



PENNY SCOT'S TREASURE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

NOVELS

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THE ISLAND PROVIDENCE
A WILDERNESS OF MONKEYS
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✓ THE PORCELAIN LADY
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MAPLE-LEAF SONGS

✓ Penny Soot's Treasure
✓ A Tale that is Told
The Walrus

PENNY SCOT'S TREASURE

BY
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TO
JOSEPH LEE
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CHAPTER I

AT SAINT ANTHONY'S CROSSING

THE wind was blowing a hurricane up in the mountains, bending the great firs like rushes by lake sides.

'This is a nice welcome to Saint Anthony's Crossing!' said Mrs. Morley, nodding toward the rain-lashed window-panes.

'It really is!' answered Sadie, meaning it, not speaking in irony. 'There are places that are made miserable by rain, but this—— Why, it's invigorating and splendid! The storm just stirs up all the scents of the mountains, and it is good to be alive. Listen to that!'

'That' was a sharp crack in the forest—of some tree snapped by the gale, and the sound of its collapse followed, audible amid the rushing roar of the wind, a sound of further rending of trunk and smashing branches of other trees—then a sullen thud.

Saint Anthony's Crossing, as you know, is the centre for that great new bit of land called the Cartaret Block, up in the north-west, where, by a happy conjunction of protecting mountain spurs and alluvial soil, the ranchers can raise excellent crops of Number One Buckeye—or Cockeye, or some such-named wheat—sometimes, if the pamphlets are accurate, even two crops of wheat in the fierce, brief summer; and thanks to the same lie of the land they can winter horses, without stall-feeding, winter them in sheltered valleys. Places like the Cartaret Block lure the adventurous spirit, the lovers of elbow-room. Nominally they come there to open farms, to 'take up homes,' but they are really there because it is the last new patch in the north-west, because just beyond it is virgin land, because it is, even in this twentieth century, a 'frontier,' the latest maps showing half the rivers, only over its border to north, as mere uncertain dots, the result of hearsay rather than of survey.

Sadie Dixon, like a girl in a story-book, was up here to make a living for herself, and I would make her a schoolmarm too, only she

wasn't. She was manageress, head-waitress, boss, what-you-may-call-it, of Morley's hotel. It was something of an innovation to have a manageress—stress on the last three letters. Morley had wanted a manager, had advertised for one, and Sadie, seeing the advertisement did not stipulate 'man,' had replied. To be sure she might have taken the word 'manager' as masculine, and, like a purist, refrained from application because 'or manageress' was not added. Morley had had some smart waitresses in his time, and the notion of a manageress, sprung at him in the signature to a very capable letter, settled the matter. He only glanced at the signatures of applications after hers, and she was the only 'She' to apply. So here she was, after a long journey on the cars from Calgary, by Edmonton, and by the tossing stage.

She had just finished writing out the Bills of Fare for the evening—Morley had not gone the length of Menu-card, leaving that for the plate-glass avenues of Calgary and Edmonton, and Bill of Fare seemed more in common with the brand new, sawdust and resin-smelling Saint

Anthony—when Mrs. Morley entered with her comment on the weather; and Sadie's non-ironic agreement had just been given when Morley followed, threw himself into a chair, stretched his legs, and grabbing his beard in hand, with a 'Well, mommer!' to his wife, inquired of the manageress: 'How are you making out, Miss Dixon?'

'So far as I'm concerned—very well,' said she. 'The main question is whether my employer——'

'Your employer is satisfied all right,' he assured her. 'I'm glad to hear your side is pleased. I was some doubtful at first. In a new place like Saint Anthony there is a scarcity of female society, and some young ladies might find us uncouth.'

'I've had more real courtesy shown me here and on the way here,' said Sadie, 'than I've experienced anywhere. It would have been comical if it had not been charming. I wasn't allowed to carry my grips an inch. I wasn't even allowed to climb into the rig that brought me here until a box had been put down to mount

up by. The cars from Edmonton to railhead were full, men standing, and I was ashamed——'

'Whatever for?' asked Mrs. Morley, in an odd way she had, interrupting instead of waiting for explanation.

'I fell asleep,' Sadie explained, 'and when I woke I found that the man sitting opposite had rolled up his coat and put it for my head to rest on, and had got up—vacated his seat.'

'Yes, take us all round, we may be tough but we know how to treat a lady,' remarked Morley.

The words were hardly out of his mouth when all looked up, and in the doorway was a man whose very presence suggested a belying of that statement. Mrs. Morley stiffened; Morley's eyelids half closed, while his eyes hardened. The pupils, from being soft, infused with kindness, changed, so that they looked as though they were made of some cold, gray stone. Sadie thought she must have shuddered visibly, and was annoyed with herself, for she would rather have shown unconsciousness of this man's presence.

He was large and fleshy, of a heavy fleshiness,

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full-lidded; his upper lip was more like a warning than part of a mouth, oddly turned forward and out; his hand, resting on a hip, was large and strong-looking, but markedly feminine, reminding one of the hand of a very big doll-like woman, the fingers running abruptly from the plump to taper points with filbert nails; even his hands seemed as a warning. His face shone from the rain and a recent wash.

'Am I too early to have supper, Mr. Morley?' he asked, but looked from Morley to Sadie and again from Morley to Sadie—with a veering of his eyes.

'If you just go out to the desk,' replied Morley coldly, 'and punch the bell if you don't see anyone behind the desk, you will hear all about the establishment.'

'No offence I hope,' said the man in the doorway, drawing himself erect so that he looked more combative than apologetic.

'Not at all,' answered Morley. 'But there's a desk out there and a bell in front of it. I keep my private life and my life as a hotel-proprietor

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separate. I never do business in my own sitting-room.'

'Oh, I'm sorry. I've just arrived, and——' he glanced at Sadie and back again.

'You punch the bell,' Morley repeated.

'I've just come in, and I see the dining-room is shut, and——'

Morley rose and advanced in his slow, travelling-crane manner that made him look as if he was affixed to the end of some moving shaft of steel. The effect of his progress was to suggest that when he reached the other he would just squarely push against him—say like a locomotive buffer—and thrust him out.

'I'll show you where the bell is,' he said grimly.

The man in the door backed before him, eyes blazing. Morley stood still. Outside in the vestibule the man turned and departed without further ado; then came the loud punch of a bell and the proprietor moved off. As he disappeared Sadie and Mrs. Morley heard him say: 'Yes, sir, what can I do for you?' as though the interview at the door of the sitting-room had not

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taken place. If there had not been something so gross, so ostentatiously gross in the man, Sadie would have laughed at this climax.

'He'll take it lying down,' Mrs. Morley murmured. 'He knows Morley is in the right. And he knows Morley can easily tell him the house is full.'

'Supper I said I wanted,' came to them from the hall. 'I don't suppose you run to a schedule in a town where a man is liable to come in off the mountains at any time.'

'Oh, yes—you want supper. It's ten to six now.' They could picture how Morley was looking up at the clock. 'Dining-room will be open in ten minutes.'

'I just feel as if I wouldn't like that man to touch the table my hand was resting on,' said Mrs. Morley. 'There's something right horrible about him. He should be a big handsome fellow by his size and his build, but I find him surely repellent.'

'I admit I wouldn't like to shake hands with him,' said Sadie.

'You're not the only one,' said Mrs. Morley.

'Others feel it too. I've seen him go up to a man and hold out his hand, and the other man said: "How-do! You must excuse me, but my hand's in my pocket." I've heard lots of boys talking about him, about his manner, his—halo—no, a word like that. Joe explained it to me—aura! that's it. When that fellow said: "Excuse me, but my hand's in my pocket," I expected trouble, but Squire—that's his name—Squire just laughed and turned his back. He knew the sympathy of every man who saw was against him.'

'I shall begin to be sorry for him in a minute,' remarked Sadie.

'Whatever for?'

'I always do feel sorry for people with a down on them.'

'Oh, there's no down on him!' exclaimed Mrs. Morley, though her next sentence almost contradicted that statement. 'Folks don't have a "down" on any one in a frontier town for nothing. But they feel things. There are heaps of tough men here, and heaps that could do with a whole lot of reforming, but I don't know any of them that

seem so—what will I say?—well, so brazen as that Squire about his halo of plumb wickedness.'

The talk dwindled. Really Sadie did not feel inclined to be sorry for this man, he had left such a horrible impression behind. His very manner, and the way he stood there, were like insults. She was haunted by his voice as it sounded when he spoke, outside there, about men being liable to come in any time from the mountains. From one of the windows she could see a scarp of the mountains shouldering up desolate, lonely, luring and forbidding, into the driving rain and cloud-wrack. Her drive into Saint Anthony had been through a lonely enough stretch—the loneliest in her experience so far—but it had been by a road, a cleared road of two deep ruts through the woods, and the little pockets of plains. Once or twice on the way she had seen trails luring off into the forests on either hand; but now, after this man had stood in the doorway and left this sense as of something evil in the room, she sat and looked at the desolate range, with the storm-clouds sweeping over it, feeling afraid. From here to the Rockies west, from here to the Arctic Sea north,

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so she considered, one could move on and on and never meet a living human being, unless one knew the precise far-scattered, far-sundered spots where men were to be found. The last spare settlements, the further infrequent trading-posts, were as nothing. Imagine meeting a man like that alone in the mountains! It would be like a nightmare! But the notion could well be dismissed, it would never be lived, for no woman does go alone through these lands. She wrote the last of the Bills of Fare, gathered all together, and, as she was thrusting back her chair, Morley returned.

'I've read,' said he, 'of a squire of dames. Squire is that galoot's name,' he flung off to his manageress with a sidewise jerk of head. 'Not much squire of dames about him, eh, Molly? What do you know?'

But as that was to his wife, and as Sadie was not asked to wait and give her opinion—tell what she 'knew'—she departed to put the Bills of Fare on the tables, entering the dining-room through the kitchen. And then it was time, after a warning to the cook, to open the doors. In came the congregating diners. It was very true that the

males, as Morley had said, were in the majority in Saint Anthony. In they came, Squire among them, radiating an air of appetite and a kind of robustious, restrained wildness. How could it be otherwise? There were many kinds of men, but all had one trait in common, the love of being at the beginning of things.

Taking them by and large, taking them in the bunch, Sadie preferred them infinitely to an average crowd in any big city restaurant. She did not censorially condemn them for their way of amusing themselves in town, for the blowing away of hard-earned dollars in cigars, so that the street was hazy blue with them; for the nickel-in-the-slot gambling machines, hard at work despite gaming laws—their presence suggesting some connivance between store-keepers and the law-executors. Had she been less trustful she would have known that the innocent skittle-alley along the street was really a gambling-joint, and instead of thinking how childish were the young men to pour in there of evenings—well, she would have known the truth. But after all men gamble in other places than in nominal skittle-alleys.

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It was only the 'drunks,' not to put too fine a point upon it, that hurt her heart. Saint Anthony was just far enough away from a railway in construction to keep its saloons open, as the law was; and liquor was procurable for celebrations, treats, joys, sorrows, instead of only medicinally; liquor was procurable 'right there,' for consumption on the premises. In the matter of strong waters Sadie had a side of her—the softer side already indicated—that was touched often less to censure than to regret. One small bit of moralising she did allow herself—and that was in wondering how men confronted by these great and wonderful mountains, these great and wonderful skies, these vasty manifestations of cloud-burst or of moon soaring as if out of some witching glade, some well of magic, could ever want to be drunken on anything but the vivacity of the place and the good, joyous air. This consideration she even voiced to Morley once. He took it as if he was guilty. Perhaps he, in his time, when he was younger, had 'celebrated.'

'They will do it,' he said. 'You see they work

in the woods or what-not months on end, and then hit town—lost like sailors in a port.'

'The attractions seem to be all wrong,' said Sadie. 'Wouldn't a library be welcomed?'

'I guess not,' he replied. 'Most of them would look on a library as a kind of charity. And anyhow—do they buy books? Do they ask for books? No! I guess when they come to town the notion is not to improve their minds, but to fuddle 'em, or to frisk 'em. Yet they ain't bad boys,' and he gloomed a trifle.

'That's just why I'm kind of sorry to see so many of them so often like that,' said Sadie.

She had sorrow in that vein this very night. Passing again through the dining-room at supper-time, to see that all was going well, she observed a youth of a type that seemed to centre in Saint Anthony—to centre, she presumed, in all such places, in all the world's Saint Anthonys—a lean, long-nosed, humorous-mouthed young man, his eyes announcing to all who could see that he had had a goodly allowance of what is called 'song-and-stagger juice.' She was not the only one to be touched by his condition. There are 'oiled'

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young men who are the cause of merriment; there are 'oiled' young men who are kept a furtive watch on, not eyed too obviously lest that precipitate trouble, but watched from time to time from the corners of the eyes—a flick of a look, and gone. This one was of neither variety. There was something forlorn about him. He seemed to her to be the last man in the world who should be like this, with these mountains standing up before him so serene to-night after the storm had blown over, and a sacred sunset blazed in the new-washed west.

He was brown as a light Indian. He was groomed, shaved like an advertisement for shaving cream or a razor. He was, like those men in the smart novels, 'clean-limbed.' Whether he also had 'straight legs' she, of course, could not see, for they were tucked under the table. Of those near him, only one was inclined to 'josh,' and he was the most Yahoo-looking of the diners present. ('Yahoo,' by the way, is not slang, or journalese, or what is called Americanese. It comes from Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*.) At the head of the table sat a man not unlike Uncle Sam, in a long

frock coat (Sadie knew him to be manager of the Saint Anthony hardware stores), who looked at this trig, yet deranged young man from time to time under his brows as he ate. It was a look that showed how he too felt the discrepancy between the other's state and face.

Talk broke out, and the 'oiled' one joined in with great air of restraint, of control. Only the Yahoo grinned as at something amusing; Sadie thought the Yahoo was indeed a fool. She had seen him driving a load of timber through town that afternoon, and considered now that he was like one of his own horses, heavy, sleek, complacent. He nudged with an elbow the man who sat beside him, made some remark evidently intended to draw out the 'oiled' case; but the fatherly, frock-coated Uncle Sam, bending slightly over his raised fork, glanced at the would-be joshier (not slang, please, but from 'Josh Billings') as if he had found him an interloper, an ignoramus, one void of understanding. Yet holding himself erect, that odd air of sobriety overdone, the young man gave answer—and all smiled, except the joshier. Sadie decided that the 'oiled' youth was

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liked, and had been clever instead of just making a fool of himself.

And then she saw him look past her, fix his gaze very definitely somewhere in the background. Glancing round to discover the cause she found Squire at a table. He looked a gross creature indeed sitting there, even more markedly than when he stood in the doorway of the private sitting-room. He met her eye and did not look away. It annoyed her to think that she was the one who did so. Make no mistake, nor think that Squire was the only man in the room who saw her—who looked at her. There was a mere kid at another table whose obvious devotion would have turned some girls' silly heads, and set them flaunting with the thought of one more conquest. He was just a kid, a roving, wander-fret kid, of the breed that a century ago used to tie up lunch and a jack-knife in a blue handkerchief and hit for the docks to be cabin-boy of a privateer, but nowadays works a passage, or beats his way, and somehow gets to the Saint Anthonys.

But Squire was a different matter. The sedate young tippler, who had roused Sadie's interest,

thought so too, hence his attempt to fix Squire's eyes, to be found by Squire fixing him so when the latter should have done trying to ogle the new manageress. Sadie moved away to the kitchen, fulfilling her duties of suzerainty, though little were they needed; the hotel was running, as Morley said, 'on wheels,' but he liked his manageress to be on deck, to be in evidence at meal-times. It gave an air of what he called 'snap' to the establishment.

When she returned again Squire had gone, and the young man of her interest had risen. At his side was the elderly manager of the hardware store, she was glad to see, culling him not too obviously, but culling him with a friendly: 'What have you on to-night? What do you say to a game of billiards?' Fatherly among the juniors, he was, very clearly to her, aiming at keeping from 'tanking up' one whom he thought worth keeping.

'Forget him,' he was saying. 'He's of no account.'

'That's all right,' said the young man. 'I got him to see I was looking at him. I held his eye too long for him not to savvy, but I want to go

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around and see if I can find him, just to pass by so that he can have a chance to tell me what he thinks of me——'

'Oh, he's no account.'

'I don't know.'

'Well,' meditative, 'of course if you want to, but I would like to put a view of the matter before you for your consideration—as a man not without intellect.'

'Flatterer!'

'No, sir!' very stately. 'I do not flatter. I would suggest that your look was enough. To go and put yourself in his way, however subtly you did it, would be—er—well, to put yourself in his way, to overstress the incident. You did not like his manner. You telegraphed your opinion of him. But to place yourself in his way now would be worse than to evade.'

'Very well put, sir,' said one of the other men, rising.

'I agree,' said the object of their solicitations. 'You put the case with Socratic wisdom.'

'My dear fellow,' broke out the hardware manager, and said no more, turned to take down

his hat from a peg. 'Come and have a cigar with me on the veranda, where we can set our heels on the rail and get a quiet spell till it is time for you early-bird toilers to be in bed.'

Sadie's heart went a trifle faster. She felt like an eavesdropper. They had not noticed her return to the room, and part of their conversation, she knew, had been of her. She had not been blind to that young man's stare at Squire any more than she had managed to escape Squire's insolent gaze.

'Very well, we'll dismiss him for the time being,' she heard. 'But if he looks crooked at her——'

'We'll lynch him. That's what!' said one of the others.

The dining-room door suddenly opened and she looked up, expecting a late diner. It was Squire, back once more. He glanced from her to the little group, then head up, with that passive, mask-like expression on his face, trod to the place at which he had eaten, and with a deliberate gesture took a tooth-pick from a sheaf in a small pot that stood there on the table. Sadie kept her head down, it seemed, and yet, if you take my meaning,

she saw the whole room—even to two men at a far table, somewhat 'out of the picture.' She saw everything, certainly saw the queer, supercilious light on Squire's face as he trod back to the door, saw Uncle Sam move a hand in the manner of a benign host, to usher before him the younger man who had drawn up in a kind of imitation—belligerent imitation—of Squire's pose. Sadie was impelled to depart, and did so, toward the kitchen. By the time she reached it, Squire had left the room, and the others were just making an exit.

'My goodness!' she thought. 'That Squire man does give me the creeps. I wouldn't mind meeting the half-jagged boy on a trail in these awful mountains, but the other, sober as a judge—well, it would be as if I met a toad six feet high flopping down on me, upright on its hind legs. There's something wrong with that man. There is something horrible, I believe, about him.'

CHAPTER II

OLSON MAKES INQUIRIES

A MAN who came to the door of the private sitting-room the next day, when all three—Morley, his wife, and the manageress—were there again, even as on the evening of last chapter, did so in a totally different way. In Mrs. Morley's phrase, a phrase new to Sadie (it stuck in her mind somehow), he was 'quite a different pair of sleeves.' It was for all the world like a piece of stage-craft, a study in contrast—'look on this picture, and on *this*'—designed to show how two people can do the same thing, and how, though with one it is annoying, with another it is all right.

'Excuse me, Mr. Morley, coming to your private room,' brought all three heads round to find a man at the door, a big man too (they run to big proportions in such places as Saint Anthony), a hefty, square-jawed fellow who moved loosely, with a suggestion of running muscles

under his baggy clothes. Morley rose, looking an inquiry, and nodding.

‘ Good-day to you, sir.’

‘ Can I have a word with you?’ asked the newcomer.

‘ Why, it’s you, Mr. Olson!’ Morley ejaculated. ‘ I didn’t recognise you. Where have you blown in from?’

‘ From riding up and down and hiking to and fro. You may ask! “ Blown in ” is the word. That was some storm—I hear you got it here too. I wanted to have a word with you, if it was convenient.’

‘ Why certainly. We’ll—we’ll go——’

Sadie rose to depart.

‘ Oh, don’t let me——’ began Olson, giving her a glance and a bow.

‘ That’s all right,’ said Morley. ‘ All right, Miss Dixon. You stay—we’ll go.’

‘ It surely ain’t as private as that,’ remarked Olson.

‘ But I can go and look after——’ said Sadie.

‘ You stay right where you are if Mr. Olson says it ain’t so private,’ advised Morley. ‘ You’re

through for the morning. You've no call to be running around housekeeping any more.'

Olson blurted out his business at once, as if to settle the matter, and that was how Sadie heard this part. What came to her ears later she overheard, in a sense more nearly to the precise.

'I only wanted to ask you,' said Olson slowly, his voice and manner that of a man with much patience, 'if you ever heard of an old-timer around here, or anyone along the Pine River, or the Peace, or Norman's River, known as something like Penobscot?'

'Penobscot—Maine,' said Mrs. Morley.

Olson turned to her and bowed deeply. 'Thank you, ma'am,' he said, but seemed unsatisfied with the reply.

'Well, if it isn't anybody from Penobscot, Maine,' said Morley, 'if it ain't Penobscot This or That——'

'No. Plain Penobscot—or something of the sort.'

Morley wrinkled his brows and with one hand gripped his beard in a way that Sadie soon came to associate with him, a trick, a mannerism.

'How about Penny Scot?' he inquired.

'Well, was there such a person?'

'There was surely!' said Morley. 'I saw him first at Athabasca Landing when Athabasca Landing was just a landing, so to speak. Did you never hear of Penny Scot?'

'No, sir.'

'Well, he prospected some in his day. He was at Edmonton when they called it Fort Edmonton, and he outfitted there for the winter—and was gone seven years. And do you know where he was these seven years? Away up the Smoky and the Peace, the Pine, the Norman, the Liard, and the Pelly. He was kind of—well, I wouldn't say crazy—when he came back, but he had that absent-minded, subdued Robinson Crusoe air about him. He could surely take care of himself. I often used to wonder what his story and his name might be.'

'Not Scot, then?'

'No, sir. At least, I don't think so. He had a bit of a Scottish accent, and as it was said he came into this country with nothing but a pack-norse and his blankets, they called him Penny Scot. He struck me as a man that had had an

education, but you know how easy it is to drop one's grammar and moods and tenses, knocking about like that. The rumour was that he was one of those old fellows that didn't think banks safe—and packed his money in his belt and his boots. Rumour? Well, he said so himself. That made folks not believe it, but men that go off on seven-year trips all on their lonesome away up till they're looking south on the butt-end of the Rockies, instead of east or west at the flanks of them—well, I guess they think they can look after themselves and all the gold-belts in the world.'

'And where did he end up?' asked Olson.

'Search me!' ejaculated Morley. 'Have a cigar.'

Olson accepted one, but did not light up at once.

'Yes, search me,' said Morley, shaking his head. 'Of course you've heard enough of stories to know all kinds of yarns get around about all such fellows. You see them in a neighbourhood a spell, turning up and going out into the hills again, turning up—and then no more. If you're a wanderer yourself you maybe run across them somewhere else, doing the same thing, coming

into town for flour and a case of cartridges, then off. Or maybe you hear stories of them when folks are swopping reminiscences and gossip of where they've been. Then they disappear, and somebody says: "You can't tell. He might have been murdered." Another says: "He was murdered."

Olson glanced thoughtfully at the proprietor, then transferred his gaze to the tip of his cigar, and said: 'Is there a rumour that he ended that way, then?'

'Oh no, I didn't mean that! I'm not speaking of Penny Scot specially. Of course if a man like that holds a claim you know if he's working it, or if somebody's putting in the assessment for him. But if he didn't stake anything—well, he just disappears from that section. Maybe someone mentions him and asks if he's been seen, and somebody else has a hunch that he's liable to have had one winter too many, snowed up, or was wintering somewhere, instead of hitting a town and holding down a hotel-stove for the season, and has maybe passed in his checks to King Blizzard, or been starved out. No, I guess old Penny Scot

could rustle grub someway—if he was snow-bound in the Coppermine Country!’

‘Do they say he was snowed-up, then?’ was Olson’s next question, asked in a casual way.

‘Not that I ever heard,’ said Morley. ‘He may have made good, and be sitting sunning himself in the park back east, giving kids nickels and backwoods yarns. I don’t know what came of him.’

‘He’s only at his meandering,’ Mrs. Morley interrupted, with a laugh.

‘But it is sure interesting meandering,’ said Olson. ‘It is just all about this Great Lone Land, what’s left of it, that he’s talking,’ and upon my word there was an ecstatic—a reservedly ecstatic—look in his eyes as of a visionary.

‘We spell it differently now,’ Morley commented. ‘It’s L-o-a-n in these days.’

‘I don’t know!’ said Olson, jibbing. ‘I know there’s been a lot of realising money on paper propositions, but it’s a rich country too! The mineral’s in place, and there’s oil sure, and there’s coal enough for the world for ages. It’s a clever enough josh—L-o-a-n, but I’m—well, I got a

plumb attachment for the Lone Land, and I've got all kinds of faith in its future.'

'And so have I,' Morley assured him in conciliating tones.

Olson was evidently conciliated. 'Did this Penny Scot make good?' he asked, getting back to his theme.

'I believe he did—once or twice,' answered Morley. 'I believe he sold a couple of claims in his time, in B.C., each of them for what I would call a fortune. How he spent them I don't know—if he spent them at all.' He saw where his talk was leading him, that he did not know much about Penny Scot. 'The fact is,' he said, 'he was such a quiet fellow nobody knew much about him. He told me he had a trip round the world on the sale of one of his lucky strikes, and that would have left an ordinary man with a good deal over. It could be done on interest, let alone capital—a trip round the world. It can be done at a pinch for six or seven hundred dollars, to say nothing of being done by a young man working his way for nix! But you can never tell. If you can get hold of some old-timer from B.C. he might be able to

tell you more exactly. I recall one conversation into which Scot butted to tell about the Nile. He'd been there all right. He said what he liked about the Sphinx was that it didn't get bored with the tourists, just sat quiet paying no attention. And he had been to Monte Carlo, I think, too.'

'That's one hunk of capital and sale of a claim accounted for,' said Olson, with a laugh. 'When folks break the bank there they make a vaudeville song of it, and I never heard of one about Penny Scot.'

'I think he must have kept a fair wad, anyhow, out of his two strikes,' said Morley, 'for he was not, so far as our paths crossed, one of those prospectors that has to—or does—work a spell for wages. So far as I know he never worked for a grub-stake. I've seen him around town playing solitaire in a corner, but I never saw him doing a day's work toward buying an outfit—only saw him buying it, and then: "So-long, Penny Scot."'

'Then he had either a bank-book and drew when he was in town, or he had a jag of money in

his belt the way he said,' Mrs. Morley gave definite opinion.

