. Before Alberta made any reply Colinette appeared with food on a tray, which she placed on a small table and retired. Still smiling, as if half in jest, Hawksworth moved across the room, lifted both tray and table and placed them within the store room. Then, having dragged a comfortable chair into the candle-lit apartment, he turned to Alberta who had looked on in speechless astonishment.

"Now, I have provided for all emergencies," he said. "Go in—to oblige me. It is only for a short while."

"Do you take me for a child?" Alberta asked haughtily. "I am not afraid of a fight or of Three Bears either."

"But I *am*, you know, on your account. There is no time to lose and, really, I must ask you to

oblige me in this matter," he repeated in an eager, insistent way that warned her not to oppose his will.

"How foolish!" was her reflection. "Can he suppose that my friends would omit to search that room?"

He was wiser than she thought. His plan was to keep her in ignorance of the real character of the attacking party in order to prevent the necessity of violent interference with her efforts to give aid to his enemies. The thickness of the walls would, he trusted, so subdue all sounds that she would fail to recognize their voices. He also wished to spare her the sight of bloodshed—the possible shooting down of her friends from the upper windows. And he determined—if victorious, as he expected to be—to remove all traces of the struggle before she was allowed to come forth.

"What reason have I to wish to oblige you?" asked Alberta, stubbornly.

"That I am determined to fight for you to the death."

Her eyes fell before his burning gaze. Moved by the man's passion, in spite of herself, she was not at once ready witl. a reply.

"What's that?" cried Hawksworth suddenly,

hearing or pretending to hear some sound. "There they come! Go in!" he urged.

He lifted his hand and touched her between the shoulders, as she stood motionless. It was a promise of possible force to come, and Alberta started forward shuddering. Up to that moment he had not so much as touched her hand. A new fear of him, and the recollection of Raphael's warning, caused her now to step forward quickly and enter the candle-lit apartment.

"Thanks, thanks," he said, smiling and following. "Only for a little while," he assured her, then shut the door and softly turned the key in the lock.

Profound silence followed, but as she sat staring at the flickering candle a few minutes later, Alberta heard the opening of a chest that had stood in a corner of the outer room. Almost immediately she was aware that Hawksworth had cried out, swearing, and bounded to the head of the stair calling Raphael's name. Steps sounded on the stair, then Hawksworth's angry voice:

"What does this mean? All the cartridges have been taken from the chest, too. It can't be that *she* got word from them and has done this! She's clever enough."

Then the voice of Raphael: "It is very strange,

but I don't think she did it. Some one could have slipped into the house when we were talking with Jeremiah last evening. When I came up Colinette was at the spring and the lady was out walking."

"This is the devil to pay," Hawksworth was heard to exclaim. "Is your rifle loaded?" he then asked, still not appearing to suspect Raphael.

"No," was the answer, "and I have not a cartridge."

An oath and—"nothing left but the five charges in my revolver!"

There was silence again for some minutes, broken at length by a loud sneering laugh from Hawksworth. Alberta wondered at, and it was well that she did not guess the meaning of, this triumphant outburst. What had delighted her jailer, who leaned out of an upper window, was the spectacle of two drifting canoes filled to the brim with water, and three human heads one moment in view against the foam of the rising swell and again out of sight in the trough.

XXI.

THE gale blew toward the island. Near its shore, therefore, was the roughest water, and as the two canoes entered on the latter half of their journey, danger threatened them more and more.

"We swamp for sure. Better go back," called out the Owl, when still a mile of dangerous water separated them from the island shore.

"If we turn back now, he'll escape us," said Harold.

"No!" called out Lucien in return. "We'll go on till we swamp, then we'll swim."

It was a daring plan and Owl shook his head, being unable to enter fully into the feelings of the two young white men who set their teeth, dipped their paddles as though their muscles were of iron, and strained their eyes toward The Retreat. Fortunately the canoes were empty of baggage, even their guns having been left behind with their other belongings in a cache. Their only arms were a hunting knife and a revolver each.

Had the wind blown in their faces, so that they could have taken the swirling white caps on the quarter, their chances would have been better. With the heaving swell astern, the canoes were extremely difficult to manage. The Owl's in particular, carrying less weight, was buffeted and knocked about in a frightful manner. But it was the canoe sinking lower under the weight of two that was first swamped. A great wave struck the stern, swung the little boat side-wise and poured in a deluge over the low gunwale. A second wave completed the disaster. Down went the canoe, swaying from under their feet to rise and float away, though full to the brim, as Lucien and Harold struck out boldly for the island shore, now a half mile distant. To have swung on to the drifting canoe, the necessary resource of less expert swimmers, would have caused them to be carried too far out of their course.

The swamping of the second canoe was not long delayed, and the half-breed followed, swimming in the wake of the two white men. There was little danger for such good swimmers as the three plainly were, and Hawksworth's scoffing, "Drown, then, meddling fools!" came of a too hasty calculation.

Holding his field-glass focussed on them as they neared the shore, he first made out the face of an

unknown half-breed, then that of a light-haired Englishman equally unknown to him. Ah, this was hopeful; after all it might be only a harmless hunting party, in which case he would go down and meet them, assist them to regain their canoes, invite them to breakfast (the bird being caged safely enough), and send them on their way. But look. The glass was now focussed on the third floating head, and Hawksworth uttered an oath as he recognized the dark clustering hair, the bronzed skin and well-known handsome face of Lucien Mérimée.

Ah, well, his precautions were well taken, then, and he would be wise to remain behind closed doors. With Raphael at his back, he would not be unwilling to face three men, but it was necessary to consider the possible confederates waiting in the woods behind him. He remembered that it behooved him to be very cautious, in view of the great stake for which he was playing. He determined to remain quiet, allowing the house to exhibit no sign of life until openly attacked.

Lucien was the first to touch bottom, get clear of the leaping spray and crouch down behind a huge rock. Harold shortly joined him and then the Owl. All were panting hard, and in their temporary exhaustion it was mutely agreed that they should rest

a few minutes before taking further steps. Harold was the first to rise and peep around that side of the rock looking toward The Retreat.

"Nobody about apparently," he said, his voice scarcely heard above the boom and splash of the incoming waves.

Meanwhile, Lucien undid a box of cartridges which he had brought securely inclosed in a small rubber pouch. The three wet revolvers were then carefully examined, the damp charges removed, and fresh cartridges thrust in. Thus prepared, the three men stepped from behind the rock and cautiously approached the house.

Drawing near, they observed that the doors and lower windows were shut, as if the inmates were gone on a hunting excursion for the day. Thereupon they boldly advanced and walked around the house, stopping now and then to listen.

"There's nobody here," said Harold in a low voice. "Perhaps it isn't the place after all."

"It must be the place, and I'm not sure yet that there's no one here," whispered Lucien, examining the ground. "If they've gone they've not gone long."

The Owl had been examining the ground also, and he now picked up a handkerchief and brought it

forward with a "Voici, messieurs!" It had rained at dawn and the ground was soaking; this tell-tale bit of cloth was dry.

"Some one was here within half an hour," said Lucien, with a suspicious glance toward the silent upper windows.

"If they took to their boats on the other side of the island?" suggested Harold.

Thereupon Owl ran off a little way, examining the ground for tracks. He came back promptly, reporting no signs whatever of a retreat from the house across the island that morning. Lucien now led the way around to the front, all scanning the upper windows expectantly. As they halted again opposite the front porch, which was raised only about a foot from the ground, he shouted:

"Hallo! Hallo there!"

Silence followed. Harold took up the cry, shouting a second and third time, and then was heard a faint knocking within. Hearing the call, Alberta had recognized the situation and determined to make a sign. But scarcely had she begun when her efforts were arrested by the fierce voice of Hawksworth commanding and threatening; he spoke to her through the closed door and she quailed before him. She doubtless would have gone on after an interval,

braving his anger, but hardly had he ceased to speak when the sound of some metallic object falling on the lower floor was heard all through the house and no doubt without. This was Raphael's sign. Hawksworth bounded to the head of the stairs, swearing and demanding in low tones to know what this meant.

"A tin pail fell off the table, Monsieur." Raphael did not add that it had fallen only after being purposely displaced by his hand.

The party outside had heard both sounds, drawing the obvious conclusion. The fall of the tin could have been caused by a rat, but the knocking could have been caused only by a human being.

"Hallo there! Open the door! We know you are there!" shouted Lucien and Harold.

"What do you mean by rousing people out of their beds in this rude way?" called out Hawksworth angrily from one of the upper windows, careful not to show his face and trusting to the earliness of the hour to give plausibility to his artful pretense. "Who are you and what do you want?"

"That's his voice," whispered Lucien.

"We want a convict and kidnapper," shouted Harold on the instant,—"one Hawksworth alias Biggs—and we've got him!"

The answer to this was a bullet. As it hissed past Harold's ear, the Owl shot like an arrow behind a tree. The other two were quick to follow his example, the mask being now thrown off and war declared. Before he took to cover, Harold fired a shot into the window whence the voice had issued, breaking a pane of glass, after which for some minutes all was quiet.

Between the two trees behind which Lucien and Harold were sheltered lay a section of a hemlock-log some twelve feet long and not less than a foot in diameter. The moment the former's eye fell on it a plan of attack was suggested to his mind. The log was light enough to be lifted and carried by three men and heavy enough to serve effectively as a battering-ram. Should the three lift it and run with it beneath the shelter of the porch, they could stand out of range from the window above and batter the door in. It was a means of forcing Hawksworth to open combat in any event, and the sooner this was done the better, for might he not we awaiting help from some unknown quarter?