'That's what, ma'm,' Olson agreed.

'Of course,' said Morley, 'a man can easy sink an awful heap of money in the country just in looking for more. He may have died poor.'

Olson went solemn over that. A shadow passed on his face. He was as a man who has felt something painful and personal where nothing personal was intended. Sadie made a note to herself that never once did Mr. Morley ask this man what he wanted to know about old Penny Scot the prospector for. The omission interested her in her employer, and she liked him for it. That he must, in a human sort of way, have wondered, she was sure. Her hazard was right, but Morley was very much of a Westerner, of that kind who would not for worlds transgress his unwritten code regarding the ill-breeding of asking questions of that sort. Olson's inquiries were all in order; to ask why he was moved to put them would be beyond the mark. It was in a lull, while Olson stared at the floor, that Sadie thus considered and

Morley thus did not ask: 'What's put you on to him?'

'I only wondered,' said Olson, after that lull, looking up, 'because I ran across an old Indian who was talking about him—at least it seems to be the same man he was talking about. It sounded, the way he said it, like Penobscot.'

'That would be right, I expect,' said Morley, 'though Penny Scot was never on to any oil proposition. They were not thinking of oil in his time—at least, in his time around here. Oil up here is about as new as Saint Anthony.'

Olson looked profound, too profound.

'Well, that's really why I was asking you,' he explained. 'I wanted to know if this Penny Scot had left behind, or dropped any hints, about his views on oil.'

He was not born for diplomacy. He had the air of clutching at a graceful way out, closure of the talk. But Morley was born to believe rather than be dubious, and did not notice that.

'Bless you, no,' he replied. 'Oil and coal were in a different world from him.' He suspected nothing beyond an interest in oil, and possible oil

areas, behind Olson's visit, and arrived at the opinion that he had at last managed to give an answer to the crucial question. 'B.C. is where you'd hear most of him now, I guess. He only came through here when he was getting on in years. He is a grey old person if he's still above ground.'

'I guess,' said Olson. 'Well, it was only curiosity. Thank you for telling me. Here's to you, Mr. Morley, in your cigar,' and bowing he backed away, holding up the cigar a moment in air as a glass is held in toasting, then bit off the end as he made exit.

After he had gone Morley turned to his manageress.

'That's Jack Olson,' he said, 'generally called "Oilson" because his game is petroleum. By all stories he's got to get some petroleum somewhere if only to refund him for what he's put out in looking for it. Kind of sorry I said that about putting money in the earth, but I don't think he noticed it.'

'I wonder why he's so eager to know about Penny Scot,' said Mrs. Morley.

'Why, he told you! You heard him! He got his name from some old Indian in the woods, and wondered if Scot had any notions about oil land.'

'So he said,' she replied, stressing the last word. 'It's the only explanation he offered, and then not until you suggested it. For that reason I don't believe it.'

'Oilson is a white man——' began her husband.

'Oh, sure! Oilson is a white man, but he's deep. He was feeling about for something about Scot that might leak out without asking.' She sat thoughtful, going over the conversation for clues as to what might have been gained by "Oilson" in the course of it. 'I don't know whether he got it or not, but *oil* is not the secret of his interest, this time. That was the one bit of the pow-wow when he was only, as they say, talking. No; I don't know if he got what he wanted, but that was certainly to put you off either what he had found, or what he was hunting.'

'Think so?' said Morley, but in his easy, lenient way, as if it did not much matter.

'Yes, I do!' said she. 'It's not the ones that talk but the ones that listen who get the drift best.'

Don't you think he was after something, Miss Dixon?'

'To tell the truth, I didn't listen carefully,' said Sadie.

'But you couldn't help hearing!' ejaculated Mrs. Morley.

'She means she didn't listen that way,' explained Morley, who understood, or thought he understood, his manageress's nature better than did his wife—for didn't he see more of her? 'It wasn't her affair, so she did not listen, as one might say, acute.'

'Well, that's beyond me!' said Mrs. Morley, but she was not—if shrewd—a vinegary lady; so though it was beyond her she left it at that, with a jolly enough laugh, and the whole thing might have been dismissed from their minds, certainly from Sadie's mind, had that lady not overheard later a discussion in which the name of Olson was remarkably prominent.

CHAPTER III

OLSON MAKES PLANS

OLSON went out from his chat with Morley with heavy, expressionless face. If build and bearing advertise a man, here was a patient man, a thorough man, a man of much kindliness; also the kind of man who, at the end of a misplaced kindliness, might show himself an adamant person. Certainly, too, he looked upon occasion as if he could arise (after due and fair consideration) and hit hard. Strolling on to the sidewalk he lit his cigar, blew an easy feather of smoke, flicked a shred of tobacco-leaf from the tip of his tongue, and leisurely moved into the midst of the tangling and disentangling crowd that went past the door. Whether he had found, or had not found, what he wanted to obtain from his talk with Morley, his face gave no announcement.

Past all the new stores, their woodwork in many places still exuding sap, showing blisters of resin,

he walked, or as he would have said, projected himself along the sidewalk. Now and then as he went there would be a nod, and a 'How-do, Oilson.' Most people thought his name was Oilson; it was less obviously a nickname than that of 'Tomatoes' for De Mattos—he who made good on tomatoes. Only by inflexion of voice, or twinkle of eye, could it be told whether those who hailed him knew that his family tree said 'Olson.'

To him it was all one what he was called. He was an easy-going fellow, not quickly roused, not quickly taking umbrage at anything. Don't imagine that he had lack of discernment. He saw a deal, but he let much slide.

'Struck oil?' one hailed him.

'Got to strike something soon,' he rejoined. He had just returned to town from a long trip to the north, reopened his old shack in the scrub-covered back-blocks in which he had batched a spell before going out, and there deposited his blanket-roll. He was not hungry, for he had eaten at the snack café; but he paused now at a grocery store, inveigled by something that always inveigled him

—the design of a corncob, amid green corn leaves, on the label of a tin.

He walked into the store and purchased a tin of corn, and with that in hand drew aside from First Avenue to seek out his shack in the tangled environs. There, among the stumps, each already taken possession of by the modern spirit, each already decorated by little tin labels that ordered passers-by to smoke somebody's plug-cut, and chew somebody else's plug, he saw Jim Jefferies, whom we have met before without introduction—the 'oiled' young man of Morley's dining-room, all sober now.

'Hullo! Hullo! Hullo, Jim!' Olson broke out in greeting.

Jefferies merely compressed his lips in a smile of pleasure at the encounter, held out his hand, and nodding at the packet Olson carried—'Canned corn?' he asked.

The other looked slightly caught, like a school-boy, but admitted that Jefferies was right, with a 'Sure!' Then: 'Glad I met you,' he said. 'Come along to my shack. You're the man I was looking for, though I did not know it.'

'Am I the missing link?'

'That's right. That's what you are. I couldn't get to the root of a trouble I have, and you're the solution—that is, if you're agreeable.'

'Well, we'll see. Go ahead.'

'Wait till we get to the shack and can sit down to it.'

'Good!' said Jefferies. 'Then while we're getting there, I might learn something—and that is the psychological, or pathological, reason for this canned corn notion! When things go well with you—canned corn! When you want to think hard—canned corn! When you want to do yourself well—canned corn!'

'It is surely a simple taste,' said Olson, in defence. 'I can't explain it. When I was just a kid in this country and went broke, canned corn eased me as if I had a job, though I spent my last quarter on it.'

'And while you were eating something turned up?' asked Jefferies.

'Here's my wickie-up,' said Olson, and fumbling for a key he opened the door of his fourteen-by-twelve, or so, shack. 'Here's home,' he said. 'A

roof, a bunk, a roll of blankets, a table and a stool——'

'And a tin of canned corn,' ended Jefferies.

'That's what. That's good enough home in this here rolling star. Take this stool or the table, as you please. I want to talk to you.'

His voice dropped to a murmur, and Jefferies knew then, if he had not realised it before from Olson's manner, that here was to be a conference, not merely a chat; that here—Olson was now grim enough to suggest it—might indeed be a conspiracy of old friends instead of just a renewal of old friendship. With half of the corn on a tin plate for Jim, and half left in the tin, which served as a plate for Olson, somewhat as the Arabs eat salt before a deal, these two ate, and talked quietly, while a stone's throw away the life of Saint Anthony went on, and its murmur came faintly to them—ring of till bells, songs of gramophones, chanting of skittle-alley keeper, drumming of feet on the strips of new board side-walk.

Apart from these sounds the shack might have been any trapper's or prospector's at the Back-of-Beyond, save that the door was hinged and had

a heavy lock, and that there was a pane of glass in the window. It really had a window, not just a ventilation chink like the balistraria in the old forts. The same elusive, yet haunting odour hung to the place, of dust and bark and caulking moss. Stick up a construction like that in some city exposition, succeed in getting the right smell in it, and those who have relapsed from the Frontiers, gone back to taxis and boxes at the opera, as well as those who have gone back to the nerve-racking tenement and the tragic sight of soup queues, would heave a sigh and pull out, and return to 'God's Country' again. Jim, disposing of his canned corn, stood stock still, gazing before him in an apparently dazed condition. It was in an absent fashion he had waited while Olson opened the tin, in an absent fashion he had accepted the proffered plate. Olson diagnosed.

'Haven't been in a shack of late?' he murmured. 'Been lying on spring mattresses, and sitting in frame houses?'

'Yes. You've got it. It takes me back,' said Jim, 'to a shack in the Yellow Head Pass we

batched in when I was through there with a survey. I declare I can hear the silence all over again.'

'It's a trig old shack,' said Olson. 'It is one of the first in Saint Anthony. Say, there's no jerry-building about it, eh? When I came up into this country six years ago I remember seeing it sitting back among bull-pines and scrub, looking out at the trail with its one lonely eye—and here it is now, lost sight of, a kind of "also ran" of a domicile, the view from which'—he glanced out of the open door—'is a Jap dish-washer heaving another tin out, on to the dump, from a three-story-up edifice on First Avenue; and only a glimpse of him, too, in between corner-lot bungalows. Well, squatez-vous. Take the stool.'

Jim 'took' the edge of the table, and with a nod indicated that the stool was for his host; but as Olson 'took' the edge of the bunk, as he spoke, Jim very soon, unconscious, occupied both table and stool—sat on the table with his feet on the stool, hunched up and looking down at his host, lost to everything but the subject unfolded to him.

'Would you care to accompany me some little way back from the haunts of man?' asked Olson.

'What's the proposition?' said Jim.

'It's this. I know it's safe with you, even if you don't decide to come with me. That's one reason why I flagged you. It's this——' and he dropped his voice as though, as they say in books, the very walls had ears. 'It's this—there was an old prospector called Penny Scot, reason for the name being that he was a Scot who showed up in this country with copper instead of silver in his pocket. The rumour goes that he packed his dough with him. Maybe he did. I generally discredit such stories, but Penny Scot seems to have been a bit of what is called "a character".' Olson frowned. 'He was like me. I hear he sold a couple of claims at different times in different places, but he did not pull out just because he made good. He went on putting his money into the earth, as the saying goes.' Again came a moment's introspection, a snort of annoyance. 'That's what I've been doing! I heard a man, on the very day I outfitted for my last trip, talking about the country and how a lot of money had been lost in it. "Why," he says, "I was told recently of a man who'd put ten thousand dollars

into this country that he made in the province next door. And he's not singular. Doubt if he'll get it back." That was me he'd been hearing about. And he was right, or he's right so far. I've put some more in, and taken none out. Here I am. Yes, sir, that unknown gossip is still right. I haven't got it back and more with it as I had hoped. But I needn't keep on bemoaning and repeating that. Now I'm going to flutter the last—the real, right, sure, and no josh last—of my spondulicks again. It's not oil this time. It's not coal, nor natural gas, nor discovery of new wheat-belt. It's not free trading nor anything like that. It's dime novel. I wintered on the Norman River—Norman's River, some folk call it—and there was nobody there but an old Cree trapper, who told me about a man he called, so good as I can give it, Penobscot—since verified as Penny Scot—how he came into this country and then hit up off it into the Little Norman River country.'

Olson paused and sighed.

'Uh-hu!'—that is as near a spelling as can be devised for the growl or grunt that came from Jim, signifying interest.

'Never came out,' Olson said at the end of the sigh. 'A man must die somewhere! That's a cinch. And it ain't dime novel that maybe he died up in the Little Norman River country.'

'Don't you worry,' Jim advised. 'It doesn't strike me as adventure story at all—unless you mean that dime novels are true to life.'

'That kind of reminds me of something I read somewhere,' said Olson, with a laugh. 'It said that dime novels weren't so far out—only things happened thicker and speedier! I wish they'd speed up some for me! You don't think, then, that I'm like youngsters back in Carolina who hear of Captain Kidd's treasure?'

'And go hunting for it?' inquired Jim. 'No, siree! And the youngsters are not so far off, either. Grown men have gone after Captain Kidd's buried treasure, and other treasures too. Did you ever hear of a fellow called Knight who outfitted a ship to go after treasure on a South Atlantic island?'

'No. Did he get there, or did they put him in the loco-house?'¹

¹ Lunatic asylum.

'He went.'

'And did he find it?'

'Nothing but land-crabs.'

'Friend of yours?'

'No. I read his book.'

'Oh, well, he got a book out of it and maybe she sold. I got to find the treasure. I can't write no journal, and from all I hear the publishers would get a cinch on me one way or another if I could! I'm glad, anyway, that you don't think I'm on as hopeless a trail as children digging on the seashore, after the history lesson has made 'em conversant with Captain Kidd, from Carolina to Florida.'

'I don't. The notion is similar, but I put my money on you first. I want to hear all about it.'

'There ain't much more to tell. This old Indian knew precious little. He only knew that Penny Scot went into the Little Norman country, and never came out. They usually tell the police-boy these things, so I dropped the name casual to one or two on the way out, but they'd evidently never heard of him. This old Indian knew where Penny Scot's winter camp was. Up the Little Norman

it was, and on——' he paused. 'Do you think you would care to come with me?' Then without waiting for an answer he continued: 'Up Little Norman, east bank, four hours travel from——'

'I'll come. You bet you!' broke in Jim, sitting there all concentrated.

Olson nodded.

'—— from where Little Norman runs into the main stream,' he ended his indication of the distant camp-site. 'That's as simple as anything. This ain't hunting a needle in a haystack. We can get there. The only point is this—did he carry his dough around with him? I'm willing to chance that. If he did of course he might cache it when winter came along and he got a fixed camp. Or he might cache it when he felt death on him.' He paused again, meditative, more than meditative—broody. 'Guess I need not worry. I ain't what you call old yet. Thirty-five ain't old. It's when I see a man of sixty shuffling along with a pan and a shovel, an old hoss, and all the loneliness of the hills in his eyes, that I get kind of—I don't know what.'

'If Penny Scot had money, wouldn't that old

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Indian go to his camp for a look round?' asked Jim.

'I don't know about looking for money. Guess the Indian wouldn't expect much in the way of dollar bills on a prospector. They might go look-see for any tea or tobacco. Anyhow I suggested that to him—"He may have left some tea or tobacco," I suggested; but the old man went mute then. I thought that maybe he had helped himself to the tea—thought that maybe he knew for certain Penny Scot was dead, instead of only thinking so, had taken the tea and maybe was sorry he had spoken. For you know when a thing of that kind leaks out—about anybody lost track of—and the Indians knowing, yet saying nothing, then the police-boys that drop in visiting can be mighty stern, and read a plumb solemn lecture. But later on I found out different. Every Indian I mentioned Little Norman river to looked glum—and when it came to asking if there was good hunting up in the woods there they were mum as sphinxes. Then one came out with it—that that is where their Evil Spirit lives, so they leave it alone. On their maps, so to speak, it's got a red line round it, and

stamped plain across it in heavy letters is "Hoodoo Reservation." That's whatever!' he said definitely. 'The neighbouring trapper to my friend trapped along the Big Norman, and knew just where Penny Scot's camp was; but he only so much as passed the confluence of them rivers at all because he carried a charm against hoodoos, and I guess he did not rely on it to the limit either. I'd have gone in then—in the spring, and had a rubber-neck up the Little Norman—but in spring that country is surely only a sponge. Winter would be best, with dogs—if you'd been there before to know where you were going well enough to shovel through the snow to it. But without knowing that, where are you? Spring's a sponge there, neither dry land nor canoeing water. And now—well, now I just feel that I want a partner. We can't take so much as a hoss if we go in from this side. Yes, that's right—you'd do it with dogs in winter. You can't canoe it at all, for it would be all portage, and you'd take your life clearing a portage. It's a case of hike, loaded on the back like a shell-snail, axe in hand—I guess half the way. There is an old Stoney

trail up from Riffles for some distance, but it bends back west too soon. We might—we just might—strike some Beaver Indian trails north of that, but I don't know. The place being hoodooed there won't be trails to talk of.'

'Are the woods hoodooed for the Beaver too, then?' asked Jim.

Olson saw his point.

'That don't signify,' he replied. 'Crees are round it sufficient, even though it is hoodooed to them, to keep away the Beaver from going into it. Hoodooed for Beavers or not don't cut any ice. A Beaver Indian projecting near it from westward, and sticking up his dead falls, would get his time-check from the nearest Cree trapper.'

He stopped speaking and stared before him. Jim sat erect, dropped his feet to the floor, rose and stretched.

'It is just plumb knowledge of loneliness that was worrying me about deciding to go out,' said Olson. 'I kind of discovered it unto myself, and acknowledged it, when I lifted my eyes coming along here to the old shack and perceived you. Not so much as a pack-hoss to speak to *gets* me.'

'I'm pretty nearly through my dough,' said Jim. 'That's the only thing to prevent me—'

'The grub-stake is all my expense,' replied Olson vigorously. 'And if we find Penny Scot—or his mummy—and get his belt, or whatever is his, if it's true he packed his banking account, why your share is half of it.'

'We'll see about that,' said Jim. 'I didn't hear of him, I didn't get any clue.'

Olson wagged his head and stood up.

'I see I was right about you,' he commented. 'You're white. You'd get your back to the wall with a partner. Gee-whiz! You'd never succeed in what's called business. What you ought to say to me is: "I guess loneliness is a great and gnawing complaint. It's worth two-thirds for me to accompany you, Mr. *Olson*."' '

Jim threw back his head and laughed.

'You're on to this notion of mine?' asked Olson.

'You bet you! Poor old Penny Scot. Wonder what his right name was?'

'Don't know. Seems to be Dennis now! '—which is slang.

Their talk thus over they came out again. Olson

slowly looked up, then turned to accompany his old-time friend, now partner. The expressionlessness of his face was observed by Jim who promptly imitated it, feeling that possibly he looked elated.

'Don't look so blame innocent!' said Olson.

'Innocent? Me?' said Jefferies.

'You look so innocent that if I was a sheriff I'd make sure you was planning a hold-up an hour from now, and stay with you!'

Jim laughed, and considered that perhaps he had overdone the subduing process. He certainly looked less innocent when, back in First Avenue, he espied Squire with a friend. To be sure First Avenue was not very long; there was nothing sinister in the constant encountering of Squire. Their eyes met—Squire's with a frown, the gist of which (if one can speak so) Jim could not understand. It was not a combative frown, despite the incident in the dining-room. The expression was neither belligerent nor scared; it was, frankly, puzzled. It was most certainly not casual.

For himself—Jim's jaw slightly tightened as he recalled that passage of glances when Squire sat ogling the new manageress at Morley's. To the

hotel they were now going for supper; but Jefferies thought it unlikely that he would see Squire again that night, for the latter, if he had not a toothpick in hand, had the air of a man well fed. His companion, moreover, whose name was Powell, was biting on a toothpick, tilting it at raffish angles, waggling it from left to right in his mouth in the fashion with that table accessory, that post-prandial toy, in Saint Anthony.

'There's that fellow Squire,' said Olson. 'He gets the credit of having been mixed up in a hold-up in his time.'

'Oh, he does, does he?' said Jefferies. 'I wouldn't put it past him. I can't quite place his face. Confidence tricks, it looks like to me, as well as straight hold-ups.'

He glanced round for another look at Squire, supplied with this bit of gossip about him, to take closer scrutiny, and found that the other two men had stopped, and were looking after them, or after Olson, their faces grave and secretive. Obviously something had been said about Jefferies' partner. As Jim turned his head they both glanced away, looked as though they were merely taking a survey

of the street in general. Powell lowered his eyes; Squire made one of his big gestures.

'They were looking at us,' said Jim, turning his head again.

'Oh!' said Olson, in a tone signifying nothing.

That, at any rate, was the picture, delaying in his mind's eye, with which Jim entered Morley's to eat supper with his partner.

CHAPTER IV

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

SQUIRE and Powell, walking along First Avenue, smoked their cigars and said little; but they were very much at unity in the spirit of their ramble. Any one of observation, seeing them and noting the way in which they remarked others, might have had the opinion that they were of the genus *sleuth*, and wondered of what order of that genus. To a keen eye they walked in a manner much like that of those detectives who follow up the big travelling circuses from town to town, watching for any undesirables who may have dropped off (putting up and taking down tents only a method of working their way), so that if there be an outbreak of burglary, or petty larceny, or holding-up of residents in back lots after dark, the local police may have a list of the possible suspects. Crooks looking for suckers, 'tecs looking for crooks (and perhaps authors looking at the everlasting cases

round them!), all go down the First Avenues of the world with greater or lesser amount of this manner, try to disguise it how they will.

An air of unostentatious search, of definite curiosity, a suggestion of designs, clung to Squire and his partner. The average man paid no heed to them. The detective, town marshal, sheriff, or policeman is aware when such men pass, and they when he is across the street. As Emerson says in one of his essays, speaking for himself as a discerning man: 'We pass for what we are . . .'

'What do you think that was?' Squire muttered.

Powell, without having to glance round to discover what 'that' meant, replied: 'Dentist looking for a pitch I should think.'

Squire chuckled.

'Just what I sized him up,' he agreed.

'Well, there's nothing doing there,' said Powell.

'Unless he ain't got his licence, and sticks up his shingle all the same. Then we——'

'They call that blackmail,' said Powell warily.

'But if he went at us for blackmail he'd have to quit practice at the same moment.'

'Quite, quite,' agreed Powell. 'That's the

cinch, of course, in blackmail. But it don't appeal to me.'

Neither were deeply in earnest about the possible dentist; this was just a kind of game, or keeping in practice, as card-players shuffle packs and do tricks in between two deals.

'See that?' asked Squire, glancing at the 'that,' and then in another direction. It was sufficient indication for his partner. They were, indeed, *en rapport*.

'Yep. Nothing doing.'

'What would you say he was?'

'Relative of a mining company director or president,' returned Powell.

'Same here. Smattering of engineering. Sent out on a big salary,' agreed Squire.

'And if he's wise he'll not butt in to the mining proposition at all, or he'll bust the works. He'll spend most of his money fishing and hunting.'

'And playing cards in the hotel,' said Squire.

'Maybe. No good to us. Nothing doing. He may be no expert at engineering, but I know the type. They can surely play cards.'

They might have been humorous birds exchanging witticisms. In a way they were.

'This?' asked Squire.

Powell laughed outright. This time it was an obvious 'shovel-stiff,' slouching along, elbows out so as to allow of his hands being thrust into front pant pockets, under his belt.

'Two dollars a day and seventy-five cents for board. Or two-and-a-half a day, and a dollar for board. One gray blanket. "Say, mister, how's chances this morning?" What a life, Silas Powell, what a life! No wonder they quit the shovel for a spell sometimes and join the gentlemen of the "hand-out" and "sit-down."¹ I tell you what it is—man was not meant to bend over a shovel. Say, see these fellows on the other side coming along—the big one might be a lumber-jack, prospector, ranch-foreman. No, no, they're level now. Don't look at once. Now! That big fellow with the lean, eager kid who perked up his head, and half-closed his eyes at me.'

'Oh, you didn't tell me two together.'

'Turn around and have a look,' said Squire quietly. 'It's interesting.'

¹ Tramps.

They turned, and just as they did so Jim Jefferies glanced over his shoulder.

'That's a good sign they're hanging over there,' and Squire waved his cigar in air, pointing. Jim went on with Olson. 'The lean one is nothing to the purpose,' Squire commented in low tones. 'He's just earning and spending. Got muscles all right; but he's got an itching foot. He thinks he will always have muscles, and always be able to get a job that will carry him around, taking it all in. Didn't like me making glad eyes at the new manageress in Morley's. Got his head up and glared at me about it. Felt quarrelsome. Guess he'd had a dose or two of crook-elbow. I don't know where he met the other fellow—maybe on some survey party or packing outfit. The other one is the question for us—perhaps. You've heard of Oilson?'

'Nope! Very ignorant?'

'Well, he's none of your old-type prospector—none of your "no banks, give me a belt" kind. None of your "I've always a gun to take care of myself, and them bank-managers throw up their hands every time the door opens!"'

'Did that type ever exist?' asked Powell. 'I'm sceptical about it.'

'You bet your life!' said Squire, and then a look, such as would have made Sadie shudder had she seen it, came into his eyes. It was just there and gone. Powell saw it and wondered.

'Well, don't get hot,' he said. 'I've heard——'

'Of what?'

'Oh, of that kind of greenhorn, but I never believed in him—alone in the mountains and rich as rich, and got it all on him, too. Why he might be held-up!'

Squire laughed at his partner now.

'That's just what they reckoned they couldn't be. But about Oilson—I guess he packs no more than as much loose change as any man. Not but once he made good, anyhow. He used to be after silver-lead down in the Slocan—sold a prospect there very well. I know that, for it's common property around here that he spent it not in the usual way, but up here looking for oil. He's petroleum crazy. He's just hit town, and he looks to me like a man with a secret.'

'Another man's secret?' said Powell. 'That

gets back to the one thing I feel I got to touch wood over. Blackmail is——'

'No, no. I've got a hunch he's struck it.'

Powell looked at his finger-nails, at his cigar, puffed smoke, seemed bored, ready for a drink.

'That don't help us,' he said, 'unless he's got the dough and is willing to sit in to a card-game, or——'

'Unless we can jump his claim,' said Squire. 'Perhaps he's registered it already, perhaps he hasn't. Let's turn. I don't think he has registered anything, somehow. This is a *feeling*, Powell. You get that?'

'Oh! Feelings generally come for some reason, if you only dive and discover,' Powell growled and rubbed his face over with his hand, felt for another cigar.