Standing in his place, Lucien in a low voice explained his plan to Harold, who promptly approved. The Owl was near enough to overhear, and at a given signal the three men leaped from cover, seized

the log and ran with it toward the shelter of the porch. While yet they stooped over it a pistol shot was heard and a bullet sang through the air so close as to cut some strands of Owl's coarse hair. When a few steps forward another passed through the sleeve of Harold's outing jacket, inflicting a painful but harmless flesh wound in his left fore-arm. And they were still several feet from the covert when a third bullet grazed Lucien's cheek, leaving a red scratch that shed a few drops of blood. But not one of the three hesitated, and now they were safe beneath shelter.

Hawksworth felt that he had reason to curse himself, both for his uncertain aim and reckless precipitation. Already he had fired four shots out of the five cartridges in his revolver. Never, he told himself furiously, had he cut so sorry a figure. Here were his doors to be battered down in his face, and he with only one more bullet available for defense! What accursed turning of luck was this—of the luck that had scarcely ever failed him in all his wild career? Was the tide really to turn at last? Was the day of reckoning indeed at hand? He listened motionless until he heard a terrific blow on the front door that shook the house through and through; then he caught up his glass, bounded to the window,

and swept the lake in the hope of seeing a flotilla of Indian canoes.

Lucien and Harold were wrought up to the highest pitch of excitement, passion and resolve. The heavy log was a feather in their hands and they hurled it against the door with terrific force. The second blow from the battering-ram was somewhat less forcible, as they judged it best not to expose themselves in order to take the same running start; but the door trembled beneath it nevertheless, and would no doubt give way in the end. Lucien stood nearest the door, Harold midway and the half-breed near the outer end of the log which protruded a few inches from beneath the shelter of the porch. Thus they stood out of range and swung their battering-ram with might and determination. Had there been cartridges to spare, Hawksworth would have found it useless to fire at the end of a log, with only a part of an arm or a hand now and then visible thereon.

Inside on the lower floor were Raphael and Colinette, the latter standing moaning in her room, her baby held frantically against her breast, the former near the assaulted door, determined, yet hesitating to act. He had counted the shots fired by Hawks-

worth, and hoped that he would also fire the last, thus ending the struggle without bloodsheed.

But after the battering-ram struck the door the third time he hastened to unlock it, concluding to wait no longer for the final shot to be fired. He held himself in readiness, and as soon as the fourth blow sounded on the door, quickly drew the bolt from its place and leaped aside. The result of the fifth blow, therefore, took the assailants by surprise.

The door flew inward and the ram followed, dragging those who wielded it confusedly forward by the force of its own momentum. The Owl fell prostrate across the porch and Lucien was thrown to his knees. Harold alone managed to keep his feet, and, perceiving Raphael, promptly covered him with his drawn revolver.

The ex-priest threw up his hands. "You see, messieurs, I am unarmed," he whispered, with a nervous side glance toward Lucien. "I have no part in this wickedness. See!—it was I who opened the door to you." He pointed to the bolt. "Voilà, messieurs!"

It was clear that he spoke the truth, and Harold lowered his weapon. "Where is Miss Ransom?" the latter demanded.

"Above."

"And Hawksworth?"

"He also. And now, messieurs, that I have opened the place to you, let us have no bloodshed, I pray."

Lucien scarcely paused to glance at Raphael, and even had he done so he would not have recognized Père Jérome behind the mask of that long, bushy beard. He rushed past him toward the stair and leaped upward three steps at a bound.

In the dim light he saw the form of a man above him. Before he could lift his own revolver he was conscious of a blinding flash, a loud report, and of a blow upon his breast accompanied by an inward convulsive pain. Nevertheless he fired in return, took a step higher, and, as his legs seemed to fail him, tried to grasp the railing and pull himself upward with his hands. Then he seemed to himself to swim forward through suffocating mists, and then suddenly it was night.

A moment later Harold Ransom leaped over the body of his friend and bounded into the upper room. Having fired his last shot, Hawksworth now stood at bay, his back against Alberta's prison door, and a sword which he had just torn from the wall in his hand.

Harold's pistol was levelled in an instant and his

finger on the trigger, but he did not fire. He perceived that he was master of the situation and could wait. Stepping backward to the head of the stair, he glanced down and saw Raphael and the Owl removing Lucien to the lower room.

"Owl!" he called. "Leave Mr. Mérimée with that man and come up with a rope at once." Then he faced his foe once more.

"Why don't you shoot down an unarmed man like the coward that you are?" cried Hawksworth. "I dare you to take that sword from the wall there and fight me fair!"

"I don't fight vermin; I crush them," was Harold's contemptuous retort. "I am dealing with a beast, not a man. Put down that sword!"

"I'll see myself dead first," vowed Hawksworth, with the most frightful of oaths.

At this moment the Owl appeared, a coil of rope on his arm.

"Put down that sword!" ordered Harold once more.