'Well, I can't—it's just his blame manner,' replied Squire. 'If he outfits again and goes out of town, I'm on his trail. I know the look. I speak from experience—which means that I can go back and recall the looks of this man or that, the meaning of which I found out afterwards. The look on Oilson is that he's struck something.

I was on to him before you rolled out this morning. Some acquaintance flagged him with: "Hullo, struck oil?" Say, Powell, if you had heard the tones in which he answered: "No, sir! I've got to strike something soon, or go broke!" or something like that—well, like me, you'd have called him a liar. When a man comes in from a trip in the hills wearing that expression—and saying he's tired of the country, and such things, and all the time with a thoughtful air about him, and not thinking of committing suicide by a long way—well, he deserves to have his claim jumped!

'He was palavering quick and forcible to his partner just now,' said Powell, interest awakening again.

'He was. We might get something out of Jefferies if we can't find out from Oilson himself. Oilson's a dark horse. But see here. A man can make his pile honestly after all as well as dishonestly, in this country.'

Powell gave a snorting laugh through his nostrils, a cynical laugh.

'Sure!' he agreed, as Squire turned and looked at him.

'Why, man!' said Squire, 'I heard of a town surveyor who was only in Government service a year—and he was asked to retire at the end of that time. Guess he would have done so anyhow. Every blame town that he was mixed up in all the pick of the lots were bought by his relatives. And I knew a livery-stable keeper had claims all over his county, in California. His gift was getting folks that hired from him to talk, and if there was any pay-dirt found anywhere by anybody that got saddle-horse or pack-pony from him, one of his sons was second on it.'

'Well, say, if he got prospectors to talk he deserved all the pay-dirt!' said Powell. 'He surely earned it.'

'He had thirteen sons, and he got lynched,' said Squire, and roared at his own joke in a way he had. He liked to play with people, even with his partners. He was by way of being a wit. He nudged Powell in the ribs with his elbow.

'We're going to keep an eye on that Oilson, anyhow,' he said, solemn again. 'There's something doing—there's something doing, all right. I feel it in my bones.'

CHAPTER V

JACK OLSON GOES SOUTH

THAT frowning examination of Jefferies, that turning about to study Olson, might certainly have been neither here nor there. A kind of verbal *Who's Who* exists in all such places—'There's So-and-so, a construction-gang boss. You should touch him for a job.'—'There's So-and-so, owns half the town lots.'—'There's So-and-so, standing for mayor!' Olson, known as Oilson, might easily have been in that *Who's Who* of nudge and thumb-nail comment, and the turning for a second look might mean nothing more.

But there were other indications besides that veiled scrutiny on First Avenue, that Squire was taking more than an ordinary interest in Olson. Cumulatively they became sinister. Jim had to report one to his partner next day. Early in the morning Olson dropped into the Government

Office to ask for a sight of a large-scale map. That the trail from Riffles, fifty miles west, going up into the mountains, was the trail to begin on, he knew. At Riffles he and Jefferies would 'jump off' for Penny Scot's camp. But he wanted to have some definite opinion of the lie of the land from where that trail, swerving away, would cease to serve them.

The map pleased him. Only a few trails were printed on the copy offered him in reply to his request, but many others had been added in ink or pencil, doubtless by Government men, from time to time.

'Can I buy this?' he asked.

'Yes. That's—say! no you can't! That's our office copy.'

'Well, don't grab it away,' pleaded Olson, laughing.

'You can have a look at it anyhow. That's one with a lot more detail marked in.'

Olson pored over it. Had he been superstitious he might have taken this accidental sight of a special copy as a good omen. But he had no superstitions. He lounged long, elbows on

counter, head in left hand, right hand advancing and returning, here, there, index finger following trails, the glossy paper striking cool under his palm. He was far from the Government Office and its new-polished, elegantly waved counter. In spirit he was already there, in the real wild country, visualising, imagining. It enthralled him. He verified its accuracy by going over parts he knew, up and down twining lines of rivers, along caterpillars of hill-ranges. It was 'some' map.

When at last he rose from bending over it, and asked for an ordinary copy, he was told there was not one. He might have called that bad luck, but he didn't; he merely said 'Oh!' in a voice neither here nor there, and flopped again over the one shown to him for a final consideration. After another spell of examination, briefer this time, but with very deliberate memorising, he folded it up slowly, handed it back with an 'Obliged to you, sir,' and was informed: 'Nothing at all—a pleasure.'

Jefferies, strolling down First Avenue, unaware of what Olson was doing, not so much as aware of where he was, came round the corner abruptly and

nearly bumped into Powell. They moved left and right, left-right in front of each other, zig-zag-zigging, till either might have laughed or sworn according to temperament or the morning's mood. A big definite deflection round was the only solution, and Jim took it—in so doing nearly bumping into Squire! And Squire, intent upon his own thoughts, not observing his partner's doings, a step or two in advance, was saying: 'I don't know what he's registering, but——'

He stopped at sight of Jim. It might have meant nothing, of course, but a few yards farther on Jefferies saw Olson emerge from the office. He made a bee-line across the street, and told his friend what had happened, hot from the meeting. Olson listened with a frown.

'He's interested in me—that's a cinch. What's his game, I wonder? Is he trying to size up whether I look prosperous and green, so as to corral me into some game of seven-up?' He moved on, limping.

'What's wrong with your foot?' asked Jim.

'Store shoes. I was wearing moccasins these last months, and I've galled the heel now. I tell

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you this, until it is sound again we can't set out. I know nothing worse than tramping with skinned heel, and the tops of the toes, into the bargain, raw right across.'

'Your shoes are too tight,' suggested Jim.

'Tight nothing! It's the way they're cut with the heels curving in—I guess to keep 'em gripping. And the toe-caps have been put on like a knife. I'm going to rest up at the shack till it's better. That fellow Squire—he's a fool. He's only good for flattering remittance men they can play poker—that's my opinion, although he gets the credit of being in that hold-up at Lanyon. I don't like him being interested in me, even though I guess I'm not his line. You see, this going for a dead man's wad—I'm not sure about it. I've got a hunch I've heard somewhere that such finds ain't the property of the finder, but that it's up to him to deliver to the nearest man either with a red coat on, and pants with a stripe down the side, or one with a silver tag on his breast.' He laughed. 'And what would he do with it?'

'That point occurred to me,' said Jim. 'We might get legal advice.'

'Legal advice! I guess we might as well not go hunt for P.S.'s remains as do that. Legal advice! I don't know the dictionary meaning of it, but I tell you what I make of it from the solicitors and such that I've known. The legal adviser would manage somehow to leave you just the cost of the trip. Say, this foot don't get better—won't get better so long as I wear these shoes. I'm going to buy another pair and rest up too.'

At the shoe-store he halted.

'Kind of crowded,' said he. 'Don't you wait. Look down on me to-morrow. I'm going to stay with the shack.'

He 'stayed with the shack' a solid week while the foot slowly healed. At first he cooked, but towards the end of the time he grew lazy and lived on tinned goods that Jim brought down for him, with canned corn for the staple. His stove-pipe ceased to smoke; not even in stocking-soles was he to be seen splitting his small store of cord-wood. The general impression—of those who knew him—was that Olson meant it when he had said he was sick of the blame country, and was going to get out of it. Perhaps it was good for them, after all,

this frayed foot, for one day Olson had to report :—

‘Guess who came rubber-necking here to-day.’

‘That’s easy,’ said Jim. ‘Squire.’

‘No, sir—Powell, which makes it worse. Squire’s the king-bolt; he didn’t show up.’

‘And Powell had the gall——’

‘I said rubber-necking. That’s not exact. He’s too clever. He came marching along as business-like as you please, looking neither to left nor to right. I was sitting at the door, so he knew I was here all right. I don’t like it. I’m not joshing you—if this Penny Scot’s wad is a wild-cat scheme I’m—I’m done. I got to go working for another man then, so as to make a grub-stake. That’s where I am. It just struck me, sitting here to-day, that when I arrived in town I felt kind of sick of it all, and said up-town, before I got Morley to tell me more about Penny Scot, that I was going to pull out of the north. Well—so I am.’

‘Going to quit your scheme——’ began Jefferies, chapfallen.

‘Quit nothing. We’re going out separate. You’re going to Riffles, and right now I’ll draw

the whole country on this floor. I'll go down from Adam's Lake and hit in from there. It's not much further as the ducks go, and I'll meet you—see, here's Adam's lake,' and sitting there on the stool he jabbed a finger on the floor. He got up and moved a bit away, for he was going to draw a large-scale and very greatly detailed map. 'There's Riffles. Now——' and they bent over the chart for a concentrated hour. Then : 'That's where I'll meet you,' said Olson. 'You got it?'

'I've got it as clear as clear,' said Jim, and to show he had he wiped out the scratchings with his foot as he rose stiffly and stretched.

'Then I'm going out on the stage for Adam's Lake to-night—on the way to Edmonton,' said Olson, and he winked gaily.

'Your foot fit?'

'It will be, all right. I'll have a pack-horse at Adam's Lake, and maybe even ride myself. Anyhow I'll have him for company along that bit of road. It's all Peace River trail and good open country. If Norman's Woods is as much of a tangle as I think, why, then, my hoss, or hosses, can be left behind later. At this time of year

P.S.T.

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there is no inhumanity in leaving horses up there. There's plenty of feed, and they are pretty sure to mix up with some Cree horse friends. If we come back that way we can look out for Indian camps and they'll round 'em up for us again. That's how I figure it, but that's a detail anyhow. The main point is that we won't go out together, and I won't be the one to go up to Riffles. If I did they would look into my departure—sure. I must go *out*, or take the road out.'

'It should work all right so far as appearances go,' said Jim. 'I've heard you say once or twice you had a mind to leave this bit of country. I'm due to hit some job soon, and they are signing on for wagon-road work—for all kinds of work—for Riffles and beyond. You go out of the country; I go back to the old grind, expected here again in two or three months to say I'm going to have an easy winter for once—that's how it goes—and blow it in in a week. What a fool's game! No more for me! But it will look normal enough.'

'Converted?'

'Don't know about that. Getting older,

I suppose. I tell you what, Olson, when a man sees a——'

'A what?' for Jim had stopped.

'Sees what a fool he's made of himself,' said Jim lamely.

'All-right!' Olson chanted. '"Everyt'ing all right," as the Dagoes say. Guess this heel was a blessing in disguise or we wouldn't have known how blame interesting we are to some folks. I'll pack. Say, you can see me off. That would be sure natural enough too. Nothing suspicious about that.'

His packing did not take long. He shook his blankets, flung them on the floor, patted them out flat, spun the rope across them in a big U, and began to roll, rolling up with them an assortment of brushes, razors, and a towel, as well as a change of apparel. The store-keeper at Adam's Lake would supply the other essentials. He rose from his crouching over the bundle and looked at his watch.

'Half an hour and the stage pulls out,' he said. 'Coming in you have to book seats; guess going out you're safer—so far. Later on,' he

added, as if pessimistic about the big rush into the neighbourhood, 'guess the story will be reversed.'

Jim said nothing. Olson had the manner of one abstracted. No great importance was to be attached to what he said then, for he was rather in a mood than in a condition for any summing up. He looked round the shack, put the stool neatly beside the table—as if it mattered where it stood!—highly methodical and just-so if it was only in these little matters. Jefferies moved outside. Olson gloomed at his poor shack again, said: 'Aye!' deep in his chest, stepped over the threshold as a man lost in thought, locked the door, prodded it with his shoulder, withdrew the key, prodded it again, then wheeled and fell in step beside his partner, the most reserved-looking man in Saint Anthony.

So Jim saw him off on the stage for railhead, and friends in the crowd hailed with: 'Where are you going to, Olson?'

'To get a job in an office,' he responded. 'Sit at a roll-top desk. It's the softer end of the thing.'

'You'll be back in the spring,' one prophesied.

'We'll see about that,' said Olson. 'Here's adieu to this wild-cat section, anyhow.'

'Guess it's only *au revoir*.'

'All aboard!' called the driver.

'Our friends,' murmured Jim, 'are not watching the stage go out.'

'So I noted,' grunted Olson. 'Do you know what I'm wondering? I'm wondering if it was all guilty con——' the rest was lost, for after a jerk back and leap forward the stage started, the long whip flicking over the team. They start the auto-stages to-day in much the same manner.

He was off. The crowd that always gathered to watch the stage depart moved away, and Jim with it, feeling suddenly very much alone in the world.

When he entered the dining-room of Morley's that evening the manageress gave him a quick examination, and was satisfied with his appearance. There was now no tell-tale wildness of hair, no just a fraction overdone stateliness. That would be about, say, seven o'clock; for the dining-room opened at six and closed at eight, and he arrived

not with the first diners. There was reason for that. Squire was generally there on time, with the opening of the door, and Jim wished to avoid that gentleman to-night. But Sadie was therefore all the more astonished when, at ten o'clock, she saw Jefferies, not in a condition she would have called unreservedly sober. He was sitting in the rather barren vestibule, and not with Olson, but—which a great deal more than vexed her—with that shudder-producing Squire and another man. She decided that the truth about young Jefferies was that a very little upset him, recalled a book she had read on Edgar Allan Poe in which the biographer said his temperament was such that one glass of whisky was to him what half-a-dozen were to the average man. She was affixing some notices on the board when she heard Jefferies speaking.

'Yes,' said Jim, a trifle thickly, 'yes, I know where he's gone. He's gone to Edmonton, for Calgary. Er—no! Did I say Calgary? What did I say Calgary for? I meant to say Athabasca Landing.'

'When did he go?'

'Just to-night.'

'Oh, he did?' said Squire, and looked away in an off-hand manner. 'Haven't seen him around for two or three days. Thought perhaps he was gone some time ago.'

'Last time I saw him,' remarked Powell, as though he were giving a piece of information to Squire, 'I heard him say he was thinking of pulling out altogether. I wonder if he has.'

'Search me,' replied Squire. 'Perhaps this gentleman can tell you. I saw him around with Oilson once or twice.'

Sadie was aware that Squire glanced at her as she turned from the board; but she interested him less to-night than formerly. In the mirror at the back of the counter, as she thus moved away, she saw his reflection as he sat there beside Jefferies, one leg cast over the other, elbow in air, hand on knee, in a twisted, sprawling, extravagant kind of attitude. All his gestures had a braggadocio about them to her, or bombast; and yet he did not strike her as just the type of bombastic man whose bombast all ebbed out at first sign of a rebuff, challenge, or encounter. She had heard of brazen women, heard the word applied to them; but this

Squire, she thought, was a man that the word suited admirably. And whatever was wrong with Jefferies—weakness, or excess of natural spirit that caused him to be upset by spirits—he was certainly in bad company.

Perhaps she was a sentimentalist to feel sorry for him—but there it was! That was how she felt! When she went again through the vestibule she was glad to find that Squire and his friend had gone. As she passed by, Jefferies rose with an air of determination, like a man with his mind made up. He looked left and right. No one was in sight. The dining-room was long shut; the sitting-room vacant. Mrs. Morley, in the private sitting-room, was reading the three-days' old *Calgary Eye-Opener*. The swing door (one of those coming down almost to the floor, and not reaching all the way to the ceiling—designed to give ventilation as well as privacy to the interior—fixed on a central pivot) was shut. Only feet of people going by outside showed beneath it. His hat was in his hand.

'Pardon me, Miss Dixon,' he said.

Sadie paused as one slightly astonished, with her sweet little head up, her eyes inquiring.

'I want to tell you a most extraordinary thing, Miss Dixon,' he said. 'I think you should know. If I wasn't going away to-morrow it might be different. I'd hope you would see—I know you would see. Don't take me for a sentimentalist. Don't be afraid I'm going to give you any Sydney Carton talk to make you, and me, feel mean and foolish. I want to tell you just this—that when I saw you the other night in the dining-room—when I was—you know what I mean, I was right ashamed of myself. I think you should know that's how you made me feel—just by being there.'

She took a deep breath. Here was no request to give orders to be called for any early morning stage or auto, no inquiry regarding mails, or any inquiry at all such as she was wont to receive when 'flagged' by guests in the house. Her face was oddly strained and very beautiful. She seemed to go suddenly older within her as she looked thus at him, and was more adorable in his eyes than before.

'But to-night,' she said. 'To-night——' and

hesitated, looking closer at him. His eyes were bright; his hair was rumpled; but if he was quickly deranged by a glass then assuredly, it would appear, he quickly came back to normal. As she so considered his eyes were looking sincerely, but with a kind of dreamy eagerness, into hers.

'To-night was running a bluff on a man,' he said. 'I had one or two with him for the sake of a friend—I can't explain just now. I had one or two because he wanted to jag me up and pump something out of me. It was play-acting. Not again, Miss Dixon, will you see me tanked up—and I've not cut it out because I don't see the sense of sweating in the bush to hold up a saloon keeper. I've cut it out because you came walking into Saint Anthony's Crossing. That's all. I'm through. It can't hurt any woman to know she exercises a—but I said I'd give you no Sydney Carton. That's all. Good-night, Miss Dixon.'

He swept round and was gone. The revolving door revolved before his out-thrust hand. She saw his heels a moment under it on the other side, and then he was gone, and the empty vestibule was merely a kind of cave of echoes for the outer

sounds—drumming of feet that went past on the sidewalk, distant gramophone songs, clang of nickel-in-the-slot machines, 'walk-ups' of the touts at the door of the skittle-alley and real-estate offices—the latter still open despite the hour.

And now that the amazing, brief interview—sprung upon her without any warning, an interview she could not have dreamt of—was over, her heart ticked as loudly, she thought, as the clock in the corner that looked down at her with its blank face. She would not forget that scene for many a day.

CHAPTER VI

JIM JEFFERIES GOES WEST

BUT what is called, by the average, Romance, doesn't go on all the time, any more than every line of a sonnet is as much of a bursting wave as the final one. Sadie had to attend to her duties, just as if they were real, all next day. The unsolicited, intimate confession of Jim Jefferies did not at all turn her head, rather did it make her the more eager to carry sweetness with her about her work. That day, oddly enough, was the day the saloons automatically closed in Saint Anthony's Crossing—the advance of steel bringing it within the limits prescribed by law for 'going dry.' She heard many talking of the 'going dry'; it was the one subject of discussion it would appear. Then there arrived the first gangs of construction men—Dagoes, Galicians, Swedes, adding more colour and picturesque tatterdemalion attire to the kaleidoscope of the street, making the place more like a mushroom metropolis than ever.

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A bunch of colliers hit town also, on their way to Anthracite; Scotsmen mostly, who spoke in broad accents about trade unions and 'the ludge,' and argued and grew hot as they brazenly passed round what they called 'hauf-mutchkin' bottles that they had laid in, in advance of the closure. And the Dagoes talked high and excited among themselves, so that one expected a knife to be drawn every minute if one did not know Italian, and was astonished to hear instead a burst of laughter ending some fierce chatter. Patient lowing bullock-teams plodded along the street from south-east, and presently plodded on out of the town, westward.

All day there was something to do in the hotel, checking books, making out accounts, and Sadie heard more of the din than she saw of it. It was by the merest fluke that she glimpsed, on the high seat of a stacked Studebaker or Bain wagon, rolling out of town in the uneven way, and seated beside the driver, Jim Jefferies. But he was looking neither to left nor right.

For his part he was glad to be gone from Saint Anthony. He had a feeling that Destiny was with

him. At the end of his tether, tired of the life he had been leading, of unremitting toil and then shuffle of cards and crook of elbow with the boys, he was beginning afresh. And with the spell upon him of that feminine influence, about which he had kept so quiet, but on which he had mused much, there had come an opportunity to make some kind of a financial base in his life. To a nature such as his this was much. Three months' earnings of three arduous dollars a day, less one a day for board, seemed so little that it was too little to save. Give him a windfall and the unusualness of it would make him 'go canny'—or so he thought. Great resolves (not too tremendously harped upon, but merely made), and a girl's face in his heart, carried him hopefully out of town.

Ten miles out they outspanned, ate from their dinner 'pails,' fed the draught horses, and rolled up in their blankets beside the fire. They were up before the gophers were out of their burrows next day. Flap-jacks were tossed—and eaten; bacon was fried, and all was washed down with tea; and the horses were jerking into their collars

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again while yet the shadows of the trees were very long across the flats.

At Riffles—which was three or four shacks and frame houses, and a great pyramid of empty tins, standing under high cedars, looking out with mosquito-netted windows at the wagon-road ruts and the gurgling, sucking twist of creek, Jim climbed down for the last time. At Riffles was liquor, and the fact that the bottles would soon be unprocurable, the barrels sealed, made the demand increase. But Jim's stirrup-cup with the friend who had lifted him on the road was of the 'soft drink' order. He was going to be no rabid T.T., he told himself, but for the nonce he was rabid. His teamster friend made no comment. To many a man who had 'sworn-off' he had given a lift on the road. They have a way of swearing-off after a whoop-up in town.

There was no curiosity regarding Jim's arrival at Riffles. Many men came there in those days with no definite design even to be discovered for the asking. Some announced their destination without speech, so that the proverbial man with a cork eye could see; they came through, tented

wagon, wife and kids stowed therein, driving with them a bunch of horses, on their way into the Cartaret Block to take up land—having come maybe as far as from Kansas or Nebraska in that manner, even old men with their sons, old men to whom Nebraska and Kansas were too greatly settled and who, their boys growing up, had a kind of Indian summer of wander-fret. Others rode in with prospector's outfit on their pack-horse; others lurched in with an automatic movement of legs, hunched a little forward under blanket roll, and asked if there were any chances of work.

Across the bridge to North Riffles (which was nothing at all but stumps and notice-boards of town-lots) Jim trudged, roll of blankets—with pannikin and frying-pan flat against it—on right shoulder behind, sack of flour and flitch of bacon balancing neatly in front, Winchester tucked under arm, and hat-brim well down over eyes. He trudged on easily, past the stumps and the little advertisement-boards on which the June bugs alighted and clicked, over which the squirrels vaulted, chattering one to another, or to him maybe. The clucking and gurgling, the everlasting hushing

hiss of the sinister river that gave the place its name died out slowly behind him. He looked round—and the bridge was out of sight. He trudged on and on, and again looking round saw the last of the town-site boards.

The tall trees seemed to stoop over him. As he moved left-right, left-right, they had the appearance of sweeping close, whelming him in. The first hint of loneliness fell, as it always does at such places—even though he knew that some miles farther on was a ranch or two. At the end of four hours a big barn and a small dwelling-house loomed up, and dogs rushed at him. An Indian woman came out to call them back. As he passed, turning to nod to her, he saw her husband, a Swede, smoky-looking and parchmenty, hoeing by the side of the shack. The Swede just raised his head—and lowered it again, uninterested. But Jim was not annoyed at the lack of salutation. He only considered that there was one whom the off-the-map quiet had affected, and rendered morose instead of sociable. He was not the kind of young man (a dash of *naïveté* in him, perhaps) to wonder

if the lonely rancher would have had something to say had he been a-saddle and looking prosperous.

If he called him ' lousy squaw-man ' as he walked on, there was no sign of it on his face. He had made about twelve miles, with a halt for a snack at noon (on a small peninsula of grass by a creek side, the water bubbling gaily and shallow over coloured stones) when the feel of the air suggested to him that night was not far off. He saw a fair camp-place ahead, but did not stop. It was not yet late enough for it to be imperative to make camp at the first suitable spot that offered. It was only time to be thinking of it. You who have trekked so know how he gazed meditatively ahead, flicking at the occasional mosquitoes, noting the cessation of grasshopper clicking and hum of flies.

Then he came to what at first, between the tree-stems, looked like a natural meadow, and he decided to camp there—maybe on its farther side if water offered; but, as he drew nearer, he heard the cling-clang of cow bells, and saw that here was not a natural glade but the cleared land of a ranch. Dogs again gave tongue—and behold, back from the road, a smart-looking little frame house,

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and hay-stacks, and two men in shirt sleeves walking toward it, work-horses at heel with twitching tails.

On Jim posted, his notion being to 'put his best foot forward' and find a camp-place beyond. He had been told there were two ranches on the road and, his adventure still before him, felt an impulse to get beyond fixed human habitation before ending the first day's tramp. A friendly hail brought him to a halt. Turning, he saw that one of the men was bearing down on him.

'Come here, you!' the man ordered his dog, and then more loudly: 'Where are you going to camp?'

'Any old place,' Jim responded.

'What's the matter with a bunk here for to-night? We can put you up in return for a chin-wag.'

Jim recognised the accent. It attracted him. In saloons in Calgary it had a different meaning from what it had here. In bar-rooms in Calgary it might only signify a public-school education wasted and a rich father in the Old Country. Heard here it

hinted at possibilities of an education leavening rough toil.

'Very kind of you,' he replied, and went aside from the wagon-road—or it might almost be said he went aside on the wagon-road; for the tributary trail to this ranch was more of a road than the continuation of the one he had been following. Obviously mighty little hauling was ever done beyond here. A road had been made, but Nature was doing her best to turn it into a trail, even as, over an acknowledged trail, she and her four seasons, with rain and snow, leaves and pine-needles, work steadily at the task of obliteration.

Jim cast down his blanket-roll on the veranda, and with soap and water he and his hosts prepared for the evening's yarn. At first the chatter went slow. It was plain to Jim that these two men wondered what brought him here, but they asked no questions. As he sat at supper with them, and saw the home-made book-case full of books, and a photograph of a girl tilted a-top, and heard the wind sighing on and on in the lonely old trees outside, he went a-wool-gathering all of a sudden. He allowed his gaze to drift absently beyond his

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entertainers, forgetting that if they offered him hospitality they expected him to talk. They had not been 'out' that year since ploughing-time; he was their link with crowds, with places where at least one can call daily at the post-office to ask for letters, whether receiving them or not.

'You're the last ranch on the road?' he suddenly asked.

'No. There's another on a bit, but he's twenty miles back, and doesn't even run a chance of a pilgrim like you dropping in to chatter—'

'Or to stare absently at the books,' said the other laughing.

Jim laughed too.

'Oh, that's it, is it?' said the first, flushing--- and Jefferies guessed that the photograph was his property. 'Well, if you're through you can browse along the shelves, such as they are.'

The result of the 'browse' was a pow-wow on books that disclosed they had much in common—not only in the works they cared for but in their preferences. Even away up here unboosted volumes could be known. Perhaps all the way from the Old Country came advice on new books,

Jim considered, glancing at the photograph and away again, as he had already been suspected of staring at it. Unexpected names were mentioned in that clearing among the woods. Jim, with a taste for reading, was ashamed at himself afresh for the life into which of late he had been drifting. He had heard of such a ranch-house, but his own experience had been chiefly of places like the Swede's below.