Hawksworth remained immovable and unflinching, giving oath upon oath for answer.

"You have one minute in which to live and obey me," said Harold, with a final air that admitted of no mistake.

Hawksworth bounded forward with uplifted sword and Harold fired, missing his mark by a hair. Then a strange thing happened. Before he had covered more than half the distance separating him from his enemy, Hawksworth seemed to stumble, and fell face forward on the floor.

Harold thought he was shot. He had forgotten Owl and scarcely noted the circular shadow that seemed suddenly to hover over Hawksworth and descend about his head. The Owl knew better, for as Hawksworth leaped forward he had thrown his rope like a lasso with practised aim, had quickly drawn it taut, thrown his whole weight upon it, and thus brought the game to earth.

Leaping upon the prostrate form with incredible swiftness, the half-breed planted his knees upon Hawksworth's head, seized his hands, drew them upward upon his back, and wound the rope about them. Though at first slightly stunned and partially suffocated by the tightening of the noose about his neck, Hawksworth struggled desperately to shake off his captor and rise. But for the weight of Harold's knees also, descending with crushing force upon his back, the furious victim of ill luck might have prevented the accomplishment of the design. As it was, the scheme of taking him alive

prospered beyond expectation. Both his legs and arms were soon as secure as it was possible for several yards of strong rope to make them, and, the noose about his neck being loosened, he remained unharmed.

As the two men stepped back to survey their work, they became aware of a knocking and the calling of a woman's voice from the lumber room. The Owl, who was nearest, ran forward and unlocked the door.

Then Alberta rushed out, looking about her almost blindly, and recognizing Harold only after he had reached her side. She gave him both her hands and clung to his.

"You?—Oh, Harold!" she joyfully exclaimed.

Her surprise and bewilderment were scarcely lessened when her eye fell on Hawksworth lying bound hand and foot almost at her feet, but the last traces of fear vanished from her face. The sudden reversal of the situation—the jailer now become a fettered prisoner—appealed forcibly to her sense of humor.

"That is rather a humiliating position for a 'mas ful man,'" she said, looking down and transfixing er enemy with the cruelty of a smile.

When Alberta appeared Hawksworth ceased to

writhe and curse and fixed upon her a devouring stare. But when she laughed and uttered her little taunt, anger as well as passion appeared in his eyes.

"Fool that I was," he snarled in the bitterness of his soul,—"fool to have waited—on account of a silly sentiment!"

XXII.

In that moment Alberta saw upon his face the mark of the beast as she had never seen it before, and she quickly averted her eyes. Her glance now wandered, full of inquiry from Harold to the Owl and then to the head of the stair—was there no one else?

"And you came all the way from England—here," she said to Harold. "How did you do it, brave boy? You are wounded!" she cried anxiously, seeing the blood trickling down his left wrist.

"Only a scratch," he said lightly.

Nevertheless, with her glowing eyes fixed upon him, she obeyed a sudden impulse to lift his bloody hand and kiss it, softly uttering the words—"My knight, my hero!"

The color rushed into the young man's cheek in a flood and his eyes took fire, but his smile of happiness was brief. "You don't know," he said to her in a hoarse, lifeless way. "It was

Lucien Mérimée who did it all. Without him I could not have come here. He was the first on the stair. He was shot down and I jumped over him. We must go to him—he may be dying."

"Dying—and you did not tell me!" said Alberta in low, hushed tones, directing at Harold a look suggestive of that of a wounded deer, ere she turned and ran impetuously toward the head of the stair.

"Remain here on guard," said Harold in a shaken voice to the half-breed, as he moved to follow her.

In the large lower room where the meals were served, and whence the stair ascended, Lucien Mérimée lay on a lounge, his eyes closed. His wet clothing was partly removed, his breast was bare, and blood oozed slowly from a bullet wound there. Raphael was on his knees beside him, holding aloft a crucifix, and Colinette stood near, rocking her fretting baby in her arms.

"O mon pauvre Lucien! Dieu vous ait en sa sante garde!" the ex-priest was saying as Alberta appeared at his side.

"How is he?" she whispered.

"I can not tell, but I fear—O grand Dieu, sauvez ce brave jeune homme!"

"It is the time for action rather than prayer,"

said the girl almost sternly, turning her white, set face for one moment toward Raphael. "What have you done?"

"Alas, I know nothing of surgery," he answered, lifting his hands helplessly. He rose to his feet and Alberta knelt in his place.

"Lucien! Lucien!" she called, in tones low and tense.

His eyes opened and brightened as they rested on her, a faint smile appearing at the corners of his mouth. "You—safe—" he murmured, his whole heart in his absorbed gaze.

"Thanks to you—to you who are dying, and all for me!" she said wildly, without a tear.

"I am glad—to suffer—for you—even if I die," he said painfully.

"Oh, no, you are not to die," she panted, placing her hand on his. "Try—try to live. You must live—for me."