With the ripple-ripple of the creek across the meadow outside, and winds sighing gently in the tree-tops, it all seemed tremendously unreal—this ranch, these men, and himself unreal too, with the object of his hike up this wagon-road reposing all private within him. It became a little more real, a little less like what people call romantic, when they touched on their work and mentioned that they had cut a hundred tons of hay, for which they had a market.

'Ten thousand dollars,' one remarked easily, and Jim did not disbelieve as some might have done. He had worked on wilderness hauling and freighting, and knew that a hundred dollars a ton can be obtained where winter-hauling must go

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on and ranchers are few. He fell silent a moment, aloof; he was momentarily (though with no envy) wondering if old Penny Scot would carry in his belt as much as his hosts between them would pull in for one season's hay. He doubted it. It seemed impossible. The brief twilight fell; the place was suddenly dismal. Then the wail of a coyote sent the dog that had been lying nose on paws, flying helter-skelter into the dusk. And then the lamp was lit, bringing cheer.

The two ranchers should have remembered their walls were but thin. After Jim was rolled up in his blankets in an impromptu bunk in the main room, he heard one say: 'Interesting chap. I'm glad you flagged him, what?'

'You bet you. Can't think what he's hiking out here all alone for.'

'He's got a kind of "quest of Sir Launcelot" look about him. If we lived in medieval times I'd say there was a lost treasure and a fair woman in his line of life, what?'

'Ssh! He'll hear you.'

'Think so?'

'Sure. That wall . . . can hear you sniff when you're up . . . writing letters.'

The voices decreased in volume, but not enough, for Jim heard next:—

'Well, Sir Launcelot's not a bad sort. Reminds me of some one—can't think who it is. Isn't he rather like that old prospector who came through here about two years ago? You remember him? had a slight Scottish accent.'

'Sure, yes. Yes, he is, with the difference that this feller has no beard.'

Jim coughed. He thought he caught subdued laughter, but was not sure. Smiling to himself he fell asleep, and the next he knew it was morning. An hour later he was again on the way, unquestioned by his hosts, a bit of a mystery to them as they looked after him and saw him, blankets on shoulder, rifle tucked under arm, being folded in by the great forest where there is nothing—a little bit of a figure in the immensity, receding, lost.

CHAPTER VII

AN APPOINTMENT IN THE WILDERNESS

Two weeks after he had tramped across the bridge at Riffles Jim Jefferies, with a halo of mosquitoes round his head, and a pennant of them sweeping behind him, came to the crest of Cust's Mountain. The old Stoney trail he travelled was there scarcely broader than a hand's length and almost as hard as cement, because to left and right the hills fell away abruptly. If it had been as easy to follow all the way he might have come to Cust's Divide more speedily. Even he, accustomed to work with survey parties, had moments of doubt when he stood baffled on that trail, and felt as if the very trees watched him to see if he went right or wrong. These are not pleasant moments. Imagination has to be throttled.

On the ridge of Cust's Range he saw that his partner had been right in doubting the feasibility of coming with horses. Olson's shack-floor map in mind he stood there a long while, verifying that

chart and considering the lie of the land as now displayed to him. The Stoney hunting trail went on along the crest; he even followed it some way to make sure that from it there was no branch going down into the valley where he had to go. The result was only further proof that Olson was right. The Stoney trail wavered on the ridge, taking the pick of the possible way along it, then dipped back westwards, even with an inclination to the south again, into a valley with which Jim had naught to do. Its woods might offer game and its streams fish, but that was side-issue. He just looked down at the haunting thousand-tree-tipped cup, saw far off in it a glitter as of a dropped fragment of silver (of some lake, or perhaps of a river broadened out), all mystery as it lay below him.

The point was settled beyond doubt, so back he strode to the farther side, and just on the ridge up came a pair of ears, and followed the whole body of an astonished coyote that had been behind him. Startled to find him returning in his steps it snarled, wheeled, and fled. Leaving the Stoney trail, vague though it had been, to plunge off

north-east, was like making a fresh start. Saint Anthony's had been a 'jumping-off' place; so had Riffles; but here was the real 'jumping-off' place. He chose the best spot to descend into this valley after having taken due bearings, and trudged like an ant in grass through the bottoms.

There came over him, heavier and heavier, that deep feeling of loneliness which all men who have known it have in mind when (back in the regions of dinner-bells, numbered rooms, barbers' poles, soda-fountains, and all the rest of it) they comment, after inventory of mineral, timber, or game: 'It is surely lonesome!' Few attempt to describe the never-never, back-of-beyond, off-the-map, lone and forgotten sense that falls on them, some time or another, in such places, in any other words, in words that probe further. Perhaps Jim could have done so had there been any one to hear; or perhaps he could not. Certainly he felt, as he tramped now with a scowling, puckering-eyed keenness, all that lies in these woods. There was a look betwixt expectancy and preparedness on his face. The woods down here made him feel furtive, and yet there was no need for him to be furtive.

He tramped on as one expecting assault, felt so —on the watch ; and yet there was nothing even to be thus on the watch for. He had not lost his way. He had his bearings clear enough. He could look away aslant between the legions of trees, and see the slopes behind him rolling up the stately summit where he had lately been. The sound of the wind running up there dropped down to him serene, soothing, a sound like that of the sea heard far off inland. It intensified this lowland quiet, this lowland hush.

There was nothing to fear. He had been too much in the bush—and seen bears take flight at the first sight of a man, or sit up on haunches wary, more wary than the man watching them—to be scared of an encounter with bear. It was game country, true, but though the bull-moose is no respecter of persons and, if maddened by flies or in ultra-lordly mood, will charge with equal disdain a president or a half-breed trapper, the sight of moose hoofing or antlering earth would have meant no more to him than a change of diet from flap-jack and sow-belly. He had heard stories of lynx attacking man ; and truly these big cats, if they did

get forepaws on to a man's shoulders, could slit him up with one flick of the hind legs. But he knew that the average lynx is more anxious to get out of the way instead of to give cumulative evidence for such stories—although, to be sure, anything with young, from rat to wood-buffalo, will put up a fight; and valiant bull-rat, or bull-wood-buffalo, will do the same if his dependants seem to be 'up against it.' But not to be 'up against it' is the general aim of these wild creatures.

It was simply the quiet of the woods, the being alone in them that cast this spell on him. He was falling into the condition of the Indian when inventing Evil Spirits, or of the old-time prospector conjuring up visions. He was on the verge of being timorous, not before anything he knew, but just before the mystery of life—'up against' himself. The meaning of it, what it was all for, all about—he mused subconsciously, and ever and again consciously, on that, with the million tree-tips gently oscillating round him and pointing at the sky, with creeks brawling and calling, elemental and eternal, to the pearly dawns, and the

shimmering noons, and the slow, the caressing northerly twilights; with the mountains serene, placid, stately, heedless, yet each peak looking down on him as if with individuality. He was tramping here, and away down yonder (almost as if it wasn't true, as if it had been dreamt of) was Saint Anthony's Crossing, with the heels rub-a-dubbing on the sidewalks, people coming and going, and Sadie Dixon about her duties in Morley's hotel. It all seemed impossible; it seemed as though he might awake at any moment, and find he had been dreaming, was not in this world at all. His vague thoughts had been somewhat in that vein, but when he spoke aloud, to himself, all that he said was: 'It's surely lonesome!'

It was even more than lonesome. It was arduous. If ever any man had crossed here, from range to range, he had left no sign of his passage. Down toward the creek the undergrowth was dense. Jim might have invented some spirit of the waters, some water-kelpie, out of a sound that reached him in the rising and falling roar, a sound like that of human voices. Grimly he held upon his course,

evading brush where he could, and where he could not swinging his axe. If ever he won back among humanity again and was asked about that part of his journey, he might say, after the inevitable comment on the loneliness: 'It's a mile-a-day bit of country,' and the backwoodsmen who heard would understand.

A jay almost startled him, as he broke a path to the creek that rumbled ahead, by giving a sudden cry and flying upward. It might have been warning the spirit of the creek that a man was coming. What else was there to warn in all these miles? At last, wet from his axe-work as if he had fallen into the water, he stood on the bank—stood nonplussed. The stream was not fordable. He had not expected so great a flow as this that leapt and shouted before him.

There was nothing for it but to get back again and work his way up-stream. To go along the bank was impossible, for it was a mere tangle of brush and roots, or margin of bluffs and wash-outs. He swung his bundle afresh, and backward a bit, where the brush was less dense, he axed his way, parallel with the river, and again broke

down to it, very business-like, very grim, very deliberate, a mile or two farther on. But again his view of the crossing was not hopeful. Drenched with the sweat from his exertions, he mopped his face and gently swore, without anger, very self-collected.

The sunrays came slanting through the tree-tops, the creek foamed along, swirling deep with gay colour, leaping up in foam white as snow. He would remember it all some day, perhaps, back among people again, sitting in a house; but for the moment what lay before him was less of a view than a proposition. It was not solved by sundown. He camped that night on the east shore, making camp late of necessity, for he had kept on and on in the dusk hoping for a good ford, till the night pounced upon the last of the twilight and he had just to camp where he was. He would have liked to build a big 'white-man fire,' for the sake of its cheer, but the bush was too thick, and though near the creek not damp enough. He had no desire to clear a way for himself by flame—as some prospectors have had the credit (or discredit) of doing.

Thoughts of Sadie Dixon kept him awake long after he had made camp. He could picture her so clearly, sitting there beside the lonely fire, recall the way her hair fell back in waves from the parting, ever so entrancingly, see again the curves of cheek and chin, remember the light, or expression, he knew not what to call it, nor did he try, that suffused her face. Under her eyes—if it seem not craziness to talk so!—there was a something in the nature of a halo, that he just recalled, remembering her there, till he seemed really much more actually in Morley's vestibule than in the far north-west, in the vestibule almost of the Great North Land. She moved before him, as it were under the big hanging lamp in Morley's 'rotunda.' He cherished, very tenderly, such pictures of her. A late squirrel, disturbed in a tree, cha-cha-chattered energetically and then was silent; and its little voice, big in the enfolding hush, came into his dreaming as though from far off. There was Sadie, in the slow Northern twilight, before him. Had Jim been of a different type he might have pondered a poem to her to ease (or express) his thoughts. As it was he was

merely a poet without a poem written. There she was in her blue frock and white collar. There she went stepping across the floor on which the lamp-light made a golden pool—went, passed, left the vestibule empty; the picture faded; the twilight drifted into night—night that merged the trees together into a black bulk of forest, leaving no sense of form anywhere save on the hills that stood up with serrated ridges, weird, drear silhouettes, unutterably still.

The fire changed from gold to red, from red to gold. It seemed to him, as it has seemed to thousands of campers, that the firelight and its reflections on him were the brightest spots in the world; he experienced, as thousands have experienced, a sense of being picked out, lit up, for all the stars to see, all the stars and all the possible spirits, powers of light and darkness, of good and evil—and all that—beyond human ken. There is nothing like a solitary camp in a solitary land to drive a man in upon himself, to put a hush upon him at thought of the mysterious world. Alone in a city garret he may blunder into another kind of loneliness; but people are just outside,

coming and going about their business or recreation—'to marriage or to funeral.' In the great lone lands and never-never countries of this planet one sits and ponders his days as Saint Paul (I think it was) once conceived of man girt about with principalities and powers unknown.

Next day he was up as early as the jay that resented his intrusion into its bit of country. It was the clipping of his axe that brought the first alarmed cry from that sentinel of this no-man's land; this time, however, the axe was not only clearing a way. The lonesome man who fumbled through the jay's domain was felling a tree for a bridge by which to cross the barrier of deep water. Had the country been open he would have continued up-stream, hunting for a possible crossing-place; but his reflections by the fire, before he fell asleep, had been to the effect that a man could spend a summer hacking a way up that creek, and find himself still on the wrong side with the falling leaves and the first snows.

His morning's hunt was accordingly for a tree of a height greater than the breadth of water by which it stood; and the fact that the first tree

that soared up sufficiently high grew beside a particularly deep and angry-looking pool did not dissuade him. It was an inevitable combination. Where the creek narrowed it must be deeper and wilder. Where it broadened, if he felled a tree, it would make no bridge—only a useless jetty. So the chips flew from his axe, and down fell the tree, with a rend and a thud, and a raising of dust, stretching from bank to bank.

The crossing was not a matter to dally over. It could be remembered later. Imagination could play with it, and with the possibilities of disaster in it, then; but at the time the main matter was to balance across. He had lost two days in his search for a ford—or less for a ford (for that seemed hopeless in many miles) than for convenient boulders that might be used, if not as stepping stones, as leaping stones by a determined man. When he did cross he balanced from bank to bank smartly as Japanese tight-rope walker, collected as log-rolling lumber-jack; and then, on the east bank at last, he stood looking back at his bridge a moment or two with satisfied smile, his lips close shut, and a satisfied grunt sounded

in his throat as he turned away, and fell to work breaking a trail into the brush before him.

Two days later he was rejoiced, coming to the top of the Norman Range, to see a faint blue haze of smoke hanging over the woods below. It was no beginning of a forest fire. From the one point, very definitely, it filtered up below there through the trees. And then began another descent by boulder and root; and presently a 'Whoo-who!' caused him to stop. With the back of his hand he wiped the sweat from his eyes—and there was Olson below, corn-cob pipe in mouth, hands in pockets, smiling up at him, shirt-sleeved, easy. The little fire, the roll of blankets beside it, the frying-pan cast aside, and the pannikin of black tea, made a kind of home.

'When did you arrive?' asked Jim. 'Kept you waiting?'

'Nope. Day before yesterday. How was the way in?'

'Up to Cust's Range—well, all right. But up that last valley—gosh! Look at my axe-edge and see. That was jungle.'

'I thought so,' said Olson. 'I been fishing.

I had a hunch you might make her before sun-down to-day, and saved some trout for you as a change from sow-belly. But I guess we celebrate the start with '—he bent over his kit, fumbling among it.

'Never canned corn?' exclaimed Jim.

'Canned corn is the word, sure,' replied Olson soberly. 'I got two tins. One for this here occasion and one for finding Mr. Penny Scot's bank.'

It was the happiest camp so far for Jim, for the loneliness had been preying on him. Their way together next day was along the edge of woods with grassy slopes falling to right toward a river that Olson announced to be the Big Norman. Here and there it broadened out lake-like. Jim had never been over the Peace River trail, into which Olson had broken, after discontinuing his journey to Edmonton, at Adam's Lake, so he did not know what sort of 'going' he, personally, would have found it. His partner was an older hand than he at trail work, and although Olson declared it had been a picnic stroll that did not convey much.

They had a pack-horse with them, so now Jim

could tramp unburdened. To west was that country that, in the large-scale descriptive map Olson had studied in the Government Office at Saint Anthony's, was marked 'Thickly Wooded'—a country that for a whole season will have no inhabitants apart from a family or two of Beaver Indians, another year may have a couple of prospectors passing through, and the next year will be 'nil' again in the census returns. They were well to the north of the Cartaret Block. Frequently they saw, running from the upper woods down to the river, across their path, prints of cloven deer-hoofs. Of living things there was no evidence apart from such faint trails, just such signs as Jim had seen on his lonely trudge. But he felt a weight lifted from him now. It was good to be able to let the gaze rove on a distant prospect, to see more than the next tree, to see more than twisted scrub and creeper, and weed close as the walls of a yard.

'How were the blazes on your trees coming over?' asked Olson as they hiked on, reverting to thoughts of Jim's trek.

'Half the way good,' responded Jim, 'and then

they led off all wrong and I had to work back. They led off due west.'

'I should have thought of that,' said Olson. 'I remembered it yesterday morning only, when I was fishing, wondering how you were making out. These railway survey men go and use an old trail, reblaze her, but when they work away and don't need her any more, they don't try to make it plain for anybody else coming after them that they've left the old trail. It would be kind of thoughtful to reblaze a tree or two ahead on the trail they've been using, so's to leave a hint that it does surely run on, but that they've broken away from it. When I was green I was once fogged that way at the very start, because a ranchman—the last up against the hills—had gone and blazed his boundary line. I saw his blazes and kept after them till they headed off the wrong way!'

'I was only caught once,' said Jim. 'I got on to it that the last people along had only been using the old trail as a kind of main street to take turnings off here and there along it.'

'It wasn't as easy as this, eh?' asked Olson. 'You don't need blazes here.'

Jim had been under the impression that they were not on a trail at all, just travelling on a dead reckoning; and he hardly knew what to answer.

'They just naturally will spraddle out on a place like this,' said Olson, 'and thin the trail, but yet it's clear enough for sure.'

Jefferies puckered his eyes—and to his joy saw what Olson meant. There were marks every here and there, where the ground was soft, or had been soft, odd marks, as it were little scars pointing the way.

'These North Crees come up here with horses, bunches of them,' explained Olson, 'different from the Beavers who can only keep alive and get food by living far apart from each other. If this was all we'd had to do I'd have voted for a saddle, might have brought this old pack-horse, ridden myself, and led a horse ready for meeting you. This is being on velvet. Later on I have a hunch it will be a long, long ways worse than that valley you had to axe through.'

Down and along they strode, and, over the next spur of hill, as if to prove the truth of Olson's words, they came on an Indian camp. It was not

a large one, a mere half-dozen tepees, with blackened tops and protruding poles, dogs basking in the sun, kids playing around, easy to pick out in their bright summer cotton garments.

'We'll give 'em how-do,' suggested Olson. 'If it was some of them Beavers you'd want to be sure you'd brought insect powder along, but I'd rather sleep a night in a North Cree camp than in a Dago construction shack, and that's no josh. Say! trust an Indian for seeing the pictorial as well as thinking of wood, water, and shelter. It's sure an enticing camp-site.'

It was indeed a pleasant prospect—a creek, foaming shallow over sunlit stones, chattered down to add to the flow of Norman River; and alders, aspens, and birches cast down their wavering shadows. The grass slopes rolled away to the glooming edges of the upper woods. On a dry raised bluff the tepees were pitched, and the creek swirled past (with skins stretched there in it, held down by boulders), and then rippled and danced, brimmed in a great natural basin. One might have thought Mother Nature intended it as a bathing-place for her human children; that they

so used it was shown by two sweat lodge frames on the bank.

An old Indian in a shabby black morning-coat, shirt worn outside his pants, yellow moccasins on his feet, sat by a small fire looking at them. To him Olson gave the old peace sign, palm out, waved gently to and fro forward; and the old fellow responded with a salutation of white men, hand raised, thumb against lifted index finger and second finger—what some call 'giving the high-ball,' though there are other kinds of 'high-balls' too, such as the liquid variety.

'This old boy,' said Olson, 'was in that camp with the bucko who told me about Penny Scot.'

'Hullo!' the Indian hailed. 'You bully?'

'Yep,' replied Olson. 'How you makin' out?'

A child showed at a tepee door, curious, podgy finger to mouth, and her Olson addressed in Cree—which, together with some remark the old Indian threw over his shoulder, brought every one out. Jim's roving eyes alighted on a matronly squaw arrayed in blue print, with a bandana handkerchief round her head. She met his eyes with a motherly smile. She made him feel such a kid! She had

a lined genial old face, was a bit baggy maybe, like most Indian women who have reached their prime; but there was, somehow, to his mind nothing alien, little of the savage, about her. She was what an Englishman might call 'a dear old thing.'

And as he admired the old lady he was aware that Olson was admiring a younger one. It was the drifting of his partner's eyes from the old man that made Jim 'look-see.' He decided that when Indian girls do run to prettiness they are pretty indeed; but, with a white girl's face tucked away into his heart, his admiration could only come to the point of making him consider: 'I believe Miss Dixon would call her a beauty!'

There is no hard and fast rule of manners and morals and deportment among Indians. It would be as sensible to ask: 'What do you think of white men?' as: 'What do you think of Indians?' Jim, with the excess of chivalry that had been set agoing in him by the manageress at Morley's, found himself hoping that the character of this band was good—all for the sake of that pretty red maiden. As he turned from the 'sonsy'

(as the Scots would say) matron and saw the willowy slip of a girl, he hoped the latter would grow into as sweet an old woman.

He had time for these communings, for Olson and the old man had lapsed entirely into Cree and were chatting away, all unintelligible to Jefferies save for a word or two that he had picked up on survey excursions. So he dropped into the category of onlooker—and, as Mrs. Morley once remarked, the onlookers see more than the participators. The beauty's eyes were on Olson and, if Jefferies was not a Dutchman, it was with a look of deep admiration—he might almost have said affection, she seemed so greatly impressed. And unless he was mistaken in his companion, Olson had full knowledge of the maiden's scrutiny. The sense of remoteness here, by this lonely singing creek, the remoteness from all the rest of the world, made him most seriously hope that there would be no dalliance, no philandering to hold up their expedition. It struck him that in these matters he knew nothing of his partner. Olson was sitting now, resting, as he talked to the ancient. All, indeed,

were sitting. They yarned on while the shadows of the trees stretched out over the grassy slopes.

Jim began to grow impatient. The very tranquillity of it all fired him to be up and on. He had the first attack of a feeling that was to increase during the succeeding days—a feeling that haste was essential. If Olson sat there longer it would be late afternoon through which they would journey on. But at last the twosome chat lulled. He thought Olson was considering departure—but no, suddenly he engaged the old lady in conversation, then lured on the young one, who seemed at first shy. The old man's face fell inexpressive, blank; the squaw appeared to be trying to draw the girl out, to talk her out of her shyness. Suddenly the young one glanced at Jim and said something in Cree.

'Him?' said Olson, turning—then speaking in his own tongue so that Jim could know what she had asked: 'No—no Cree.'

He began again to talk to her in Cree, and the old woman fell into the condition of 'second fiddle.' At last Olson rose—but even sat down again! Jim had risen too, and did not further imitate his

partner. He remained on his feet, restless. He felt once more that keen sense of impatience. For a second time Olson stood up. There were farewells made, comments to the kids. Jim nodded and gave 'So-long' all round. Again they were footing it out, left-right, left-right—Jefferies still feeling as though a great hole had been knocked in the adventure. Had he only known, he was being played upon by a querulousness that should be mastered. In its extreme cases it has ended in murder.

'You got kind of impatient up there, didn't you?' asked Olson.

Jim glanced at him. Both were wet again with the heat, trudge, trudging in a trudge that is automatic, in an atmosphere that is taken for granted.

'Perhaps I was. Got a sort of feeling that the shadows were moving on.'

'I know—I know,' said Olson. 'I once went over a trail with the wrong kind of man; and say, we were so surely like two kids that each should have been spanked. When I wanted to rest and enjoy some strip of shingle, he was for hiking;

when he wanted to rest—I own it to you—I got so that he seemed the laziest man in America. I got then so that I could imagine us rooted right there, part of the landscape, snowed on and shone on, and rained on for years—yes, sir, if he only delayed a quarter of an hour! You don't want to let feelings like that mount up. When you get like that, Jim Jefferies, will you oblige me by saying to yourself that it's the weariness of you tramping, a blame little man, in contrast to the hills all sitting still?'

'It was you that stayed!' said Jim. Even 'little man' irritated him, though he knew he should not have been affected by it.

'Now then, Jim, be honest wi' me. That ain't the point.'

'You're right. It's not. I shouldn't have said that. On you go with your lecture, Olson.'

'Well, you saying that shows it's not needed. But I'll just say one word more; we're coming to where there's more skeeters than atmosphere. You keep a holt on this here doctrine, I ask you. I'm human myself. I asked you to come along because I took you for a genuine son-of-a-gun that wouldn't

let these impulses get a holt of you. I've been too much in the almighty hills alone to care for another dose, the way I feel just now, so near the end of my bank-book. When we come to where the mosquito is king you oblige me by remembering that he's the cause of the trouble, and don't go brooding against me. I've known men killed because of mosquitoes as well as because of pay-dirt, and I wouldn't like to find you and me——'

Jim had still a touch of his irresponsible animosity left. It was the weirdest sensation. One part of him was inclined to say: 'To h—— with your trip! I didn't plan it! And if you are talking of possible trouble between us, let's quit right now.' But it was only a small part of him, yet a woeful real part—a kind of primitive man, maybe. What he did say and mean was:—

'You'll not find me kick, Olson. I believe it was that belt of woods ahead that kept fretting me.'

'That's what,' said Olson. 'And it is good to have this over before we get into them.'

Two Indians suddenly showed up over a rise ahead, riding along toward them.

'I've made an arrangement with that camp,'

said Olson, 'that if we can't take the pack-horse much farther with us, we'll make a smoke up there and they'll send somebody along for him, run him with their herd till we get out.'

Jim was further annoyed that it required the sight of the advancing Indians to bring that out. He thought he should have been considered. He thought Olson was running the expedition and planning it in a very high-handed manner. Then one part of him saw that the other part of him was behaving like a child, a bad petulant child. He dismissed that petulant child, and by the time the Indians had swept past, he was in better mood. Their coming broke for the moment the sense of vastness and solitude.

On the following day an experience befell that upset Olson, apt though he was in wood-lore. There had been sign of the presence of deer, shapely cloven-hoof marks, clear cut and dainty. The diet of flap-jack and bacon palled; the appetite conjured up scents of barbecuing deer-steaks, and a halt was ordained that should, for the three travellers, horse and men, have been altogether good, with the horse resting, and Jim doing

stitching, darning, moralising, while Olson procured fresh meat.

He was not entirely hopeful, but trusted that the difficulty of still-hunting here, in this land of twigs and many fallen leaves of the crackling kind, would be atoned for by the lack of hunters. The game was not gun-shy. He set off in the meditative way usual to a hunter, recalling the ways and tricks of the chase, with an air quiet and keen. Away from the camp he picked his steps carefully even before the tang of the wood-smoke was out of his nostrils. He circumvented bushes that would have fought against his passage. He went furtively on. When the green of a grass pocket glinted between the trees he even stopped dead to gaze round him, looking less for the shape of a deer (knowing well how they fall into the landscape, neat as pieces in a jig-saw puzzle) than for a kind of blob, not outlined at all like a primitive drawing of a deer. Only when the beast scents man, and moves, alert, taut, does it look like that, an outlined animal, head up, hind legs braced, one fore-leg bent, ready to plunge away if need be.