"Kiss me—Alberta!"

Raphael averted his face, tears started in Colinette's eyes, Harold at the foot of the stair turned his back, breathing hard, as Alberta, forgetting them all, leaned over and rested her face upon the face of the wounded man.

"Voilà!" cried the Owl in the upper room at

this instant, arresting the attention of every one below.

Hurrying to the door, Raphael saw a flotilla of six or seven canoes coming across the lake. "It is Three Bears," he said to Harold. "We may have more trouble yet to-day." He softly shut both the doors and barred them. The wind was now rapidly going down and the swell had already become less formidable. It was evident that these unwelcome canoes would arrive in safety.

When they did arrive, some thirty minutes later, Harold, Raphael and the Owl stood watching them from an upper window, ready to enter into a friendly conference with the newcomers, or to resist their attack, should they elect to interfere. In the half light of the lower room Alberta remained alone with Lucien, whose eyes were now closed in sleep or stupor. The stillness was broken only by the low voice of Colinette as she sat in her room, hushing her baby to sleep and singing softly about a lover who sought his lady—

Bien tard, après souper,
Ma luron, lurette;
Bien, tard après souper,
Ma luron, luré."

The appearance presented by Three Bears and

nine men of the tribe, as they came indolently up the slope and stood within thirty feet of the house, was scarcely formidable. They were all armed, all brawny fellows, and doubtless not altogether unworthy descendants of their ancient and once powerful tribe; but Harold thought a determined white man would be a match for any two of them. Three Bears was unmistakably hideous, but some of the younger men of his company were distinguished by a more or less comely regularity of feature and a certain nobility of expression, although their eyes were for the most part rather dull and sleepy in repose. They all wore rabbit-skin jackets, and lower garments of either buckskin or coarse cloth trousers purchased from the Hudson Bay Company.

Both Raphael and the Owl were acquainted with the native dialect and amicable salutes were promptly exchanged. Then Three Bears, looking about him curiously and with a suspicious manner remarked:

"I do not see the white chief who sent for me."

With assistance from the Owl, Raphael then told the story. It was soon clear that the Indians were amazed and incredulous, but one and all listened with characteristic patience.

When there was no more to be said Three Bears

spoke in answer, with much deliberation and circumlocution, introducing almost every statement with the native equivalent for the word "listen." He said that he had heard strange and unwelcome words, and intimated that it was his duty to see justice done the white chief whom his tribe in their gratitude had named Red Man's Friend. It might be that the white chief had done wrong to the woman—to the fair White Lady—for he had said that she was mad, and the Indians, watching her closely, had seen no madness in her. If she would go, let her go to her own people; women had been stolen before, and there were worse crimes. But that the white chief should break into other men's wigwams by night and steal their goods—surely this was lies. How could the white chief be held accountable for what could not be true? Red Man's Friend was rich and great—he was no thief. "You have taken him captive, but we must hear him speak," concluded Three Bears. "Open the doors and let us see and hear him."

Unknown to Harold, Raphael, or the Owl, Hawksworth had rolled over on the floor until within a foot of the other window, and he now shouted with all his strength:

"Three Bears, they lie! Shoot them and I will make you rich!"

At Harold's order Raphael and the Owl at once dragged the struggling and shouting captive into the lumber room and locked the door upon him. There his shouts could no longer be distinctly heard, but the mischief was done. He had spoken at the right moment. The Indians had heard his voice, his denial and his offer, and showed unmistakable excitement. They gripped their rifles threateningly, and at a sign from Three Bears drew off some distance to confer with each other.

Another conference which immediately took place at the upper window of The Retreat was both more brief and decisive. It was agreed that at the first war-like sign from without, three rifles should be fired simultaneously from the window, and that the firing should continue as long as a meddler remained visible and disposed to champion the prisoner's cause. That they could hold out and do deadly work until the Indians were largely reinforced, neither Harold nor Raphael entertained any doubt.

The history of that day might have included a second siege and much bloodshed, had not two canoes now reached the island shore unobserved. Before Three Bears and his men had arrived at a

definite conclusion as to what course to take, a white man and three Indians were seen coming up the slope. As his eye fell upon the huge frame and red beard of the former, Harold uttered an exclamation of satisfaction, recognizing Fate MacDonald of the Hudson Bay Company.

"Hello! what's the matter here?" cried MacDonald cheerfully, looking from the group of hesitating Indians to the determined men at the window.

"We've captured the man we came for," explained Harold, "but those red friends of his there seem disposed to interfere."

"They won't interfere now," said MacDonald, confidently. "They know me, and they know the H. B. C. They know that it won't pay to quarrel with the Company, not only because the Company's arm is long, but because the Company is their best friend next to God. And they know that it's a Company's man's business to take charge in a case like this."