So he scouted on—wary, with eyes intent for

any such blob of darkness; alert, too, for sign of the little cloven hoofs. But he saw nothing, raised nothing—except a jay. He swore at it under his breath, knowing how all other creatures who heard the cry would lift their heads, furred and feathered, and give ear to discover what had perturbed the jay. He remained motionless a spell, and when he did pass on again he took a different way from that in which the noisy warning bird had flown. A little further on he forgave it, on coming on the print of deer-hoofs leading up toward a knoll. They seemed very fresh.

‘It’s been down for a drink,’ he thought. ‘Maybe heading up high before stopping. We’ll see.’

He watched the woods and the track, somewhat in the way of one who, reading music, gives an occasional flicker of a glance at the keys, and thus progressing he mounted the little knoll. If there was a kind of meadow beyond, maybe deer were there, with the trees on the other side for a back-cloth. He ascended warily, ready to draw a bead a-top if the game offered; then he stopped dead, and stared perplexed.

He was 'up against' something new to him. On the crest of the knoll something moved to and fro. He stood pat, staring at it. Only one who is mentally deficient pots at whatever he sees moving, even when in a bit of country supposed to be sheltering no other of his species. One never knows. They say that round the tourist jumping-off places for big game hunting a man is shot every year in mistake for bear, and Olson had knowledge as well as imagination and sense.

This thing that moved baffled him. Left and right on the crest it switched persistently. There was no breeze to stir a bush—but, anyhow, he could not place the thing itself. He advanced a little way, eyes fixed keenly on that fluttering and nameless object. That sense of *not knowing*, near neighbour to fear, furrowed his brow, made tense his eyes, and caused him to keep finger very near the trigger. He recalled the evil name of the woods—and abruptly dismissed the superstition of the Indians as, inevitably, it came into his mind. He walked on carefully a few more steps. He stared at the mysterious thing. There was life of

some kind causing it to move, but what, thought he, in thunder, was it?

He tried to imagine different causes for the movement; but when he couldn't get the vestige of a notion of what it was that moved how could he arrive at a solution of what was moving it? Perhaps what he saw was not the thing itself—perhaps it moved something else. Grimly he took another wary upward step. What, again, in thunder, was it? It did not seem scared of him. Was it an animal, a lower animal, or was it a man—part of a man? He crept on quietly, and suddenly the thing that waggled and waggled showed itself, as he drew nigher, as a deer's tail! He caught the white of the lower part at the moment the deer was aware of his presence.

It plunged away, and he rushed forward to shoot; but it was gone. Only a crashing of bushes told him the direction of its flight. He stood there glaring at the place where it had been, and instead of laughing he was enraged. As he stood a-top the knoll all was clear to him. There was a salt-lick there, in a bit of a dip at the summit, and he realised, in the midst of his fury, that the beast

had been licking a salt outcrop and wagging its brown scut the while in enjoyment.

He did not think: 'Oh well, you can go on being happy, then!' He was merely furious. He knew that to hunt on in that direction now was of little use, and besides, the day was wearing on, so he turned back to camp empty-handed. Jim, hearing his approach, put on a ready kettle, and looked up to see what his partner carried. Jim's face was an expressive face, and it showed a touch of disappointment Olson thought—but only a touch. It was more as if Jim had not expected him to be successful. He did not pause to consider that Jefferies, having heard no snap of a shot, was doubtless prepared to be told that game had not offered itself.

Olson, in a word, was in a bad mood—entirely understandable, but bad. He came heavily, grimly, to the fire, laid down his rifle and sat there without a word. At that moment, by some movement of his arm, Jim upset the kettle. Up went a cloud of steam and ashes.

'Huh!' grunted Olson in a tone of the deepest contempt.

If Jim, over his darnings and stitchings, had not been moralising to himself upon the making of character, and how a man who would worthily love should have control of himself, there might have been trouble then. The mere grunt was like a lash; it was more biting than speech. For a moment Jim's jaw tightened, then he stepped a few paces away, bent, took up a hunk of crumbling yellow or cream-coloured wood, broke it into fragments in his hands, and strewed it on the whitened and sizzling fire. Up leapt the flames. At that Olson's eyes changed, and he gave a very different kind of grunt from the first.

'You're quite right, Jim Jefferies,' he said. 'That's all that's necessary. No woodsman need waste time jeering at a fellow for upsetting a kettle, with God's own fire-lighters laying ready to hand. The trouble is that I nearly got one. I'm sure mad at myself——' and he told of the wagging scut, beginning in tones of dejection and ending in laughter.

And then they swapped stories of men after deer. Olson told of a neighbour of his, on a ranch he had once, years ago, who went out deer-stalking,

driving some distance from his home with a double team which he unhitched at noon.

'He left 'em to graze while he piked round in the woods,' explained Olson. 'And suddenly he sees two fat fellows, ups with his rifle—and biff! biff!—gets them both, plumb dead, quick as that. He was surely some shot. But the trouble was that, after scouting round in the woods, the two fat deer that he thought he had shot were his own two horses that had taken him out that morning!'

Jim smiled, and remarked that a man was crazy to shoot a thing just because it moves—and that was the last of their approach to friction for the time being.

By another rapid-falling creek that came tumbling down out of the woods they camped that night, in that greater stillness, that quiescence that falls when the insects stop their chirring and humming, when all the little sounds that by day seem nothing are made manifest by their cessation. Two birds veered over them and swept down to the water, two loons, and one gave that queer cry that suggests the laugh of the lost. After supper they flung wet leaves on the fire, as a smudge against

mosquitoes, and sat smoking their pipes; and away beyond, up in the tangled gulches of the hills, coyotes yapped, and owls gave their deep hooting calls, or their low bubbling ones. Jim rested on an elbow, content, sluggish.

'Say,' said Olson, 'that Cree girl is sure a peach. When they run to good looks they knock any statue in the museums unearthed in them old Roman and Greek cities.'

'Very pretty,' agreed Jim absently, musing on another face, not interested in Olson's passing fancy for the copper-coloured beauty.

'She certainly took stock of us,' Olson went on: 'and I did not try to hide that I found her comely to look upon, as the old Scriptural folks would say.'

'Certainly pretty,' said Jim sleepily, and knocked out his pipe—unaware how the Indian girl was to be one of the cyphers in this story that they were then living.

CHAPTER VIII

ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE, OR——?

UP the all-but-unknown North Fork of Norman River two figures, dwindled to the value of ants in the sight of eagles coasting heaven overhead, kept at it in the plod of men whose legs were wound up for the day. They longed for stately forests of fir and pine, but there was no use of longing; scrub had its innings along the North Fork, and through scrub they had to go.

A sense of foreboding developed out of the sense of the drear. There were here some very low trees, either young or stunted, their lowest branches but a few feet above the ground; and each stood over a gloom of its own making. To minds without distraction the scene inevitably made suggestions. It is the old story of environment. Each place affects the spirit in its own way, though maybe at the time the traveller is

often unaware of what influences him and only in retrospect, going over his way in memory, sitting in an easy chair instead of on a log, with furniture round him and walls, instead of trees and mountains, does it dawn upon him that it was this or that in the landscape that affected him, out there in the waiting wilderness.

Each had these thoughts, thoughts apart from the trail, at the back of his mind, as they broke through the woods. These low trees, with their under-gloom, suggested bowed bent-backed creepings through the world. A sense of foreboding, then, developed out of the sense of the drear, the dismal. That strange inspiration that had come to Jim, in a manner beyond him to diagnose, but that he very definitely felt—that strange inspiration, the bearer of which was Sadie Dixon—was shadowed now. Through his nostrils, as he trudged, he emitted a grunt of mockery at himself. A poor fool! So he called himself. He seemed to stand off, to see himself as he had been these last years, swinging an axe, or driving a team, in striped cotton jacket, or in heavy mackinaw coat—all for what? All for nothing!

It was good that he trudged in silence, or he would either have depressed or exasperated his partner; though, to be sure, it is remarkable how telepathic men are in the woods. His thoughts were hazy, he did not try to give them words—he merely was aware of a great contempt for the man he had been. He even jeered at himself for that brightness, the name of which was Sadie Dixon. He knew—he was certain—he felt it in his bones, as they say, trudging through that motionless and so melancholy tract, that Sadie could never be anything to him—never more than just a girl who had looked sadly into his eyes for a moment. When he returned to Saint Anthony's, if ever he did return, she would be gone. He knew it. People move about so in the North-West. She would be gone! There was nothing in it!

Thus he communed. It did not occur to him that even such views regarding a woman were new to him. Pretty faces had intrigued him in towns before, and he had carried memories of them into the bush or the mountains—to cast them from his mind at last with the laugh of a cynic. But this

face he did not spurn away with a sneer at his own 'softness'; it was, instead, as if he regretfully lost it—trudging through these forbidding woods.

'It's as bad here as north of Superior,' remarked Olson suddenly.

'It don't cut any ice how bad it is,' said the other. 'When we plunged into this blame gloom I made an oath to the last of the open meadows.'

'To what effect?'

'To keep smiling.'

In three days' tramp there was no place in which they had so much as a glimpse of a mountain peak to help them toward a sense of their latitude and longitude; they looked up on a gray or white kind of background, a sullen sky.

'What they want here,' said Olson, 'is to fell a heap of the trees. Queer to think how trees keep a country moist. But it ain't nothing,' he added cheerily, 'to the west coast islands. North Vancouver, and such like, have this part of our queer star skinned for tangle. It's a fact you can't see the sights of your rifle there after four o'clock in midsummer, and the moss hangs from trees

same as I never saw anywhere except in old Buffalo Bill's show that time when he did the historic series and gave the forests of this America as they were when Indians camped where Broadway is honking and blazing now.'

'Broadway!' ejaculated Jefferies. 'I just don't believe it, as the fellow said when he first saw a giraffe,' and he pinched the lobe of his ear, slaying thus one mosquito in front and one to rear.

There was much time for self-communings, as he toiled along, with the salt taste of sweat on his lips, with its moisture even in his eyes, nipping a little. It was an old familiar sensation, not entirely unpleasant. One part of him might almost curse such toil, but it was a genial kind of cursing; another part almost revelled in it—if it was a kind of strained revelling!

There were some interludes also of sheer physical bliss, when a bit of breeze blew on his chest and forehead and when, had Olson turned, he could have seen a smile at the edges of his partner's mouth, a smile of enjoyment. These are the moments of kinship with the free winds that all

wanderers know. If cities lure them home, and they succumb to the enticement of saddle-bag chairs, some one will perhaps open a window, allowing the breeze to flutter in—and the wilds call them back. They forget that the pleasure of the remembered wind was marred (as well as heightened) by the weariness of the trail; and it is generally in vain to remind them. They nod, and say: 'Yes, that's so, maybe!' and pull out again for their silent places, their great lone lands, their back-of-beyond.

In other perspiring tramps, with pack, or survey chain, or teams that needed more than a word of encouragement—that needed a shoulder to the wheel, loadings and reloadings, axle-deep in muskeg or glued in tenacious gumbo—Jim had found pleasure in the little lightening winds, a sense of friendliness too. But a new element had come in. He had once roughly and youthfully enjoyed them. Now he felt as it were something sacred in their refreshment, something sacred at the back of the big woods, at the back of the singing of the creeks, even behind these expanses

of sullen sky that made grander and more stately the crests and slopes that jumbled and rolled and fell so augustly together. When he thought of the day when he should (to use the language of the country) 'come out,' of the day when sidewalks would ring again under his heels, his brow furrowed in shame over memories of other 'comings out.'

It can scarcely be thought that he would have stepped up to the penitent form at the call of any travelling evangelist, whether of the polished, impeccable-phrasing, drawing-room type, or of the hail-fellow-well-met baseball slang variety, but something in this country now spoke to him, something beyond what had ever spoken before; and it was changing him, as no evangelist could have changed him. The forests and the skies, the white dawns, the sultry noons, the slow twilights (with their queer hint of evanescence and everlastingness), the nights when he woke and looked away up tree-stems pointing to the blinking stars—all these things, all the life of the land that is still as the First Cause left it, touched him in a new way. It was not thoughts of the money lost ('flung

over the bars for the saloon-keepers'; it was not the money 'that you might just as well hand to the pasteboard sports without turning a card') that vexed him and made him frown. But he felt that he had insulted the spirit of these russet trees and patient hills by toiling in their midst only to support some wheezy-chested and blear-eyed saloon-keeper, or some cruelly-lipped 'kid-glove sport.' He could see them now—these he had helped to keep—and they were like two types of spiders, spiders bloated and spiders lean, waiting for him.

All this was due—although maybe he did not realise it upon every occasion of 'kicking himself' for a flippant past—to another face that he carried with him, a face to remember very tenderly, a trustful face, the trust in which one could well wish not to disappoint. The fellow was in love as surely as any character in any book in which an idler goes match-making after countess or American millionaire's daughter, backed by the classic columns of the Forum, or the blue sky of Florence, or the reflections (with the stinks eliminated) of Venice by moonlight and a

gondolier's circumspection. Men love on the Atlantic passage even as on the P. and O. Men love to the tang of balsam as surely as to the tinkle of iced drinks at Shepherd's. Firs and pines, the Rocky Mountains and Saint Anthony's; the Himalayas, deodars, and Simla—wherever you go the story is told.

But whether Jim was to marry her or not is another matter. Men have done great things for the sake of a woman who only smiled and passed by, and inspired other men too. Thousands of lovers have sung a song of Waller's—though the lady who inspired it did not care.

It was the heaviest day of their journey so far. Mosquitoes buzzed all the while, vindictive, roaring to attack, swerving, then settling and stinging; and anon a little black fly, that had feet of velvet and no warning hum at all, attacked them.

'It's going to thunder,' said Olson. 'It ain't no superstition—these flies just grow—just are—before thunder.'

To this Jim said nothing. There was nothing to say. He merely hoped for the thunder to ease the atmosphere. They plodded on. It was

certainly their worst day. Yesterday there had been mosquitoes, but yesterday had also offered them, if not a trail through, at least a trapper's base-line which they followed as far as it served, the axe tucked away under the blanket rope, not required.

'Still,' said Olson, 'there's no use kicking. Everything tallies, from the mosquito to the close bush. We're getting on for what they call Little Norman, but don't mark on the maps at all because it's just a rumour. A canoe and a current for me ever after this! The flat and treeless joy of the flattest bit of Saskatchewan for me! Say, what a whale of a world it would be if the current always set with you, and the wind blew with you, and the hills all sloped down.'

'I don't agree,' answered Jim, amused, but not laughing, scarce smiling, sweat in his eyes.

'But I tell you——' roared Olson, and paused. He was walking in advance just then, and halted in his tracks to look over his shoulder. 'That's one on me,' he said. 'Lost my rag. Sermonise me. Give me what you like.'

'I wish I could give you a tin of canned——'

'Don't mention the name of that delectable vegetable—fruit—what in heck do you call it?—cereal!' ripped Olson. 'I guess it's a cereal.'

A queer noise came through the woods, something like the noise sailors know before a storm, that ominous note in the cordage. The trees, all still, murmured of it. Then suddenly their tops fluttered more, wavered and oscillated in an anxious sort of way. There was a kind of trepidation in the air.

'I notice the bigger flies are becoming so sluggish you can flick them dead before they alight,' said Jim.

'Thunder!' replied Olson, in the tones of a sure weather-prophet.

They made camp at last, and very quiet they were as Jim whittled a stick for central lighter to set the fire agoing, and Olson unpacked.

'It's the strangest thing,' said the latter. 'I don't know whether it's the electricity in the air upsetting me, but I feel as if——' he paused, looking all round so far as one could look in that forest.

'As if what?'

Olson was pouring water slowly and carefully into the flour.

'No matter,' said he, and stirred away at the batter.

'As if we were being followed?' asked Jim.

Olson looked up, and their eyes met.

'You feel it?' he said.

'Either that or the electricity. I've never been like it before outside a town—feel as if there's all sorts of things round us.'

'Things?'

'Oh, I expect it's the electricity,' said Jim.

'I reckon that's what it is,' agreed Olson. 'Electricity's a queer thing. I met a man who told me he'd heard it ringing in the air like a bell.'

'I've heard of that too,' said Jim.

'That's right. Thought he was stuffing me at first, but a little bit of travel makes a man believe anything. He said it was one of the sweetest sounds in the world.'

'He must have been in a dry-belt.'

'He was; near Savonas, B.C. How did you know what it was?'

'I've read of it. He was lucky—the book I read said it was not often heard.'

They felt eased. They yarned on in this key, thus thrusting aside the subject they had mentioned earlier. But the very fact that they talked so much spoke of wrought nerves. A party may chatter in lonely places; two men don't, as a rule, unless to cover their thoughts instead of to reveal.

CHAPTER IX

ON THE TRAIL

HAD Jefferies said, in answer to the careful leading questions of Messrs. Squire and Powell regarding Olson's whereabouts: 'He's gone to Calgary or Edmonton' and no more, they would have suspected that he was at neither place. That is the failing of crooks, to think people are lying to them. But Jim was wise. To be offered 'treat' by men who are practically strangers—merely eating at the same hotel—well, it may be 'all right' or it may not; but to be offered 'treat' by a man you have scowled at is suspicious. So Jim took their liquor and, as we know, informed them: 'He's gone to Edmonton for Calgary,' then blurted out: 'Calgary? What did I say Calgary for? I meant to say Athabasca Landing.'

Their friendliness oozed thereafter. They esteemed him a fool who thought himself clever. They decided that Olson really had gone out—to

Edmonton or Calgary, and the reason for Jim trying to take back what he said was, to their minds, merely due to the fact that he had suddenly thought: 'What business is it of theirs?' And that was exactly what Jim intended. They came to the conclusion that Olson was off out of their sphere of interest.

It was by the merest accident that they got—or had dropped before them—a clue that set them back on the case. The driver of the stage to rail-head, in some talk about that fascination of the North-West which brings back to it even men who have left it reviling, and amid the swopping of stories about such departures and returns, said: 'Why, that man Oilson. I'm not sure, but I don't think he went on by train from Adam's Lake after all.'

'No!' cried out one or two delighted hearers.

'I don't think so,' the driver repeated. 'He certainly was in no hurry, for he ate supper next to me—and the train had pulled out. She was standing there when we got in, as usual. He was sure in no hurry anyhow.'

'Did you see him around in the morning?'

'Yes; but then there's only one train a day in and out. I'll tell you if he's there when I come back next trip.'

Squire and Powell decided not to wait. They travelled with the loquacious driver on his next journey to rail-head at Adam's Lake. They could have lynched Jefferies had they had an opportunity then. It irked them to think he had been trying to be deep with them—and had been deep with them.

'The son-of-a-gun knew we were fishing,' said Squire. 'And it was because he knew Olson's plans that he answered as he did. He thought that if he said: "Edmonton for Calgary" he was putting us off. Pretty sly, eh?'

'I'm thinking on the same lines. He probably suspected that we'd either seen him go out, or had heard of it—so he acknowledged he'd gone in that direction. The addition was meant to fog us. He knew—yes, sir—he knew Olson was going no farther than Adam's Lake.'

'It certainly calls for a run down there, eh?'

'Sure. That's too near here to lose him. There's something afoot.'

So down the Edmonton road they also went, but only as far as rail-head. There, in their own way, they found out that Olson had bought supplies and hit up on to the Peace River road. Of Jim Jefferies they thought no more, for they had seen him wangling west out of Saint Anthony's on the loaded wagon, and looked on him as only one more of the wandering units ready to do 'whatever turned up.' As for Adam's Lake—prospectors were one of its mainstays. There they sat on the blistered veranda, staring before them, inert. So far it was easy to trace Olson. Afterwards it was not so easy.

People in town, in reply to a blunt question, will tell you if some one has been there and outfitted. But ranchers on the way, or wagoners 'flagged' in passing, look at you coldly when you ask if they've met 'So-and-so'; or 'seen a man looking thus-and-thus, with a pony coloured so-and-so?' They answer on principle that they can't rightly recollect; for they shelve the responsibility of meddling in any man's business. Squire and Powell learnt that Olson had outfitted, but people were surly about questions. They must

discover his direction otherwise. The next link was found by Powell, at table in the hotel.

'I've just heard that we're liable to bump into Olson here,' he said. 'He's outfitted for a trip up the Peace River trail too—just a day or two ago.'

'Olson's a good man,' replied Squire. 'I haven't seen him for some time.'

'Well, we're liable to see him on the road. I was told he had an eye on the country along the North Fork of the Athabasca.'

They continued the talk because another man at the table had shown, with a light in his eye, some faint sign of interest. This was not their first attempt, but this time the fish jumped.

'Well, sir,' said their fellow-diner, 'he's either gone a long way round or you've been misinformed. I know Olson well by sight. If he's going prospecting on the North Fork he's going a long ways round. When I hauled down the road yesterday I saw him making away up the trail there on the Norman River side.'

Squire's expression changed.

'Well, I hope he strikes oil,' he said. 'If he

strikes oil good it means more than his old seam, I suppose?'

They were mightily pleased with themselves, and set out with a fine sense of mutual pull. That sense held as long as the road was good. It held valiantly when they too went coasting up from the Peace River road over toward the Norman country; but as fold on fold of the wilderness closed behind them, as the way grew worse, as the flies increased, so it came to them, in the phrase of the West, that they were not men who could sleep under the same blanket. The question that the hills had put to Jim and Olson—and continued to put to them—pestered these two with every fresh closing in of the dove-tailing hills behind them.

Matters were not mended by the fact that Squire had brought liquor with him from Adam's Lake. They should not have been able to get it there—but they did. He had a look that, in a 'dry' region, would always bring a 'boot-legger' to his side, if there was one of that fraternity anywhere near. He had already taken the major part of the alleged whisky, and was suffering from 'morning-

after ' symptoms that lasted more than a morning, or a day. The warning of his upper lip was accentuated. There was that in his eyes Powell noted and did not like. He could not account, even on the strength of the liquid dope that had been consumed, for an air as of one haunted that grew and stayed about his partner. In his heart Powell soon began to think this pursuit the greatest folly.

'It don't look to me like an oil country,' he said, after a week's tramp. 'And if it is it's too far back to pay.'

'Shucks!' exclaimed Squire. 'Where there's oil for one there's oil for two. And that fellow is so still about whatever it is that he's on to that it is surely something worth inquiring into.'

They were puzzled, later, on reaching that camp of Olson's where he had waited for Jim. They made, however, a highly plausible explanation.

'There's some fellow been up on that range, and seen Oilson's camp, and come down to pow-wow,' said Squire. 'He was on foot. Went back to his camp after a chin-wag.'

That was entirely likely; but when by the tracks

it was made evident that Olson and the man who joined him went on together with the one pony, they were worried again, and explanation was not so easy. They almost wrangled over it.

'Maybe the other fellow's hoss went to glory over some ledge, chuck and all. Nothing for him to do but come out with another man—and thank God for him.'

'But he's not coming out—he's going farther in,' was the right response to this.

Squire was extremely irritable.

'Well, you wouldn't have Oilson turn round just to feed another man out!' he snapped.

So they were left puzzled and bickering. Neither was good to look upon—grim, taciturn, gloomy, brooding (any or all of the words will serve), when they reached the Cree camp. It was no wonder the women kept to the tepees, that the men were sphinx-like, while the children peeped and hid. Neither talked Cree.

'Bo' jou'! How-do!' said Squire, in the lead, coming down to the camp.

A throaty 'How-do!' from John Wood Buffalo, the ancient, was all his reply, and not another

word. Squire sat down, produced his tobacco pouch, and offered it to the old man, wheat-papers stuck in it. John rolled a cigarette, handed back the bag and papers, but he seemed as far from conversation as before. The Indians were, to these white men, more like effigies than human beings. Then Squire saw a papoose peering at a tepee opening, and made a 'peep-bo' movement at it warranted to scare any child, whatever its colour. One or two young men who lounged there eyed them without any expression save the glum. Squire hated the whole bunch with a deep hatred. He wished he could ride roughshod (as the phrase is) over them all. He had tried show of friendliness in the offer of tobacco; he would now try trade.

'You sell moccasin?' he asked.

Old John, without any facial change, turned and muttered something over his shoulder, whereupon one of the young men went stolidly to a tepee and disappeared inside. Squire had a glimpse of a young woman within and smiled and nodded, then saw another child and peep-boed at it; but, as they say—nothing doing. He wanted

to exclaim : ' To h—— with this outfit of Nitches and Siwashes ! ' He was on the point of saying : ' It is sure a shy and retiring bunch of squaws ! ' but he didn't, as he was not sure how much English they knew. That fact, and his lack of Cree, and his desire to discover certain things, kept him diplomatic though he was baffled in his attempts to be engaging.

The Indian lad came out of the tepee with a handful of moccasins, and Squire stretched for them.

' How much ? ' he asked.

But the young man did not—or would not—admit understanding. He handed the moccasins to the old fellow.

' Dollar a pair,' said John Wood Buffalo, holding them forth.

' You want whisky for them ? ' suggested Squire.

There was no grin of joy, as he had expected. He had, to be sure, no whisky left with which to trade had the Indian grasped at the suggestion. He was in his playful mood. He wanted them to reply : ' Yes ! ' so as to be able to say : ' Ah, no whisky ! '

The reply was merely : 'Dollar a pair.'

'You have a pair, Powell?' Squire asked.

'Yes,' replied Powell. 'Handy after making camp and sitting around.'

Squire tossed a pair to his partner, retained a pair for himself, tossed the bunch back to John Wood Buffalo, and felt for the money.

'Here you are,' he said, and handed a dollar bill.

'Dollar a pair,' repeated the Indian.

'Shell out, Powell,' said Squire.

Powell fumbled in his pocket, drew forth a pocket-book, extracted a dollar bill and gave it to the old Indian, in the pupils of whose eyes it was as though a little flame had flickered up briefly. He looked at the two bills, folded them carefully, then raised his eyes to Squire.

'Where you from?' he inquired.

'Adam's Lake.'

There was a long pause. 'Where you go?'

'Look for two white men,' answered Squire.

John Wood Buffalo remained mute. It was as though he desired no more information.

'They steal money from us,' said Squire. 'We

have camp-go fish. They steal. We follow trail.'

The Indian might not have been interested in this additional and unsolicited news. He smoked and gazed at nothing.

'Where they steal?' he asked at last.

'Oh, back on Peace River road,' said Squire.

'You see two white men around here?' asked Powell.

John looked at him for the first time.

'Yep,' he said.

'Which way they go?'

A woman's voice suddenly came from one of the tepees, but she might only have been speaking loudly to someone within, and not to John. He hardly moved his head. Certainly his expression never changed. At any rate he made no answer to her, if her speech had been to him. Instead he asked Squire a question, or offered advice. No inflection in his voice told whether a mark of interrogation should be applied or not.