He then walked over to the group of Indians and said a few words to Three Bears in the dialect, to which the chief listened in silence and gravely nodded assent, afterwards expressing himself decisively to his followers, who thereupon sauntered indolently down to their canoes. It was clear enough

that, as MacDonald had confidentaly asserted, these Indians were too wise to quarrel with the Company. Hawksworth was a good friend, but the Company was a better and an older. The white-washed storehouses of Fort Glengary had stood in their places a hundred years, and the time never was when a hungry Indian could not find food there in the days of scarcity. Some malign influence might send the caribou to other parts, and the hunting-grounds of the tribe might become a temporary desolation, but there was always flour for bread at the old trading post, and if the Indian could not bring a pelt to give in exchange, the game being gone, the wise and patient Company would take his promise instead.

"It's all settled," said MacDonald, returning. "Open your door and let's see the prisoner."

"Before everything else I want medical attention for my wounded friend," urged Harold. "Are you a doctor or surgeon?"

"Both—after my own fashion. A white man is apt to be a jack-of-all-trades in the north."

Bidding Three Bears await his return, MacDonald entered the house and proceeded to examine Lucien's wound. A small chest belonging to Hawksworth, which was provided with surgical instruments as well as medicines, was brought to him at

his request, and having given the patient a soothing potion, he began his investigations.

Alberta preferred not to be a witness of the operation and, going out, paced restlessly back and forth under the trees. Raphael also came out when assured that his services were no longer needed, bringing several pounds of tobacco, in small square plugs, which he distributed among the Indians, offering a double share to Three Bears. He included the three red men in the employ of the Company, but his object was to please Three Bears, and the nine men of his party still waiting at the landing. Though trusting to MacDonald's assurance that they would exhibit no further disposition to interfere, he thought it wiser to send them away in a good humor.

Alberta returned to the door several times, but on seeing the surgeon still occupied, she moved away again. In her preoccupation she was scarcely aware that Three Bears sat on a log not far away, or that he followed her every movement with a grave and contemplative eye. The voices of the Indians waiting by their canoes were like sounds heard in a dream. Neither the lake, now growing quiet, nor the deciduous and fast fading growth against the dark, unchanging firs on the higher

"He followed her every movement with a grave and contemplative eye."

ground attracted her eye. When at length Harold appeared at the door and saw her he knew that she was conscious only of a devouring anxiety, and he hastened to her side with words of hope.

Though the case was serious, he told her, there was a prospect of recovery. MacDonald was at first afraid that the ball was in the left lung and that to extract it would prove a critical operation, but fortunately it had just grazed that organ and lodged in the flesh to the left, and he had completed the operation without added danger.

"Cheer up," said Harold softly. "I can not believe that it will be fatal. Men have recovered from worse wounds. Proper nursing will no doubt bring him round."

The girl thanked him with a look, then turned her pale drawn face toward the lake, whose growing calm seemed now reflected in her eyes.

"If he lives and you should choose him, Alberta," the unhappy rival then bravely forced himself to say, "I'd be compelled to admit that I know no one more worthy. A month ago it would have been different, but he and I have been through the sort of experience that shows what a man is made of. I know him now for what he is, and it would be beastly of me to make trouble since you—" He was

about to say—"since you love him," but paused, then concluded: "Should you prefer him to me, Alberta, I know that there is only one thing for me to do."

It was a difficult speech, but he felt that he had gained his reward. It seemed to him that her eloquent glance distinguished him as with a laurel crown when she said:

"You are changed, Harold. You are not the boy you were. I am so proud of you—and so grateful."

XXIII.

A FEW minutes later, leaving Alberta and Colinette with Lucien, MacDonald ascended the stair accompanied by Harold and Raphael. The Owl was sent down to call Three Bears, and when Hawksworth was brought forth and placed in a chair facing the table whereat the representative of the Company sat, with writing paper spread out thereon, he understood that an informal hearing of his case was to take place, MacDonald taking the evidence, and the other two white men, the Indian, and the half-breed, testifying.

"Now speak slow, so that Owl can translate for Three Bears and I can take down as much of it as possible. The factor will want a full report," said MacDonald, after announcing that he desired a statement from each man present.

Harold was then called on, and without rising from his chair, he told the story of Arthur Biggs, the English burglar, whose capture and conviction had been brought about through his cousin Alber-

ta's cleverness, of the escaped convict's reappearance on Muskeg Lake under the name of Hawksworth, of his infatuation for Miss Ransom, the kidnapping, the pursuit, and the final discomfiture of the lawless man only that morning.

Raphael then told what had been his relations with Hawksworth from the beginning, and confessed that as soon as he had been reproached by Miss Ransom and fully understood what a wrong had been done her, he determined to betray his employer. His description of the method he adopted was interrupted by furious curses from Hawksworth, at which the nervous ex-priest visibly trembled. MacDonald was compelled to threaten to have the prisoner clubbed before he could be quieted. This was Hawksworth's only outburst during the hearing. His eyes often wandered restlessly to the face of Three Bears, causing the latter much uneasiness, but he did not venture to speak to his Indian friend.

Being called on, Three Bears merely told what he knew of Hawksworth's life on the Kaweagotami, laying much stress on the good will he had shown the Indians. The Owl did little more than corroborate such parts of Harold's narrative as his personal experience enabled him to do. Colinette,

when called into the room, timidly related what she knew of Hawksworth's relations with Miss Ransom, not omitting to mention the fact that the former had left the latter entirely to herself, except for an occasional chat when Miss Ransom walked out, and at dinner during a week past. She concluded with the remarkable statement that she reverenced the "good Monsieur" but thought it a cruel and unlawful thing that he had done to the "sweet lady," and then, observing that her utterance had provoked a smile, she retired in confusion.

Alberta was now requested to leave her charge with Colinette and come up to testify. Her story was brief and to the point. Her beauty, dignity, and composure, and her manifest desire to avoid exaggeration, made a profound impression on all present. "I must tell you," she said in conclusion, "that though this man is what he is and has done what he has done, his consideration for me after I was brought here left little to be desired. He said he wanted to win my love and, on the whole, he seemed really to try. His motive was selfish, you will say, but its influence was none the less fortunate for me. My life here was not the nightmare it might have be[illegible]."

As Alberta rose to retire, Harold rose also, and

this brought the whole court to its feet, including even the judge and the Indian chief. Thus she passed out from among them as a queen might have passed, and the object of a more genuine homage.

"I ain't a judge and you ain't a jury—this is just a taking of evidence," said MacDonald, "but I don't mind askin' some of you what you think ought to be done with the prisoner. What do *you* say, Three Bears?"

The chief seemed troubled as to how to answer, but clearly intimated that he washed his hands of the affair. He said he had been deceived by a bad man's fair words and good deeds. All these people who told the same story in different ways could not be liars; it must be the truth. He regretted only that Jeremiah was not there to confess his share in the kidnapping. It was not for Three Bears, the Indian, to say what should be done with the prisoner. It was a white man's quarrel and white men should choose the punishment.

"Well said," remarked MacDonald when the speech had been translated for Harold's benefit. "There's an Indian with a level head."

Being asked for his opinion, Raphael said he thought, provided it could be done, that the prisoner

ought to be taken south, carried to England, and delivered to the authorities there.

"I think he ought to be hanged on the spot," said Harold, emphatically, "and if there's to be a vote, I cast two votes for hanging—one for myself and one for Mr. Mérimée. We talked it over many times and that was our decision. It was his proposal. At first I wanted to kill him with my own hand, and so did he, but we agreed that the wretch was unworthy to die fighting. We made up our minds to capture him and then hang him, any other death being too good for him. If we had caught him alive near a civilized center we should of course have been willing to prosecute him in the courts, but we did not see how we could transport him south and felt that up here we should have to act not only as judge and jury but as executioner."

The fury and hate visible upon Hawksworth's face as Harold made this statement were startling to see. He looked and was in that moment a brother to caged tigers, yet he held his peace.

"If either of you had killed him in the fight," said MacDonald after a few moments of reflection, "there's not a man in the north who would have said a word or laid a hand on you, but now—I couldn't consent to hanging him, although I'm free

to say that he deserves it. He must go to Glengary. What the factor'll do with him I can't say, but it's likely he'll send him south and recommend that they ship him to England. As an escaped convict alone he would likely get up for twenty years, and this kidnappin' and the shootin' of your friend in addition may bring him a life sentence. I think it will, if you manage it right."

"You may depend on that," said Harold, as soon as he saw that argument would be futile. "I'll go to Glengary with you and to England with *him*. He deserves hanging on the spot for the kidnapping alone—in my opinion almost the worst of crimes,—but if I can't get a rope for him, I'll get at least a life sentence. I devote myself to it."

After taking a few more notes, MacDonald turned to the prisoner:

"And now what have *you* to say for yourself? What is your statement?"

"My statement," said Hawksworth with composure, but with a flame of hatred in his eyes, "is that every man who has spoken here is a liar, and that you are a d—d fool!"

Harold Ransom started half out of his chair, but subsided into his place as the representative of the

great trading company of the north began to laugh softly.

"I guess you calculated to wind up this meetin' with a witty remark and get the laugh on us," MacDonald said drily to the prisoner, "but after thirty or forty years of hard labor you'll be pretty apt to laugh on t'other side of your mouth."

An hour later Hawksworth was led out of the house and conducted to the shack, where he remained until his removal to Glengary, meanwhile being kept in bonds and under lock and key. By day he was left alone except when it was necessary to give him food, but the Owl agreed to sleep in the same room with him at night in order to give the alarm should any of the Indians led by Jeremiah attempt to rescue and set him free. MacDonald thought that such a precaution was now unnecessary, but Harold preferred the sense of security which the arrangement furnished, and liberally rewarded the faithful half-breed for his devotion.