'You tell Shemogenes on Peace River road,' he said.

Squire wilted at that 'Shemogenes' (Redcoat), for it was not a pleasant word.

'Not see any Shemogenes on road,' he replied, and could not help a touch of something like triumph from showing.

There was more feminine chatter from that tepee. The two white men did not like it.

'I tell Shemogenes,' said John Wood Buffalo. 'I tell him they steal. You go catchum. Maybe you not catchum. Shemogenes catchum all right. You bet!' There was an amiable grin on his face, though to one of the white men it did not seem to be only amiable. To Squire there was a suggestion of being laughed at in it.

'Oh, I guess we can get them ourselves,' said he, rising.

John made a gesture attempting to signify it was possible, but unlikely, then—

'Shemogenes always find man if man steal,' he said, 'if man kill.'

Over his shoulder Squire looked at him with drooping lids.

'Guess we can see where they hit out,' he said to his partner, and he strolled away from the camp

down creek. While he was gone Powell crossed the creek and moved up on the opposite bank. A child watched him from under a tepee, and he smiled at it.

'How you do?' he said.

It looked shyly up at him—and then was plucked back out of sight. He went further up the bank, chin on chest, looking for the heavily-nailed shoe-prints that they followed.

'Here you are!' he shouted to Squire, who wheeled, looked round, and came along slowly wearing his most stalwart manner.

'He's a big ugly brute,' thought Powell to himself. 'Here they are,' he said aloud.

'Get up, you!' Squire snarled to his pack-horse. He paid no further attention to the Indians, adopted toward them the manner he always kept for 'Nitches' and 'Siwashes' when he wanted nothing from them, or after he had obtained what he wanted. As he came tramping through the shallow creek, pounding on the pony's haunch, Powell looked beyond him, back at the camp.

'So-long!' he hailed.

'So-long!' answered Wood Buffalo.

'To h—— with them!' growled Squire.

Smiting the lagging pack-horse again, for whinnying at sight of the Indians' herd grazing along the bank of the river below, he ploughed on after Powell and, his eyes narrowed to slits, his lips pursed in a grim pout, stared gloomily across the rolls of bench-land swerving away, and up, toward the encircling blue of the woods.

CHAPTER X

COURAGE AND FEAR

WHEN Squire and Powell were well out of sight, Laughing Earth—who had been prompter, as it were, in the wings—suggested to her uncle, John Wood Buffalo, that Olson and Jefferies should be warned. His eyes twinkled at her in the lenient twinkle of an old man, and he asked if enough had not been done for the handsome big white man, and his slim partner, by dropping a hint to these others, just gone, that the Redcoat did exist. He put aside her suggestion, saying he thought Olson and his friend could look after themselves; he pointed out that the two strangers had wilted at mention of the police-boy. There would be no shooting, he opined.

Diffidently she made her fears known to the others—and one bantered her with having lost her heart to the first white man, while another said that

seeing the pursuers had gone on it was too late to warn the pursued. But she suspected that both were afraid of the woods into which the white men had gone, that the first tried to evade any mission to warn by banter, and as for the second—he talked rubbish! It would be easy for an Indian to pass the pursuers unobserved and get upon the trail of 'Olisohn'—as the Crees called him. She looked the banterer in the eyes, thinking to herself: 'You are afraid!' and he read her gaze aright. Laughing Earth tilted her little chiselled head and triumphed. There was to be no further jesting to live down.

But that night she could not sleep—and in the morning she was gone. She went in trepidation; every inch of the way was terrible to her when she came near enough to the woods to see them as more than a great blue wall—to see them as trees upon trees, on and on. The Indian does not, although he is born in its midst, love loneliness. There is not a tribe but holds some part of its demesne as haunted—or dubious. There are parts of the Bad Lands that the Sioux will not enter in

broad day, and even when they, perhaps, have to, it is only a flying trip in and out. The antipathy to the Barren Lands of the Copper-Knives and Dog-Ribs is doubtless not so much due to superstition as to weather-wariness, for blizzards sweep across these reaches almost without warning. And there are other places that only an old myth makes sinister. These sandhills of Alberta that the Black-foot skirt round are homes of the dead, they believe.

What is properly called the North Fork of Norman's River comes down out of a land very awe-inspiring to the North Crees. All things aided toward trepidation of Laughing Earth. There was the bad name of the land. There was also her modesty, for she happened to be of the kind called 'good' by Jim. She would have to tell, when she returned (if ever she did return), where she had been—and there are copper-hued scandalmongers as well as white. Also with the copper, as with the white, there are those who doubt any announcement of idealistic motive for an action.

Yet Laughing Earth had—simply had—to go on

the trail of that big Cree-talking white man, and his lean, quiet companion. Fearful and brave, timid and daring, she circled round the pursuers, left them behind, travelling swift as Indians can, with only a little store of deer-pemmican to eat on the way. In the deep of the Norman Woods she knew to the full how much afraid—how brave she was. In her imagination these forests (as indeed were they almost in reality) were everlasting, awesome. There was no end to them.

She could follow the trail of Olson and Jefferies—need it be said?—with as great certainty as the townsman treads the sidewalk. She plucked some ease, also, to herself, in the thought that Olson—Olisohn—and his friend were not very far ahead. After passing Squire and Powell she had a little difficulty in picking up the trail again because of a barrier of muskeg; but, once found, she kept on in the lithe Indian way, the seemingly tireless onward sweep, the foot not lifted high, but skimming the ground, going forward very definitely at every stride.

The bottoms, the dim depths of the woods, appalled her. She had left camp long before sun-

rise. The smoke of the fire by which Squire and Powell slept (or would, perhaps, be breakfasting when she saw it) told her where to leave the trail. But for herself there could be no camp-fire the first night, lest the men behind saw it. Indians alone in the woods, in the dark, are not at ease. Indians alone in woods reputed as haunted are like terrified children. Without a fire Laughing Earth crouched all night listening to the owls, the coyote wails, heard once a far-off, deep-toned wolf-voice, and shuddered till the dawn.

Then she went on again, laughed to herself with joy when the trail led to higher parts and she could get a glimpse of tree-tops instead of just trees—trees—trees. All the while the sinister name of the neighbourhood hung over her. Once, in a particularly melancholy glade, she came near to turning back. A blasted tree had looked like a hoodoo awaiting her coming—but she might as well go on now, she considered, and dare hoodoos and all. To go back to banter—or maybe worse—among her own people, without warning Olson and his friend—why, that was unspeakable! Her dark eyes blazed valiantly and on she went.

The mosquitoes were to her a minor detail, though they harassed her too. Hoodoos and scandal—these are worse than mosquitoes. All the sounds of the forest—the rub-a-dub drumming on the earth, breaking out suddenly, followed by a crashing of small trees and branches, signified the flight of deer that had either winded her or been driven frantic by flies. The sound, at night, as of heavy breathing, was but of a mud turtle in a swamp. Everything she heard was comprehensible—the deers' stampede, the wolf's chesty bay. What she was afraid of most was something beyond all she knew.

On the late afternoon of her second day there was great heaviness in the air and great oppression in her heart. Ever and again she bent to look at the earth where the feet she followed had disturbed it. She knew she was very close upon Olson and his partner now, for the little ridges at the side of the shoe-marks stood up perfectly in places, had not toppled over at all. In one part, although the wind was humming all through the woods, a bent branch had not swept into its right position. She

stooped under it, gave it the faintest touch with finger-tip, and back it swerved.

The twilight stole round her, pursuing her out of the east, and on she went, thinking to herself that she was so near now that she should soon see their camp fire and be able, even after night-fall, to get to it. She had at this hope a slight qualm of shyness, wondering what she could say to begin. Yet surely that big Cree-talking white man would understand why she came, would appreciate, would be good to her. The twilight ebbed and she had to walk more slowly.

Suddenly there came a great flash of light, illuminating and then leaving more deeply shadowed all the woods. A crash of thunder followed immediately after. She gasped. It was as if the Evil Spirits were about to do their worst; and here, it was said, lived the Thunder Bird! She stood still a moment, blinked her eyes—and again pressed forward, following the trail as much by a mysterious sense as by sight. A great wind swept through the tree-tops after that roar of thunder. Another flame across the sky lit up the twiddling frightened trees; the thunder pealed;

and the echoes went on and on, rumbling and fading, and had not ceased altogether before another stab of light brought another crash.

Then something leapt against her out of the darkness—knocked her down—undoubtedly the hoodoo of the woods. She put up her hands before her face in terror, and screamed loud as she fell.

CHAPTER XI

A CRY IN THE NIGHT

THE first faint good smell of resin and balsam came to Olson and Jim, after the odour of hemlock and rotting leaves, as a kind of promise of better things. It was in the same category as the dark cloud's silver lining, just glimpsed at the edges. It caused them to press on, late though the hour, in hope of better camping-place than could be found here. The ground rose; there was less axe work. By grace of the Spirit of the Forest, thus forging ahead, they reached a spreading fir, a sort of outpost of that better country to come, under which they prepared camp. The lowest branches, a dozen feet over their heads, made an excellent roof; and after much rummaging round, guided part by the flickering fire, part by sense of smell, they gathered a quantity of fir-feathers to sleep on.

They were too wise to the woods to do much axe-plying without being able to see precisely what they were about, but the flicking off of fir-

feathers is not a madcap occupation even in such uncertain light if done calmly, a different matter from chopping a way through regions of windfall trees and tangling pea-vine. Hardly had they flung down the last of the fir-feathers, and with a mutual 'Phoo!' at the closeness of the dusk, squatted down on the edge of these natural spring-mattresses for a rest before cooking supper, than the lightning blazed, the thunder crashed, and the echoes rolled and rebounded in the vastness. Olson looked up at the tree, stretching back at ease.

'I recall a storm when I was a kid,' he said. 'I went to shelter under a tree, and then remembered something about trees being lightning conductors. So I hiked out into the middle of a park. Then I remembered something else about solitary upright objects attracting the lightning. I guess I would be a solitary upright object of a foot and a-half then! Anyhow, what with the one way of it and the other I quit considering the storm, and hiked on as if nothing was happening. Fear is a nuisance of a thing for a man to carry around with him.'

As he spoke the whole wood broke out with wild whimpering of coyotes, and a deep moan, of a tone more like that of a Great Dane, answered from far off.

'Who was it said that he would rather be dead and done with than go around scared of death all the time?' asked Olson—and Jim thought he was talking because he was still haunted by that sense of being pursued, looked at, watched.

'I don't know,' he answered; 'it seems familiar. I believe it was some Roman Emperor or another.'

'Guess it was,' said Olson. 'I think I read it in one of them bits for filling up a page in a magazine when a story don't come to the foot. A man can get a heap of classical education by reading them there stopgaps.'

Jim made sure now that his partner was not at ease, was making conversation. There came another flash of lightning and crash, and after it both men lay tense, a little raised on their elbows, but neither spoke. But both thought the same: 'That was no coyote.' They rummaged in their minds and thought again: 'That was no timber-wolf.' Yet neither spoke. They reclined there,

as if just waiting for the rain; and as Olson muttered to himself: 'No—it was no wild-cat either,' Jim was considering: 'That was no lynx.' To each other they still said nothing. Olson, indeed, stretched out full as if not listening at all for any recurrence of the inexplicable sound.

As it did not come again Jim, less at home in the wilderness than his partner, thought it might have been the cry of a disturbed wild bird. Each had recollection of the tensivity of feeling when they admitted that sense as of being followed. Each wished to say nothing more about that tensivity, though they still felt it. It could not be explained. It was unpleasantly near the condition of fear. Each had secretly decided to say no more about it before that cry came to their ears; and, in that mood, as it too was mysterious, they lay there wondering what it was while they talked of other things. Or at least Olson talked and Jim said: 'Yes' or 'No'—made various sounds to keep his partner going.

Then the rain came deluging, first a big drop or two plopping round about, next as if in layers instead of in drops, crashing relentlessly down on

all the spreading branches, on the pagoda-like roof of occasional cedar, on the bunched and tangled 'shade trees.' Shade trees seemed truly the name for them in these dingles through which they had come. Close to their tree-stem they were dry. Some drops fell in the fire, which kept up an intermittent splutter in reply to the long rushing sound of the rain. It was, in a way, a lulling sound, and the deluge eased the air pressures. They could almost tell themselves they had imagined a human note in that cry in the night. Jim at last forgot it in dreams of and hopes for a future when he and Sadie Dixon might be more than friends.

They even slept, anon, blessed by the rain, were only roused now and then by the crack of some broken tree and, on waking, knew what it was that had disturbed them by hearing the final rending. In the morning the rain still fell, but this, by comparison, was only a drizzle—and out of a clearing sky. They breakfasted in silence. From a runnel of water, now a roaring creek, Jim filled the cans while Olson blew the smouldering fire into flame. Half an hour later they had deluged the fire to

extinction and were off, looking round in farewell at the tree that had been their home during the night.

That rich, robustious, resinous odour came refreshingly upon them. There was little axe-work to do, and before an hour had elapsed, one after the other as they tramped, their heads were yanked round—it is the only way to put it—by the sudden bobbing up southward of a peak, glinting like silver. At the same time there began to mingle with the note of the wind in the tree-tops a deeper one—that of falling water ahead, roaring and tom-toming. In certain waves of wind it came like a great crowd cheering. There was a *vox humana* stop in it ever and again. Only a few ultimate squalls now intermittently tossed the branches and splashed them as they plodded on.

‘Last lap,’ said Olson, over his shoulder. ‘This is where the Little Norman runs down.’

‘And it was on the Little Norman that Penny Scot—’ began Jim, shouting into the wind.

‘That’s right,’ said Olson, but in absent voice, his brows knitted, his mind clearly abstracted. Jim could not be sure what he had said. Then,

abruptly, before them there was a creek, in freshet, sweeping down between rock sides. So full did it flow, and was so constricted here, that it curved against the opposite wall, leaping along it in a series of swinging waves.

'Good thing it's the east bank,' cried Olson, looking on at it.

'You bet,' replied Jim. 'That would take a bit of trouble to get across.'

'We'd have to wait till the hills were drained of last night's drops—or go a heck of a way up,' remarked Olson.

'We go up anyhow,' said Jim, half in an inquiring tone.

'Up's the word,' said Olson. 'This is the Little Norman all right, all right.'

It was then, with the thought of having come, if not to their journey's end then to the stream of their journey's end, sight of it bringing a change of mood, that Jim blurted out what had been on his tongue ever since waking.

'What was that queer sound that came after the peal of thunder last night?' he asked.

Olson, from standing sidewise to him as both looked at the torrent, wheeled and confronted him.

'It wasn't no coyote,' said he definitely.

'And it was no timber-wolf,' said Jim.

'No, sir,' answered Olson. 'It was nothing I can think of.'

'Well, if it was nothing we can think of, neither you nor I—and you know more about what might be in these woods to scream than I do—then we should inquire into it. A man should always inquire into what he doesn't know.'

'Ain't you the lad for initiation?' growled Olson. 'You're right, Jim. I'm glad you spoke. I was trying to reach a decision about the feeling of being followed last night, when I talked of being scared as a kid—and all that. I tried to get holt of it again after that queer sound, as you call it. I ain't superstitious. I declare I ain't superstitious, but I got to wondering if there wasn't some good reason for the Indians giving these woods a miss. Come on. Let's get back. Come along, Dick, you hoss, your human guides are going back a step. It's difficult to tell where a sound comes from unless you know what it is,'

he went on as they took the back track. 'I once heard a powder-magazine explode five miles out of town, and I thought it was the shack door that slammed. But the direction of that whoop was sure enough.'

'My impression,' said Jim, 'was that it was fair on our trail, and not far from where we were camped either.'

So back they came to the tree where they had camped, and it seemed to look at them (wood travellers will understand) in a friendly way. If it does not seem crazy to say so, it looked at them with a kind of 'What, here again?' air. There lay the fir-feather mattresses; there was the circle of their extinguished fire—as it would remain long after they were gone, ay, dead and gone.

The same thought had been in both their minds, that if they had been followed their pursuer, or pursuers, might be now at this last camp. At a common impulse they halted and looked at the signs by the place. Only their own footmarks showed, easy to tell by arrangement of nails in the soles of their shoes.

'Well, it ain't a soft job to locate a sound unless

you know it,' said Olson again, 'but if I'm not mistaken it was back a bit, and not more than a quarter of an hour either. We may only find a lightning-struck eagle, and learn that's how he whoops when——'

'We've got to find out,' said Jim, 'now!'

'That's what! Get it settled! But it hurts taking so much as a step back—yet. Wherever it was, it was on this side of that last rise to carry the way it done, unless it was something out of sight bigger than either you or I can imagine.'

CHAPTER XII

SQUIRE READS THE TRAIL

WELL beyond the Cree camp Powell, who had been ploughing along looking down at the flow of Norman River, spoke.

'There's sure no poor-man' (placer) 'mining here,' he opined. 'There ain't washings for a Chinaman in all that creek or I'm a Dutchman.'

'Well, Oilson's in this country for something, ain't he?' asked Squire.

'But it's too far back to pay,' said Powell.

'There's a thing to say—"Too far back!"—when you don't know what it is.'

Powell had no sharp riposte to that—not because he was scared of exasperating his partner, but rather in the mood of 'I strove with none, for none was worth the strife.'

'Too far back!' Squire harped on. 'That depends on what he's struck. And look how the

railroads stretch. Too far back this year may be plumb centre in five years' time.'

He surveyed the trail, as they drew nearer to the woods, with an increasing gloom. When they came to the first trees he was dismal in the extreme. His lip twitched. He looked into the first open vistas of dusky green with a face on which something like fear showed.

'Which way do *you* think they went?' he said, glaring at his partner.

Powell decided that the effect of the whisky from Adam's Lake had not yet worn off, had left Squire in a twitching and irascible condition.

'Why, straight on, of course,' he answered. 'It's quite plain—plain as the moon ahead.'

'Moon? What do you mean, for God's sake, talking about a moon and it 'way on in the day?'

Powell gave his partner a quick scrutiny, then pointed to the moon hanging in the western sky, the tilted, half-moon, washed-out looking, very pale in the sun-lit blue heavens.

'Why sure!' said Squire. 'Sure! Of course. But what worries me is why that fellow Oilson,

and whoever he picked up on the way, came in here. There's nothing here. There ain't no oil. What you mean by telling me he was after oil?'

Powell was taken aback.

'Well! Wouldn't you jar anybody!' he exclaimed, his eyes opening wide, more astonished than aught else. 'I tell you what I think—and that is we've to go slow soon, or we'll be plunging right on top of them. Wish we could have got next to those Crees good enough to get one of them along. We can follow a trail, but we can't tell when it was travelled. We can say this year or last year, perhaps, but we can't say to-day or yesterday. They're liable to hear us. One of us has got to scout ahead alone sooner or later.'

'Scout ahead alone!' repeated Squire, standing there, the pack-horse beside him.

'Why sure,' replied Powell. 'We might just as well have stopped Oilson on First Avenue, Saint Anthony's, and asked him if he was on to anything, as catch him up, or let him hear us following before he's got to wherever he's heading. And look at that wood! It ain't no floor of old dusty cones or pine-needles. It's leaves. One of us has

got to pike on ahead all the time—follow them like a snake. You know what I mean.'

'What the — you mean by that?' blazed Squire.

Powell broke out with a 'Pshaw!' He suspected that his partner was a coward, despite his record otherwise.

'I mean—I mean by calling me a snake!' said Squire.

'Oh, shucks! Touchy! You got to get over the poison that's in you. If I hadn't seen before this the after-effects of the ammonia and bluestone dope, I'd be tired of you. I was doubtful of the thing at the beginning; now, when I'm on to it, you're backing out.'

'No, sir—no, sir! Don't you imagine it. I'm just wondering what they're doing in them woods.'

'Well, they're not there for nothing, are they?'

'That's what I'm afraid of.'

'Afraid of!' Powell gave him up. 'Oh, come on,' he said. 'We ain't so close on 'em yet that we got to scout ahead at once. It's easy enough going for a mile or two, apparently. I can tell that by the lie of the land.'

On they went. As we already know the woods were dark, and in the muskeg the mosquitoes bred by the hundred. They tramped on, slap-slapping at the pests till they were weary. Powell was in front. They plodded forward for an hour or two, in silence, till Squire suddenly hastened his gait, made up on his companion, with: 'Powell! Powell!'

Powell turned, and the other drew close.

'Don't you see that somebody's joined them—moccasined?' he asked.

'I see,' said Powell, 'that there's a moccasin on the trail. I thought maybe this was an old Indian trail.'

'Perhaps!' said Squire, and seemed satisfied, fell back again, and on again they went. But a little later Squire once more legged after Powell.

'You weren't just humouring me, were you?' he asked, 'thinking I'm bug-house?'

'Humouring you? About what?'

'That moccasin print.'

Powell gazed calmly at Squire, then looked away.

'He's bug-house all right,' he thought to himself, but aloud he answered: 'Of course not.'

'Then why didn't you remark on it yourself?' said Squire.

'I didn't see anything queer about it,' replied Powell.

'Eh? No! That's right. There ain't anything remarkable about it.'

His face cleared. The look of almost dementia went from him as if an invisible hand had smoothed it away. Set upon by mosquitoes and flies they trudged on. Powell slit a handkerchief to make ear-covers for their horse, Squire standing by, mutely waiting. It took a little time to fix these makeshift protectors, but all the while he said not one word. Powell glanced at him once or twice, wondering just what kind of craziness had pounced on his partner. He thought he was now less strained, and diagnosed his case to his own satisfaction by considering that the after-effects of the Adam's Lake potations had reached their crisis. But as he so thought Squire gave him a set-back by suddenly (in the phrase of Powell's private communings) 'getting them again.'

'You see, *he* wore moccasins,' said Squire.

'Who did?'

There was a blaze of fury.

'Who did? What did? What do you mean? The Indians did, of course!' he said. Then he went quickly on ahead, the pack-horse attended to, went on with the remark: 'You see I ain't scared of you being behind.'

'Oh, for God's sake!' cried Powell. 'Keep a hold on yourself. You're suffering from the after-effects of that dope, as I've told you before, that blind-pig muck we drank. Tell yourself that and quit this craziness.' He nearly added: 'Or I *will* shoot you!' His eyes were fierce.

Squire, looking round, merely laughed—and on they went with their attendant host of black flies and mosquitoes. There was not another word passed between them till they made camp.

'We must be getting on,' said Powell. 'I wish we knew if they were one camp ahead or two. Say, it would have been dandy if we could also have toted an Indian woman with us. She could have told just how close we are.'

'Indian woman?' said Squire.

'Why, sure. Oh, I see—thought you'd got 'em again. Of course she may not be with them.'

'You're certain,' said Squire, 'that these moccasins are an Indian's?'

'Quite certain. An Indian woman's.'

'Never thought of that,' said Squire.

Powell was 'jarred' again, but said nothing. Squire sat in the smoke of the smudge-fire, making witty monologue on the subject of squaw-men—till the flutter of wind in advance of the storm came through the woods. He blew a great breath.

'That's better!' he said.

'And it will soon be worse,' remarked Powell. 'It's been banking up for a cloud-burst—and this is no cloud-burst camp!'

Before an hour had elapsed they had beginning of proof of that saying; but in such country a camp is forced upon a traveller rather than chosen. Next day Squire fell to rear when they broke camp, but presently came level with the pony and began to draw the Winchester from the ropes beneath which it was thrust.

'What you want that for?' asked Powell over his shoulder,

'Just in case I see anything to shoot. These woods are full of wolf and such-like.'

'Well, you leave it there,' said the other.

'What for?'

'Because I'm in advance and I might need it,' said Powell. 'And because you've got the jumps,' he added.

'You're scared o' me!' sneered Squire.

'No, sir!' Powell snapped. 'It's because — you — got — the — jumps! I only say it to you the way I would to a kid. And when I scout on myself later I'm going to carry the rifle with me. I don't know how far ahead they are — or how near.'

For a spell they stood staring at each other, then Squire branged in front like a great petulant child. But to see a grown man act so it savoured, indeed, of 'jumpiness.' Branches swept aside, and waved into place once more. Powell could see his partner, anon, only in a fragmentary fashion as he followed, pack-horse at heel. When he did again overtake Squire he decided that not for worlds would he allow him to touch the rifle. He meant to keep within grasp of that rifle himself. Squire was a

hefty specimen, and though in ordinary conditions Powell would have tackled him to a wrestle for a fall, a madman, he considered, is reputed to have an added adroitness and vigour.

'No, siree,' he mused to himself. 'I run no chances in this darn cane-brake!'

Squire was bending to look at the ground, and as Powell came nearer he made a strained beckoning gesture of arm and head, and pointed to his feet.

'Blood!' he said. 'Now explain that! I rely on you, Silas Powell, explaining that to me convincing, same as you explained the Indian woman along with them. You tell me this!'

Powell was prepared to find that here really was hallucination—one step nearer insanity; but, drawing closer, he saw indeed what looked like blood on the trail.

'Well—something was killed here,' he said.

'What! What's that?'

'Something was killed here,' repeated Powell. 'There's a heap of preying one on another in the woods. Some small beast been hawked here, most likely.'

'Why, sure! That's it! Say that again!'

Powell thought that this was a moment for humouring, and said it all again, taking inventory as it were at the spot, noting sign of a great trampling and breaking of bush and earth round the place; and seeing a great chunk of tree-limb, rent through, lying to one side, he again expressed the opinion that a 'small beast's' death was the cause of that tinge of red in the mud. For a moment he was affected by his companion's jumpiness. Rage swept through him, and he had an impulse—as though in self-defence, not from bodily hurt, but from further assault upon him of that feeling of fear—to bring his fist down on the head of the stooping Squire, fell him, smash him senseless. Instead he took a grip on himself.

'That's all,' he said again. 'Come on.'

'You don't think in all them eternal woods the same thing could happen twice?' asked Squire.

'Often! Often!' replied Powell. 'They're killing all the time—the carnivorous ones.' But abruptly he examined the signs afresh. 'Whoa, you horse, you'll muss this up! This is interesting. The two pairs of heavy-nailed shoes

come back here. They've been past here, and back, and on again. The moccasins end. It beats me.' He strolled away a bit. 'No, sir,' he said to himself, 'moccasins don't show again.' Then he peered into the bush at the trail-side. 'Somebody's gone down there,' he said.