MacDonald voluntarily proposed to stay several days in order to watch Lucien, until it was seen whether he would begin to grow better or worse. On the fifth day the patient's condition was pronounced so favorable as to render it reasonably safe to leave him in the hands of good nurses, MacDon

ald explaining that he was the more willing to do so seeing that at Glengary he would be near enough to be called if unfavorable symptoms such as he did not anticipate should develop. But, yielding to Harold's urgent solicitations, he extended his sojourn to ten days, at the expiration of which he confidently declared that complete recovery was only a matter of time. He stated, however, that the patient would be unable to travel for weeks and should not attempt to leave The Retreat before midwinter at the earliest.

If desirable Lucien could arrange to remain with Raphael and Colinette at The Retreat during the entire winter. Harold would of course accompany MacDonald and the prisoner to the trading post and later, in pursuance of his expressed determination, convey the latter to England and see to it that this time the "masterful" lawbreaker would be incarcerated for life. But what of Alberta?

Harold expected her to go south with him and made his plans accordingly, but before the day of departure arrived he learned that such was not her intention.

"I am glad Lucien has improved so rapidly," he said to her as they walked out together in the bright cold afternoon, "because we need to start at the

earliest possible day. If we get caught by the freeze-up travel will be very difficult, and we must hurry."

There was indeed need of haste. Already light snow had lain on the ground for days, and the air blew so cold over the lake that at early morning the water froze on the paddles between dips. The pale sunshine had lost all its warmth and little color was left in the landscape. For weeks the forests had been on fire with bright hues, scarlet and golden leafage flaming against evergreen walls. But all this glory had now faded, leaving only the last faint echoes of summer, the paling sunset radiance standing between the day that was gone and the night of winter that was at hand. The water-ways were soon to be in the grip of the ice king.

"We need not halt very long at the trading post, and I think we can get out just in time—from what they tell me," continued Harold. "Lucien of course will have to stay till spring or come out on a dog-sled. As for the convict, having him go out with us need not be disagreeable to you. We can of course travel in two parties."

"I must stay here, Harold."

"*Here?*"

"Yes. I hope you won't be displeased, because

I care a great deal for your good opinion," faltered Alberta, "but I can't leave him and have told him so. How do we know that through some neglect he may not take fever and—die! I can't trust him to Raphael and Colinette. I could not endure the suspense. He expected and wished me to go—he thought it right—but he has almost consented for me to stay."

"But how can you?" asked Harold, much troubled.

"This is not England, and only real things matter here," she argued. "Besides, we shall not be alone but in the house of our friends, Raphael and Colinette, who are man and wife. If it is a chaperon that the family at Redwood would think necessary, Colinette must serve." Alberta averted her face as she added: "My mind is made up and I would stay in any case. Whenever we can leave here we shall go south and be married at the first opportunity. Raphael and Colinette will go with us, for they do not expect to remain on the Kaweagotami."

Both Harold and Alberta were glad to be interrupted. Little Cloud, who had just landed, came straight to his adored "White Lady," and they turned to speak to him. It was the boy's third visit

since the new conditions had brought him forgiveness and freedom to cross to the island, and Harold had heard the story of his devotion.

"I have ordered made for you the finest canoe the country affords," he now told the boy, "and Raphael says he will paint 'White Lady' on it—wouldn't you like that? And that is not all, my Little Cloud: I expect to send you from the south, the finest little rifle in Canada."

Every one was awake and out of bed at four o'clock in the morning, two days later, MacDonald having decreed an early start. After standing by as Harold and Lucien, each with a smile of genuine good will, exchanged the last hand-clasp and parting word in the fire-lit room which the invalid occupied, Alberta walked down with the former and stood on the ice-covered stones at the water's edge to see the party off.

She was in time to witness the removal of the prisoner from the shack. Preceded by an Indian bearing a torch, Hawksworth walked down to the landing between MacDonald and the Owl, each with a hand on his pinioned arms. As he passed near Alberta, she noted that he was not lacking in composure, though his eyes roved restlessly about. On seeing her, he halted for an instant and seemed

about to speak, but she quickly averted her eyes, and, being pulled forward, he passed on in silence. He was placed in the center of one of the canoes and a rope tied round his waist was attached to the thwart against which he leaned—a precaution against possible temptation to suicide.

"You have shown the generosity of a great soul, Harold, dear, and you will find your reward," said Alberta, as she clung to her cousin's hand in parting.

He could not trust himself to say more than a simple goodbye, and turning blindly from her, Harold stepped into his canoe, knelt in his place, and they were off.

Alberta stood some moments alone, listening to the dip of the paddles and straining her eyes after the dusky canoes as they skimmed rapidly out on the bosom of the lake, now white and glistening beneath the paling stars, then she turned her steps toward the fire-lit room of The Retreat, where waited the promise of a great enduring happiness.

THE END.