No path proper was to be seen, but some one had very clearly broken vigorously through where the brush was less dense. To crush the jumpiness that was being transferred to him from his partner (hauling the rifle from the pack with a movement of impetuosity) he crashed instantly a way through to discover if possible why the bush was broken into there, and why the shoe-marks went under.

Squire stood still, as if hobbled, staring after Powell, and listening to his vehement breakings. It was with wild eyes he gazed when the other man again appeared, shouldering back to the trail with upraised arm and rifle-barrel pushing back the clinging tendrils.

'I think some one was hurt and went down to the creek for water,' said Powell. 'That's what I think now.' He thrust the rifle back, as in a sling, under the pack-rope.

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'Oh, you do?' growled Squire heavily.

'Yes. Yes, the two men were in advance. The Indian was behind.' He stood there blink-blinking, brow furrowed, went to and fro still examining the bushes and the trampled earth.

'Well, what I think,' said Squire quietly, 'is that it all ain't true. I think somebody killed somebody here, and carried them down to the creek—flung them in.'

'I ain't no great hand at woodcraft stunts out of the ordinary,' answered Powell, 'but I don't see how anyone could be carried through, not if they were dead. And there was sure nobody dragged through. I guess the Indian is with them all right, hiking along third, and was hurt back in the rear somehow, so they turned round for that.'

'Do you think they're 'tecs?' asked Squire.

Powell felt like signing the pledge when he got back—if ever he did get back.

'Guess the police-boys do their own detective work here,' he said tersely.

He looked at Squire again to see how that was taken, and thus looking was appalled by the face confronting him, for its expression was almost

idiotic. He wondered if he was to have for companion an imbecile, asking fogged questions to allay some imbecile fancy, or a maniac who might at any moment assault him. He thought perhaps it might be a touch of delirium tremens; he had seen various phases of that in his time—for he had mixed in variegated society. But he was no authority on mental aberration. He did not know but that what seemed at one time excess of petulance, at another what he would call craziness, at another stage merely imbecility, might not abruptly swerve into raving and dangerous madness. He realised how far he was again from the Winchester, strolled easily past Squire to the pack-horse, caught the lines.

'We'll get on,' he said; and on he went, eyes on the trail.

Again Squire fell behind. A quarter of an hour later they came to the deserted camp under the cedar; and all the way, as Powell noted, there was no moccasin track. The white men's footmarks had returned, and gone on again.

'She was a long ways in the rear,' he commented.

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Squire, it appeared, had paid no further attention to the trail.

'You know nothing about it,' he said, 'nothing at all.'

'May as well camp here anyhow,' suggested Powell. 'What you want, Squire, is a sleep—a good sleep.'

So another night fell, and the owls hooted in the woods.

CHAPTER XIII

A LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

As for Jim and Olson—back they came, past the first of the firs, and down into that hollow smelling of decaying leaves and of hemlock, and up the slope on the hither side. There both stood fast, giving ear, for a voice hailed. Neither was outwardly startled; for, after all, both were in a mood of preparation and expectancy; but inwardly each experienced a shock.

‘Oli-sohn! Oli-sohn!’ the voice wailed.

‘Down by the crik,’ said Olson. ‘But who in thunder——’

‘I see her—I see her!’ Jefferies cried, peering through the tangle. ‘It’s that Indian girl.’

‘How did she get there? Say, this bush is close all right!’

It was Jim who struck first on a feasible way through, and pushing aside the pea-vine and bushes came to her. Olson hung a few steps behind to

allow of the briars and tendrils swinging into place before he followed.

'What is it? What's wrong? What are you doing here?' asked Jim, looking down on her where she reclined at the creek side, her kerchief bandage-fashion round her head, instead of in the usual once-folded manner. Just under the bandage he glimpsed the edge of a raw wound. Her face was drawn, her hands and wrists scratched. She looked beyond him, for Olson came quickly in the rear, his head down like a bull, eyes puckered, arms parting the branches again.

Such questions as Jim had fired off in English were now fired off in Cree, and the story came out how she had been smashed on the temple by a tree-branch, hurtled at her in the storm, how she had lost consciousness, then come to herself, and how not knowing how long she had lain there she had been horribly afraid. She had fumbled and pushed her way down to the creek for water, because her head was bleeding and, what between the dark and her panic (it was, as Olson said, a 'whole jag of trouble once she got it') she had stumbled, prodding a sharp end of broken root into

her foot, clean through the moccasin. Then, guided only by the lightning flashes, she reached the bank of the creek, bathed the foot, laved her head, holding on to undermined roots, and finally crawled back again there to crouch under a bush and await the morning.

All this was told in Cree to Olson, Jim getting little of it save what a gesture and a pointing now and then helped him to surmise. She did not, however, take long to explain her plight. It came tumbling out in answer to questions almost in irritation. She stretched a hand, as if begging for an end of Olson's interest as to how she had spent the night there, and poured on him the answer to another question—why she was there at all, alone. He gave a long whistle once, but in his eyes, as he admired her pluck, she had all the reward she needed and anodyne for her terrors. As for public opinion among her people—it could be what it was! For Jim's sake she lapsed into English—and none so bad English at that. Between the broken speech, and her briefly interpreted Cree, Jefferies, as well as Olson, very speedily understood that they were being followed;

and by her description alone (even had they no evidence that Squire and Powell were interested in Olson's doings), they had as good as a snapshot of that combine.

'She can't go back now she's warned us,' said Olson. 'Lame or sound she couldn't. She'd be liable to meet them.'

Laughing Earth suggested that she could take a detour through the woods if she wasn't lame—if she wasn't—

'She's scared,' said Olson, 'and no wonder. These woods have a bad name for hoodoos, and she's been all a night of storm here with no fire. I tell you, a white man with a hundred hoodoo scalps hanging at his belt, so to speak, wouldn't feel good after a night like that. Come on, Jim, we'll carry her along.'

With a mutual impulse they stretched hands to each other and thus made a chair on which to carry the girl.

'But we can't get through the bush that way,' said Olson suddenly. 'We can carry her on the trail like this, but—here you are—what's your name?'

'Laughing Earth,' said she in English.

He bent to her, put one arm round her waist, slid the other adroitly behind her knees, and up she swung in his arms. Jim smashed ahead, wishing he had brought his axe, while Olson again waited to let the branches switch back, then came after him, shoulder down, head lowered, and all humped protecting over his burden. Her eyes were bright with other than pain when, once more on the trail, he set her down gingerly for a moment on her sound foot. Then he and Jim joined hands.

'Come along, Laughing Earth, hands on our shoulders,' said Olson, and she had to grab them whether she would or not, for their linked hands knocked against her.

Down she sat, willy-nilly grabbing their shoulders, up she soared, and away the two men went tittuping like laden Chinamen smartly back to the big tree where the pack-horse waited, and Laughing Earth was boosted on to the astonished pony's back. He laid down his ears dejectedly, dejectedly he tucked down his tail; but he accepted, without further protest, the additional burden. Thereafter no more was said for some way. It

might have been just as a compromise with the pony; it might have been for other reasons, but when Laughing Earth was a-top the load Olson unslung his rifle from the pack and both went on like men ready for any emergency. All three, you may be sure, did a heap of thinking.

Here the axe-work was over. The scrub thinned out, except just where the tributary, after roaring like a herd of bulls through that rock defile, joined the main stream. They did not coast that triangle ahead, held up on the slope where fir and pine again had predominance. The trail here, as always at such places, was (at least for white men) lost; but Olson had an account clear in his mind, from the old Cree trapper, of this part of the way.

Laughing Earth, speaking in Cree, pointed ahead and Olson, with a nod, replied. To Jim he interpreted: 'She says very few come up here. The neighbour of that old fellow who put me next to this, traps down to opposite. This trail ain't Indian. It was made first by Hudson Bay Company's men hitting west from Norman's Fort to see if they could establish a post on the other

side the watershed. That was before her time. She's just a chicken.'

She looked down from one to the other and had the manner of one thinking, uncertain about a phrase in a strange tongue. The twinkle that came into Olson's eyes dispelled her doubt.

'Twenty snows,' she said, and drew herself engagingly erect.

But the vivacity was only momentary. Her mind was still troubled. An Indian with a charm against hoodoos came up here after one autumn, and never returned, it appeared. She mentioned this to Olson, who again translated to his partner.

'I ain't superstitious,' he said. 'I've got a hunch some other fellow without a charm shot him. But anyhow it cinched the hoodoo notion up tighter. While Edmonton was still a fort, and before Jasper House was in ruins, various white men came up through the country, and some few now and then rebroke her, went on—didn't come back. They all got the credit of not going out any other way except on the spirit trail.'

There was no doubt that Laughing Earth understood most of this (it transpired later

that for a spell she had attended at the Fond de Lac Mission School) but she did not show pique. She was worse than piqued. She was in agony. She pointed straight ahead again and said the trail went on so, and she was not imagining it either. Maybe her keen eyes could see sign of where the trail had gone on; maybe she was able to pick out comparatively recent bushes among the older ones. She was indeed distressed. *Item*, they would have to cross that raging torrent; *item*, they were pursued by two 'bad mans'; *item*, Olisohn and his partner were determined to go up the valley; and, though she had not been here before, did not every Cree know that up this creek was the very core of terror? She voiced her fears more plainly to Olson.

'We've got to go up, Laughing Earth,' he replied. 'These bad mans may be getting close. Besides, we don't want to cross the creek. You savvy, Laughing Earth?'

By following with great concentration she did 'savvy.'

'What you want to go up here for?' she asked.

'I know you not steal as bad mans say. Why you go up here? Why he follow?'

'I can't tell you that—unless it's plumb curiosity. You savvy?'

'No, no savvy.'

So he told her in Cree and Jim was out of it again. But what they came for he did not say, nor did she again inquire. Her face showed a slight ease and a great courage. She switched the pony's neck on the off-side and he began the ascent; but Olson, at the first step of the horse, went ahead, Laughing Earth looking eagerly for him to do so.

'You bring up the rear, Jim,' he said. 'The Thunder-Bird lives up here. I told her about that charm I have against all kinds of bad birds, but anyhow she's more scared of him than of the bad men behind. And I know her taste is maybe erroneous, but she thinks *I* should face the Thunder-Bird as the bigger bluffer of the outfit, and leave you to keep an ear twitching for the merely human possibilities of trouble in the rear. I've tried to shake her belief in that blame bird, but I suppose they tell it to one another—fathers

to children, and keep tab of all the proof it does exist and let slip the ones that it don't. And—well, I guess it gets into their blood.'

He gave a mournful wag to his head.

'Four hours up Little Norman on east bank,' he said slowly. 'It was one of her compatriots reckoned it so, after a visit from just below there. That was in winter time. Guess it don't make much difference; summer or winter about the same. And when an Indian says "four hours" a white man can call it six.'

Off he went. Laughing Earth flicked the pony's withers. Jim brought up the rear, turning his head, treading the slope slowly, looking down at the deep woods below, very grim of jaw, defiance in his survey, as if the 'bad mans' were already able to see! They had mounted in this order, fallen back into silence, when the Indian girl glanced over her shoulder to Jim and pointed down creek. Her quick eye had detected what the men, each looking for a shack, or ruins of a shack, had missed. Fear was again upon her.

'Olisohn!' she called in a low cry, and when he turned just pointed again.

Neither of the men realised why she drew their attention to what seemed like a mere run of gravel and shale over a projecting shelf. But Jim deflected to it as the quickest way toward comprehension. Urgently she called him back.

'No, no!' she said. 'Please no!'

There was fresh pow-wow-ing in Cree for explanation; and the explanation was that the poor girl thought that here was the Thunder-Bird's lair. Olson sought to appease her while Jim (heedless of her entreaties) continued to run down the bank. He brought up with a few short putting-on-the-brake steps at the mound, disappeared behind it, to reappear immediately and wave.

'It's a dug-out!' he hailed, rather at the top of his talking voice than in a shout.

Down hastened Olson, and Laughing Earth blanched under her copper-colour. It was indeed a dug-out, easy to be missed—just a cavern dug into the hill, the front composed of a few upright logs. The entrance was narrow, not more than two feet across, and some kind of door had doubtless once stood there, or maybe a bear-skin had served to cover it o' nights. Olson struck a

match and stepped inside. It immediately went out. He struck another and held it before him, advancing into the dark interior.

'Yes—that's all the way it goes back,' said he. He was oddly self-possessed and excited at once. 'I thought it might be a tunnel. It's a dug-out all right.'

The second match dwindled. He let it drop, and there they stood, letting their eyes, new out of the light, get accustomed to the place.

'Look there! Gee-whiz! What's that?'

'It's a skull!'

It was a skull, rolled into a corner. Tattered blankets lay at one side, and these they turned over with their toes, a sense of unpleasantness preventing them from putting down their hands. There, too, were bones; even among the blankets there were bones. They raked on the floor with their feet, finding more bones.

'Oh, pshaw!' Olson broke out, and stooped to the blankets.

In the midst of the knowledge that they had arrived at Penny Scot's home—just this hole in the hill—they did not forget that they were

followed. This nicety, this sense of unpleasantness, this finicky raking with toes, was to delay matters. Olson lifted the shreds of blanket one at a time; the tattered remains of a bear-skin he shook, and it fell apart. Then he raked further on the floor with his hands, and presently growled: 'Weskit button. 'Nother weskit button. Watch-key—clasp-knife.' He threw the latter on the top of the blankets.

Jim passed to the rear wall. With his back to the door his eyes saw it all more clearly now.

'Got a kind of cupboard here,' he muttered.

Olson did not reply. He was still grunting over the floor, systematically raking it.

'Pants button!' he exclaimed a moment later. 'Nothing but buttons! Buttons! Gee-whiz—this ain't going to be a cod lucky-bag, Jim, is it? I tell you if this is only a case of buttons in the plum-duff, and no—darn! 'Nother button!'

'Here's a tin plate—frying-pan. What's this? A fork,' said Jim at the hole in the wall.

Olson rose and came over.

'Here's a tobacco-box, and that's all,' said Jim.

Olson kept flick-flicking his hands together to

get the dust off as if he was beating time for a coon dance. Jim rubbed his chin (or rather his beard; he had been so sun-scorched hiking in from Rifles that the scrape of his dull razor was a minor agony to avoid), plucked and plucked. They stood there considering.

'That ain't the whole inventory!' said Olson. 'It surely ain't He's cached it. That's what it is!'

'It's either a lie that he packed his wad with him, or——' began Jim, and then had another thought: 'Maybe it was all paper, and the rats have had it.'

'No. That's out of reason. It would be gold. Trust him for that—if the story was true at all.'

The dug-out seemed nothing but a horrible little hole in a hill, a black den of disillusionment. Olson took off his hat and vigorously, angrily, scratched the back of his head, tousled the hair wildly.

'D——n those fellows following!' he said. 'They make me unable to think what next—where to look. They're none so far behind now. I got to think.'

Jim still had the tobacco-box in his hand, was fumbling with the fastening as he stood there, full of a doubt that the whole expedition had been in vain. Penny Scot, he thought, was probably but an old, meandering prospector worth a few dollars and an outfit. Abruptly the box he held flew open, and he looked inside. It was stuffed with paper.

'Didn't even leave any smoking!' he remarked.

But Olson took it from him, and with slow thumb and forefinger, and great deliberation, removed the paper from the box. Unfolding it he stepped to the door. Then he drew a deep breath. Beside him Jim peered at the document, and both read:

'A man named Squire did it. I should never have given him more than directions and the cold shoulder when he came to my camp. I had been to the Company's' [Hudson Bay Company] 'trading post for a supply of flour. He made himself agreeable in a sort of way, and this is a lonely section. One should not be friendly to a man one's instincts doubt.'

'Poor old devil,' murmured Olson, unaware as he read.

'The pony was ahead in that dense belt of cedar and tamarack. He was behind me. It was there that he knifed me. When I came round my belt was gone. He had taken everything I had. He had dragged me, I fancy, to the creek and shoved me in, and I must have drifted down or been bumped down. I am black and blue. The wonder is I wasn't drowned. The current is strong, and I fancy I was as much floated on it as swirled along it. I came to myself at the bar of the junction of Little Norman's with Norman's—North Fork—and got back here. It was terrible. The hæmorrhage stopped, but I have decided that the knife was dirty. These symptoms indicate blood poisoning. It is very lonely now. I have never felt so lonely anywhere.'

'I may be getting maudlin,' said Olson, with a glance at Jim Jefferies, 'but this harping on "lonely" gets me.'

'And me,' said Jim thickly. 'I've got there—and past it.'

'I would leave no record for any chance

discoverer to find, for I am quitting this world, and it may not matter; but I think (not for myself—I accept my fate) that Squire should be found and tried if ever this is read. I will and bequeath—I, Richard MacDonald Jefferies—will and bequeath my claim staked on the opposite bank, five hundred yards up, and forty yards back, to whoever finding this informs the authorities of . . .’

There it tailed off, and then, very scrawly was added :—

‘ I am generally known as Penny Scot. I was called so when I came to Fort Edmonton on my uppers, and the name . . .’

It tailed off again, for the last time.

The two men stared at each other, and were only called back to consciousness of their surroundings by a plaintive wailing voice.

‘ The son-of-a-gun’s got here!’ came from Olson in a hissing whisper.

There was that in the cry that made both plunge out of the dug-out even as it was called a second time, low and pleading :—

‘ Oli-sohn! Oli-sohn!’

CHAPTER XIV

'THE CANNED CORN GOES!'

'OLI-SOHN! Oli-sohn! Jim! Jim!'

On to the slope, out of the dug-out door, round the edge of the drift of shingle, they scurried. It is about the only word for it; and there was Laughing Earth above, not where they had left her, but hopping down on her sound foot, the picture of dread and courage mixed. Jim was the first round, and she called his name again in a voice like a stage-whisper, either having gone hoarse in terror, or trying to make it carry without shouting loud.

'Oh, that's all right,' said Olson. 'She only wondered what had become of us. This is top-hole grit, when you consider she thinks we've gone into the den of the Thunder-Bird like as not. It is sure a lesson to face everything you know, seeing the way Laughing Earth faces everything she don't know.'

But she came hopping on, hissed a word in

Cree, and before Olson could turn to Jim to translate, and explain the meaning of the look on his own face—'Somebody come, Jim,' she murmured.

Olson, indeed, might have forgotten to translate. His eyes, as soon as she warned, were on their backward track.

'You see?' asked Jim. 'You see somebody?'

'No—hear. Soon see,' answered Laughing Earth, and she sat down where she was, heaving a great sigh.

Jefferies dashed up to the pack pony and led it down beneath the dug-out. The door was too low for its entrance, but he tied the lines there, and as he was so employed came Olson following, in his arms the Indian girl—to whom he poured out a stream of speech, in the midst of which Jim heard the words 'Penny Scot' repeated, first soothingly, then as if in indignation.

'Penny Scot stop here,' Jim explained, to aid in assuring her, 'only Penny Scot.'

Olson set her carefully down beside the log front, and she eyed the dark entrance over her shoulder with big, frightened eyes.

'Queer beasts we are—queer beasts,' said he in Jim's ear. 'When I had her in my arms just now I blame near throttled her—just with plumb rage at her not forgetting the Thunder-Bird notion.'

Laughing Earth did not even notice that he was talking to his partner. She was peering round, doubtfully, into the dug-out.

'This hunting for money is a soul-killing game. Life! What's life? I tell you what, we've turned life into nothing but that—hunting money. And if we don't hunt it, our only hope is that it will come to us by some blame miracle.' As he spoke he threw back his left hand for his rifle, which leant against the dug-out. His accustomed fingers caught it up, and he swung it butt over hip at the ready, his right hand falling into the small. 'Could have throttled her for her Thunder-Bird nonsense. Could have throttled her for us not finding his belt. We'll find something yet.'

He talked on and on in a fierce whisper, but all acute, listening for a sound, his eyes ever turned away from Jim—for all the world as though he listened with them. It was, indeed, as if he listened with his whole body. He took a step to the end

of the dug-out front, or slight projection of hill, just as you like to call it, removed his hat, and slowly advancing his head he peeped round. Jim glanced at Laughing Earth. She nodded to him, her expression changed. She pointed to the tattered shreds of blanket tossed in the doorway.

'Man,' she said.

'Yes—man,' he replied.

'Penny Scot?' asked she.

'Yes.'

'He stop here?'

'Yes. Penny Scot—just a man. No *peshak tyee*. No *skookum*,' relapsing into Chinook in the hope that he could ease her of dreads. Then he remembered that *skookum* means both 'strong' and 'ghost'—a plague on linguistic barriers! Then he also remembered that these Crees don't know that trade jargon of the Further West. He wanted to gain her confidence, and was enraged at the strife of tongues, at the world-wide Babel—at himself for not, in his knocking about in the North-West, learning more than a haphazard handful of words from the Indians he had met. A little annoyance at Laughing Earth

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came as well. He was sure that had Olson been ready with his Cree, her English would have been better! He looked at her again, wondering if his surmise was correct, for he had met Indians who pretended not to be able to answer his speech yet could, as some subsequent event proved.

'He ain't armed!' Olson's voice made him start. 'No; he ain't armed that I can see. We'll let him amble a bit nearer to find out if he's got a lump behind him might be a six-gun. He sure ain't got a rifle.'

Jim stepped close behind him.

'Where is he?' he whispered.

'Coming along the slope—some diffident.'

'He's not making down here?'

'No. He's looking back over the hill a spell, then pursuing the trail hard—looking back—coming on again, hell bent for election!'

'He'll look down here all right when he comes to where we stopped up above.'

'You're right!' snapped Olson, and whipped forward with his rifle raised. 'Throw up your hands!' he sang out.

Jim swung his rifle at the 'ready,' but did not

show himself, merely moved to the spot Olson had left and there waited.

'Coming down with his hands up,' said Olson. 'Holdin' 'em up good—keep 'em up!' he shouted.

A voice answered, and it was not Squire's; Jim had taken it for granted that it would be.

'All right. I ain't heeled. Honest to God—I'm not heeled.'

'Come down, then,' called Olson. 'You'll ex-cuse me for asking you to keep your hands up till I verify that; for I don't know your views on the vexed question of truth and falsehood, and compromises of what they call white lies.'

Jim heard the steps draw nearer. A little avalanche of rubble shot past the edge of the dug-out. He moved round beside his partner, and there was Powell, arms crooked over his head, slithering down towards them. There was a jump of astonishment in his eyes when he saw Jim, a momentary look of rage—then nothing. It had never occurred to him, nor to Squire, that the mysterious stranger was the young man they had pumped at Morley's.

'So it was you joined him?' he said. 'Well,

let's all get under cover. Go ahead and feel me over. I ain't got so much as a Derringer on me. He's got the rifle.'

'Squire?' asked Olson.

'Yep. How did you know?' Then his eyes passed them to Laughing Earth. As he spoke he had been looking anxiously along the hill, over his tracks. Olson and Jim remarked the flash of red that glinted when he saw the Indian girl. She too observed it, and met the gaze without a tremor. There was neither dread nor defiance. She was just there, quiet, complacent; there was no more to be said.

At a sign from Olson Jim ran his hand over the newcomer, clapped him down the chest, round the hips.

'You put him bug-house!' Powell ejaculated to Laughing Earth.

She merely stared up, wide-eyed. She had no English now—not a word.

'All right. You can drop 'em now. Put who bug-house—Squire?' asked Olson.

'Yep.'

'And how did that happen?' He looked inquiry at Powell, at Laughing Earth, back to Powell.

'He couldn't make anything at all of her moccasin prints,' said Powell. 'When they disappeared he was near crazy—kept asking me if I thought a dead man's feet would shrivel. That was when I got ready for all kinds of trouble. He'd been working up to it. The moccasins were argued over, and explained. Then up the subject came again, not explained after all, it seemed. Nothing but that! Whew!' he blew out a long breath. 'Think of that, will you? On and on, all night in his sleep: "Do you think a dead man's feet shrivel?" then moaning, and next: "I guess a dead man's feet would shrivel." He got the rifle, too, and slept on it. On the rifle! Yes, siree! It was some night! Bad enough to be a warder in a lunatic asylum, but warder over a maniac and him lying on a rifle in these hills—gents, now that I'm here I feel easy. Maybe I owe you a grudge,' he nodded at Jim. 'Maybe I owe her a grudge, and feel it when I see her,' and he nodded at Laughing Earth where she now sat with her back

against the upright front of the dug-out, no more afraid. 'But if that grudge crops up again I shall surely recall the pleasure I had in getting away from him and on to your trail. I'm fitchered, gentlemen! I own it too. This morning I'd have given the whole of whatever you've got—whether it comes from coal, oil, gold, lead, basalt, copper, or any d——d thing in the earth—to whoever would have shot that maniac for me. If I blinked an eye—he knew. I couldn't move a muscle but he knew. No use pretending I thought everything was all right so as to get him stretched out, and then commandeer that rifle.' He stopped and listened.

'Tis the wind and nothing more,' said Jim, feeling tense but unable to resist it.

'I guess that's all,' agreed Powell. 'It moans like him. About four o'clock he did rightly fall asleep and I left him an inch at a time—an inch at a time. Say, it was the worst time of my life! That man Squire! Well, he ain't a man no more, if ever he was. The thing that looks at you out of his eyes—how can I explain it? The bit like

a man has just been evaporating these last days, and something else taking its place.'

He shuddered. Jim and Olson exchanged a fragment of a glance and looked back again at Powell.

'I wonder if you saw an ant-heap near one of your camps?' he asked quietly. 'He saw it, and stood there smiling—a blame peculiar smile. It seemed to be a kind of a smile all to himself. Then he raked away off into the bush, this way and that; it didn't seem human the way he went on. If he'd gone down on all fours, and pointed his ears, so to speak, and sniffed, it would just have finished it. If you take my meaning, it was as if he was bristling his hairs and stiffening out a tail!'

It was not a moment to smile at similes—Powell's manner forbade it. Besides, they were in this forest themselves, and to each there came a sense of horror rather than of amusement at this account that might have seemed excessive if heard in a smoke-room by men who had never lived beyond sound of a dinner-gong.

'He came back with his handkerchief full of

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another kind of ant. He lays it down beside the ant-hill, kicks some bits over on to the handkerchief, and then he whoops: "Look at 'em! Look at 'em scrappin'! Red and black! Red and black!" They were scrappin' all right, tearing the legs off each other all over the place. I'm a bit of a naturalist myself—fond of animals, I am. Had a horse I could shake hands with once.'

Olson's eyes changed when he heard this. The half-cynical expression departed.

'Why, man, all round in the woods it's right interestin'!' Powell went on, at a tangent, in response to that glance of Olson's 'Them little twigs you see in the river beds—they often ain't little twigs at all. They're a kind of a beast that makes up a home for itself to look like a twig—packs it round, all same snail-shell. Yes, sir; and if it don't float properly it adds another little bit to balance itself. And yet, I don't know. Maybe it does that on purpose too, builds it a bit off the plumb intentional, so's to add on the side-twigg, and make it more nacheral. What do you think?'

Jim and Olson thought that, if he was not careful, Powell would go the same way as Squire.

There was a note in his voice, during this dissertation, suggesting that he was somewhat highly-keyed, if not distraught.

'Oh, no;' he said, reading their faces aright, 'I'm not going batty too. I'm only telling you about him. If you'd been there—well, I guess you'd have felt an instinct to put a bullet through him, and get shut of him. But keepin' company with it—with that man—through them woods——' he shook his head and gave a meaningful grunt. 'I tell you what! When he got confidential, that was fierce. He tired of watching the ant-fight and rubbed 'em out with his foot—if you take me—just like that, rubbed his foot around all over them. Then he came up to me and says he: "Tell me this," says he—and said no more.'

"Tell you what?" I says.'

'Says he: "No—you'd think me silly, think me a fool kid if I asked."'

'I says: "Not me!"'

"Very well, then," says he, "do you ever feel as if you don't know whether to commit murder or suicide?"'

He looked from Jim to Olson to be sure they

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were listening. His manner was as one craving a hearing, for the sake of relief.

‘What did you say?’ asked Jim.

‘I said, “Sure, often!” Tried to humour him like that, you see.’

Jim nodded. It struck him that Powell needed a heap of humouring too.

‘He says, “Oh, you do. Good! Then I’m maybe not so bad after all. Murder—or suicide. Murder—or suicide,” he says, just like that, and then he adds, “or weep—weep. Yes, that’s it. To commit a murder, to commit suicide, or else just to weep.” So I said, “If you take my tip you’ll weep.”’

‘“You’d weep, would you?” says he.’

‘“You bet you,” says I.’

‘So he screws up his face as if he was trying to cry, but he didn’t; his expression turned into a lonesome, all to himself, sly kind of an expression, if you take my meaning. And one of them darned jays let off an alarm in the woods, flying over, and suddenly seein’ us, I guess. I tell you it made me jump. I turned right round. It was then he bent down and took up the rifle

I'd been fool enough to lean against a fallen tree. "I'll think it over," says he. "I'll think it over—before I weep," says he.'

Powell paused, thrust his hat back, and drew a palm across his forehead as if trying to wipe something away.

'Froze on to the rifle after that. Stretched out, practically lying on it, to sleep. I argued whether to try and get it, what to do. If I moved to brush a 'skeeter off he moved too. I let the hours go past, pretendin' to sleep and wonderin' if he was asleep, or only pretendin'. At the cold bit of night, gettin' on for dawn, I began crawlin' back inch by inch. I don't know what you gentlemen think, but I couldn't wait to see another sun-up on that thing's face—and it with the rifle.' He blew another breath of relief. 'Well, I'm here now,' he said, 'and you are real, anyhow.'

He put out his hand toward Olson, as if to touch him and so make sure of him, but drew it back. Olson's sharp stare was doubtless proof enough to Powell that he was really in the presence of two other men—away from his demented partner.

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Jim and Olson, watching him as he talked, decided that despite his almost loquacity, here was no ruse. The man spoke the truth. This was no stratagem to inquire into.

‘What are Squire and you up to here?’ Olson asked.

Their eyes met. They looked at each other a spell, and then Powell made a motion as of a man tossing down a vain hand of cards.

‘Squire got on to it that you were after something,’ he said, ‘couldn’t place it, thought it must be big and worth sharing. He asked me to come along. I came. That’s all.’

‘That’s all,’ said Olson. ‘Well, I guess we keep you company now. And we’ll ask you to repeat before a J.P.—’

‘What?’

‘— what Squire said about whether a dead man’s feet would shrivel, all about him being worried over that moccasin trail.’

‘A J.P.! How’s that? What’s Squire’s talk—’

‘I could have kept it up my sleeve,’ said Olson, and Jim thought he should have done so—and so,

really, did Olson; yet it was out then; 'but you may as well know that there is something in Squire's talk. It is not just the craziness you imagine. There's sense to it. You can invent what story you like as we go back as reason for being here—but you got to tell about the moccasin delusion.' He broke off to peer keenly into the woods. 'Get inside there just now,' he said.

Powell passed into the dug-out, Laughing Earth's eyes on him in a manner, if one can't say like, certainly suggesting the way a dog looks when prepared for an attack, yet not 'hunting trouble.'

'You're not scared of him, are you, Laughing Earth?' asked Jim. Her expression had struck him as tremendously pathetic.

She shook her head, and moving her blanket disclosed a knife in her hand. The blade was thin and shone like silver.

'So you brought that with you!'

'I find it where I stop that night,' she said, getting sufficient English to answer him, perhaps in reward for the look of solicitude he had for her.

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Olson stooped and held out his hand. She surrendered the knife to him and he examined it oddly while she chattered on, in Cree, explanatory.

‘Got it when she was trying to sleep under the tree after her accident. It was rusty then. Spent the time before we met her honing it on a stone. Talk about a needle in a haystack! I guess this is the knife that Squire stuck into old Penny Scot!’

‘Into my uncle,’ said Jim quietly.

‘Your what?’

‘That’s right. You didn’t notice. You didn’t seem to——’

‘Didn’t know you had an uncle! Didn’t know——’

‘Yes, sir. I feel like that man that saw the giraffe and refused to believe it. There is no doubt about it, though. My uncle was a queer bird, and his name was Richard MacDonald Jefferies! When I showed signs of wandering he was cast up at me by—but no matter. “Just Uncle Richard over again!” He was a queer subject at times. He’d wandered all over the world. In the old stamp-book I kept as a kid there were stamps off his letters from every corner of the

globe. Then we lost trace of him. I rather think the old objection to him not settling down was brought into correspondence. "Gone—no address" finished it.'

'How didn't I get on to something of the kind when I read his name? Say—it's adventure story all right!'

'Is it? It's very queer. I feel it as very, very queer; but I think life's like that. I can easily believe a writing man would turn down something he's experienced when writing a story, because——'

'Because it's as unreal as the giraffe, or finding the needle in a haystack,' said Olson in the tone of a man musing. Then: 'Well, it's blame strange. What's that?' he gave ear, and answered for himself: 'Partridge drumming. Say, it's a strange world,' his voice sank to a whisper. 'Say, we'll tell this fellow here the whole truth. I've slipped out that there is something in the moccasin talk of Squire's already. May as well tell the rest.'

'Not about the discovery?'

'Discovery? You mean Penny Scot's claim?

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Not likely. What do you take me for? I mean all that hangs on the moccasin talk.'

'That's the part I didn't understand when you and he were speaking just now. Why has a J.P. to hear of that so very specially?'

'Why? Because Penny Scot's shoes didn't last for ever, of course. Penny Scot—your uncle—would take to the moccasin like everybody else in the woods. We'll go home in our stocking feet ourselves, I guess, if we don't strike those Crees again and trade a pair. Look at them!' and he gazed down at his own shoes.

'Ssh! What's that?' said Jim quickly.

'Deer breaking through,' replied Olson promptly. He re-examined the knife. 'Well, the miracle don't go whole hog like an adventure story. If this was the knife he did it with, and lost in the wrastle when he was hauling what he thought a dead body to the crik—crazy thing to do too!—it ain't got his initials cut in the shaft, and the name of the shop on the steel!' He tossed the knife back to Laughing Earth, who caught it adroitly. 'If he did lose it then I guess he hunted for it some before he pulled his freight.

Maybe he got scared then. Maybe—say, them deer are breaking through some frequent and populous. It's a stampede.' He craned round the corner again. 'Oh, that's all right. They've been coming down the other way and winded us. There's nothing down there. That's a cert. He's not on our trail warm, wherever he is.'

'You asked if you should tell Powell now or wait.'

'Yep.'

'I think I'd wait.'

Powell's voice hailed them, subdued, within.

'Is there any victuals coming to this outfit?' he asked.

'Well—for gall!' exclaimed Olson. 'Do you think we're going to light a fire and show a smoke?'

'Why not? Let him come—and plug him,' said Powell, appearing in the doorway. 'And say—whose dug-out is this? It ain't yours. And there's a blame old skull here.'

Abruptly a thought dawned on him. His left eye closed slowly in an extravagant kind of way announcing a discovery.

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'Are you 'tecs?' he asked quietly. 'Are you acting as some kind of 'tecs?'

'What makes you think that?' said Olson.

'Well, are you?'

'No.'

Powell winked again.

'I guess I know what he meant,' he said, 'when he was worried about the route, when he was worried about a heap of things. I'm dovetailing his ravings!'

'Something struck you?' suggested Olson.

'Something has,' returned Powell. 'But no matter.'

'I'm not so sure. Anything to do with 'Do dead men's feet shrivel?''

'Per-haps!' He pondered, on his side, whether to speak or not, and then: 'He was up here before.'

Olson suddenly lost his temper. He seemed mad at Powell, at everything.

'Yes, sir!' he ripped. 'He was in this country before. And if you want to know he murdered the old prospector who made this dug-out—took his wad too!'

He produced the tobacco-box from his pocket. Jim was horrified. He wanted to sign advice not to read the letter. He thought his partner, in sudden annoyance, had forgotten the definite whispered assurance that he wouldn't think of mentioning the strike Penny Scot had made. But Olson was reading; and Jefferies need not have worried, for the bit about the claim staked further up was left out. Jim sighed audibly when it was safely passed over.

When Olson finished he looked at Powell, saying nothing; but his eyes meant: 'What do you think of that?'

'I guess that will hang him, then, without my evidence,' said Powell, 'if he's caught. I guess that will hang him all right. I can't say I'm what you might call enamoured of Squire, but after all we did pike out together if we didn't hit it off on the way. I would like to get off from giving what they call evidence.'

'There is a kind of streak of white through you, then,' said Olson.

'Oh, it's maybe a bit grey in places, but it's there. I guess there's things beyond most folks.

Different men, different views. What's beyond me ain't beyond another; and when that other man would quit I'd maybe go right ahead. But I'd feel kind of mean giving that evidence to anybody, and not because I might be asked what I was doing along with him. It wasn't inventing how I'd exp'ain us being together that troubled me. I guess I'm some relieved now.'

'Victuals you said,' remarked Olson. 'Victuals. Perhaps we might chance a fire.'

'We've some cold flap-jacks from the morning,' Jim reminded him.

'Oh, cold flap-jacks!' growled Olson.

'And canned corn,' said Jim slyly.

Olson's eyes jumped.

'Well, before we tackle that canned corn,' he said, 'I'm just going to see whether he's coming along at all. I guess Laughing Earth and you can keep this gentleman company till I come back.' He glanced down at the Indian girl. 'You look kind of peaked,' he said to her. 'What's the matter?'

'Nothing.'

'Not scared of anything? You know only a poor old man lived here?'

'No, not scared ;' her eyes added : 'with you.'
'Foot hurt?'

She did not reply at once, then : 'No,' she said. 'All right.'

He threw his rifle into the crook of his arm, plunged down hill, turned up stream and disappeared. Powell sat quiet inside the dug-out, just visible at the door. Laughing Earth remained crouched at the entrance, listening ; to the other side stood Jim, listening also and musing upon the wandering uncle, and the strangeness of life. The spirit of Sadie Dixon seemed to be very much with him now. He could see her so plainly, wondered how she was, wondered, with dread, if she had gone from Saint Anthony's Crossing. There was not a sound save the creek drumming, the hum of flies, the crackle of summer. The silence was intense. Jim, after about an hour, looked at Laughing Earth and, having looked, studied her.

'You got pain?' he asked.

She nodded with a touch of woe in her eyes.

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'Your head?' he suggested.

'Head a little,' she answered. 'Foot.'

Thought of blood-poisoning of course flashed into his mind.

'You know balsam fir?' he asked. 'You know those little pimples, beads, little things on the trunk. You savvy?'

'Yes.'

'Would it be any good if I got some for you to put on?'

'Yes.'

'Why didn't you say?'

'Too much hurry,' she replied.

'There are some right here,' said he. 'Give me your bandana—what-you-call-it.'

She unwound it, and when he saw the wound on her head he gave a grunt of sympathy.

'You'll be all right here,' he said.

'Not go yet,' she begged.

'He won't touch you.'

'I will surely respect the lady,' said the perking-up Powell within. 'I'm half asleep to tell the truth.'

Laughing Earth turned her head, and looked contemptuously toward the dug-out entrance. Suddenly she held up a finger.

'Somebody come!' she said.

It was Olson mounting from below, his rifle slung on his shoulder now, his hands held out before him in a peculiar fashion. He climbed up to the dug-out, digging his heels into the bank, and as he came level they saw that his hands were all smeared, the palms full of a glutinous substance. He held them out to Laughing Earth.

'There you are,' he said. It might have been all he had gone for. He had been pricking balsam out of the trees. 'Gee-whiz! What a crack you got on your head. There you are.'

She took her kerchief, tore it in two pieces, rubbing each in Olson's hands, and one she bound on her forehead. Then she slipped off her moccasin.

'Gee-whiz!' he exclaimed again. 'You've got grit, Laughing Earth.'

She laughed as she bound her foot.

'Any sign of Mr. Squire yet?' he asked.

'No,' replied Jim. He studied Olson's blank

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face, blank as it had been after their pow-wow in the shack. 'How about——' he left the rest unsaid.

Olson was now holding his hands as a man about to wash.

'The canned corn *goes* !' he said. 'You can be getting her open while I slip down and get the remains of this off my hands.'

CHAPTER XV

ROUGH JUSTICE

THERE was a rustling in the trees, of a quality different from the other manifold rustlings of the day, a rustle presaging night. The creek took a deeper note, in a stillness more intense. The ancient instincts in the blood of the most urban of men, had he been there, would have told him that the hour had come in which to prepare for the dark.

'We can't go hunting Squire now,' said Olson.

'I was just thinking,' replied Jim, 'that if he doesn't hunt us we'll have to hunt him.'

'Yes, if he's stalking us. If he's changed his mind—well, there's a different story; we can leave him to the woods and what he can make of them. That ain't our picnic. By Powell's account we don't know what to make of him, and there's the blame last long shafts of the sun lying across that almighty forest!'

'One of us should keep awake,' said Jim, looking

round at the dark blue stretches of tree-tops below them, the slow twilight of this night stealing down, to his mind, more uncannily than any he had known. It all seemed so vast, so enduring. The roar of the cities of the world in that place, and at that time, was puny as one grasshopper's chirr.

'You take on a spell of Morpheus, then,' said Olson, 'I'll wake you later.'

Powell's voice came from the dug-out.

'Say!' he exclaimed. 'It's dark in here already. You'd think this blame hole was where the night come from. Have I got to bunk with this relict?'

'Not if it worries you,' Olson responded with a sardonic laugh that was hardly a laugh at all.

'Hey! Where are you going, Laughing Earth?'

She was slithering down the bank.

'Get leaf for flies,' said she.

In token of appreciation of his thought for her in the matter of the balsam, or in devotion to him, or because of both, she was shuffling down hill to gather some leaves objected to by mosquitoes, conquering her terror of being so much as a yard away from human society in this unnatural place.

A yard was as bad as a mile, it would seem, here; but she would risk going a little way.

'You point me out the bush, tree, weed—whatever it is,' began Jim. 'Don't let her hobble down, Olson. She'll——'

He was interrupted. Laughing Earth halted as if frozen. Powell's jaw dropped where he stood in the doorway of the dug-out that the coming of night was making trebly dismal to him. Olson whipped up his rifle again, featly balanced in accustomed hand. The quiet air—the hushing hour—these accentuated a gripping sense of horror in the cry that reached them:—

'Penny Scot! Penny Scot!'

The strain was more than Jim could stand. He peered round the projecting spur of hill into which the dug-out had been tunnelled, and no sooner had he done so than up went his hand to those behind in a sign for silence.* He turned his head briefly to speak to them.

'He has no rifle,' he said.

Then he was peering again. Next moment, without looking round—'No,' he said, 'no rifle.'

Now did he show what manner of man he was

in an emergency; he had been mighty easy with Powell, but it was clear he realised their relative positions in this wilderness escapade. He glanced over his shoulder, and——

‘Say, Powell,’ he rasped in a low voice, ‘did he have a gun—revolver—shooting-iron of any kind?’

‘Only the rifle,’ answered Powell.

‘Sure?’

‘Yep.’

Olson had half an eye on Powell. He had believed his story—but one never knows! Laughing Earth triumphed over the atrophying spell that had fallen on her at that cry and crawled back to the ledge, her eyes bright in the falling twilight.

‘He’s up at—he’s coming down! Wait a bit. This is better than hanging it out all the blame night, with no moon to talk of and no fire, and——’

‘Penny Scot!’ wailed the voice. ‘Penny Scot!’

At this renewal of the beseeching cry Jim did not move, made no sign to his companions, remained motionless looking round the spur.

'He's seen you, hey?' asked Olson. 'Seen you, has he?'

'Has he seen you? Has he seen you?' murmured Powell, all tense.

Olson gave him another look, keen, searching—and decided that here was not acting. Powell had clearly had enough of his crazy partner. There had been no ruse before, when he joined them. Olson had not thought that there was any covert design, but with such gentry it was possible Powell might have wanted to get into their camp and attempt some sleight-of-hand with the rifles. A moment later it was plain to those in the lee of the hill's projection that Squire had seen Jim. It was made clear, also, for whom he mistook him. There was no more play-acting in Squire than there had been in his late companion.

'You ain't dead, Penny Scot?' came his voice.

Jim Jefferies for once trembled. Squire was near enough for his face to be plainly seen—and it made him shudder. It looked as if the man's soul had gone. Again Jim signed; and the three saw his hand move with relief, for the signal assured them that he was fit to tackle the situation,

had self-confidence. Furtively, obeying the behest of that signalling palm, they moved away into the dug-out, Powell backing in, Olson helping Laughing Earth with hand on her elbow, then following to take up his stand in the darkened entrance.

They could hear Squire's feet crunch as he descended. He was only a step or two beyond the corner. Had such a proceeding seemed wise, they could have whirled round and grappled with him.

'It is you, Penny Scot, ain't it?' they heard him ask.

Jim now faced him, eye to eye.

'Humour him!' whispered Olson, at the same time as Jefferies was saying: 'That you?'

Jim's voice was steady, but on a different note, to the ears of the three breathing quiet, tense, within Penny Scot's last home. He had almost said: 'That you, Squire?' but he was not certain if Penny Scot (though the old man had left in his last will and testament the name of his murderer) was supposed to know his name. He did not understand all the workings of madness, either. Squire, insane, and mistaking him for

Penny Scot, might (if he had not told his name, if it had merely happened that Penny Scot knew who the man was with whom he had 'met up' as they say) suddenly be beyond humouring, wonder how his name was known, incontinently blaze. He looked as though anything should be expected from him. But the madman's next words showed Jim that his excessive caution was not required on this head.

'I'm Squire—you remember me. I thought I saw your moccasin print. This ain't your ghost, is it? It's surely you, ain't it?'

'It's surely me,' said Jim.

'You forgive me then, Mr. Penny Scot, do you? Say you forgive me. You got a gun just round the corner there; I know by the way your hand's drifting down. Don't shoot me. If you knew how glad I am to see you alive, Mr. Penny Scot, if you only knew—if you could only see inside my head.'

'That's all right, that's all right,' said Jim.
'Here I am.'

'You do know how I feel?'

'Sure.'

'You do see inside my head?'

'Sure!'

'No, you don't.'

'No, I don't.'

'But you know what I mean?'

'Yes, I know what you mean.'

Squire was close to Jim now. He was as crazy as the craziest; his eyes were full of madness, and their appearance was the more terrible because of the dusk.

'What's this? Is this your dug-out?' he asked. 'Gee! So this is where you were. How did you get back?'

'Floated down the creek, and stuck on a bar, and crawled up. I'm all right now,' said Jim. 'Glad to see you. I'm going out to-morrow; we can go together. It will be company.'

He thought he had gone too far, for Squire gave a crackling little giggle. But it might have meant nothing, or anything—have signified pleasure, or have been a sign that he suspected some scheme against him. Jim's instinct was to turn and run, or rather his wish was to turn and run. Of course that was what he must never do, could not and would not do.

Yet he would have given a year of his life if the loss of it would free him from the necessity of humouring this beast for a moment more. Squire seemed to be a creature from whom whatever makes wolf different from man had fled, and in going a door had been opened for the entry of worse than wolf.

'I was wondering if a dead man's feet would shrink,' said Squire. 'I saw a trail a bit around here. Or was it yours?'

'Oh, that needn't have worried you,' replied Jim easily.

'Humour him to come inside,' whispered Olson as loud as he dared.

Squire tilted his head, and his face was white and strained. He seemed to be listening with every muscle.

'Heard a voice!' he exclaimed.

'Did you?' said Jim. 'It will be from my friends,' and he nodded his head backwards.

'Friends? Friends? What did you look round the corner that way for?'

'When you called—me?'

'Yes.'

'Why, to see who it was, of course! Come along and be introduced. If you can pull with them we'll all go out together. That would be all right, eh?'

Squire looked very leering and insanely shrewd upon him, then again giggled.

'Ah!' broke out Jim. 'That would be the moccasin print you saw! There's two or three people with me, and one of them is an Indian girl. She hurt her foot in the woods, and——'

He backed as he spoke and, backing, put hand to rifle. Squire pressed closer.

'Now don't you do that, Penny Scot!' Squire snarled, looking as if he would spring. 'I ain't got a gun. Don't you go and——'

'Why man! That's a nice notion to have of me after being glad I'm alive!'

'Glad you're alive? Yes. That's right. It is you all right, ain't it?'

'Don't you see it's me?' said Jim, and was about to add: 'Do you think I want to shoot you now after you being sorry for what you did?' but it was unnecessary. Squire's mind was off elsewhere,

'Friends inside?' he asked. 'Where they come from? I mean besides the Indian girl who came to see what you could do with her foot? That's what you said, ain't it?'

'Just prospectors,' Jim answered. 'Come out, you fellows, and let me introduce you to a man I met in the hills a long time ago. Then,' his voice shook a trifle as he drew nearer a reprieve from this hideous conversation, 'we'll get a fire and have some——'

Olson stepped out. He and Powell—and Laughing Earth too, doubtless—were in agreement with Jim's attempt to arrive at a solution of this problem thrust upon them. None knew what effect the 'introduction' might have; but all hoped for the best, and it had to be proceeded with.

'This is Mr. Squire,' began Jim, 'a man——'

Squire's eyes shifted from Olson to Jefferies and back again—to and fro. He gave the same kind of leer as he had given a moment or two ago when Jim suggested that they should all go 'out' together; but this time he did not giggle; his face contorted in a grin instead, and not a sound did he make.

'What did you say his name was?' he asked.

Jim had to think hard again in an endeavour to arrive at some notion of the madman's tangled thoughts, wondering how best to cope with him. He plunged.

'Mr. Olson,' he said.

'That's right,' said Squire. 'I thought maybe——' he stared into the dug-out. He advanced to the door. He thrust forward his chin, peered again, like a man with myopia.

'You've trapped me!' he shouted, into the doorway, and what with his hollow voice, and that den of a place echoing it, he seemed such a mad beast that both Olson and Jefferies had a momentary temptation to set him free of the world, and themselves of him, with one swift bullet. But they still had hope—humane or sentimental—to 'humour' him 'out,' to get him to a town and an asylum. It had been Jim's notion first and had been transferred to his partner while he talked alone to Squire; though, to be sure, Olson, listening, had muttered: 'It will be some trip if we manage it—it will be a h—— of a trip!'

'I see you there, Powell!' Squire screamed.

'When I saw Oilson my mind cleared. I thought it was Penny—someone else—never mind who! I got kind of mixed with them little moccasins. You've trapped me! You've——'

He leapt in upon his former partner, and encircled his throat with those great hands, hands that had always been repulsive, with filbert nails sunk in such markedly podgy and yet taper finger-ends. The force of the leap crashed both to the ground. Next moment Olson and Jim were stuck together in the narrow entrance, simultaneously darting to the rescue.

'We're making it darker!' Olson moaned. 'One at a time! One at a time! Out, Jim!'

Jim fell back abruptly to let Olson enter, and then dashed in after him. Powell was down, with Squire's knees in his wind, Squire's hands at his throat; but in the dark they could hardly make out who was who in the tangle.

Then, as Olson swung in with Jim at his heels, the Cree girl spoke one word. They heard a kind of sobbing sound, and after that all fell quiet. Laughing Earth had used the lean knife on Squire as he (if it was his knife, lost years ago, though

that they would never know) had used it on Penny Scot. Maybe it was his; she had found it, you remember, rust covered, by the creek, and had honed it long on a stone till it was a slip of a thing compared with what it must have been originally, a mere thin poignard.

Hers was the defter hand. All that was left to do that night was to get Powell free from those gripping fingers that would soon be stiff, crooked so, and haul him outside.

CHAPTER XVI

LAUGHING EARTH WAVES FAREWELL

'FOR any sake,' said Olson, 'a light, a fire. This place——' and he said no more, either his opinion of the place being beyond speech at the moment, or perhaps, despite his lack of superstition he did not wish to revile it, seeing that so little way up creek was his treasure-trove—to which he would return some day to put in the final 'assessment work,' unless a ready buyer was found on their return. He did not malign it. There had been tragedy here—and expiation. Perhaps anon the history of the Little Norman would be fairer.

Jim rummaged in the pack for a cup, and went stumbling and fumbling down to the black creek for water to dash over the all-but-strangled Powell. The last cold light of day lit only the west-fronting side of the lonely peak that, away to south, might have been peeping over the lower slopes to observe them. Down by the stream, that tom-tomed on and on, it was already night. By the time a fire

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was aglow, and Powell sat up again, night had closed in all round them.

The firelight flickered on a stone up the hill, making it like something living that was there and gone, prying, scurrying away, prying again. It shone on a tree-stem half way to the wedge of blackness in which the creek brawled, then flickered down, so that it was as if some ghostly presence had risen up and been abruptly dissipated into air.

All felt the place horrible, but most of all the Indian girl. She dared not look over the firelight and out into the blackness behind. She sat humped, cowering there, staring at the creeping and leaping flames. It was not because of what she had done she was afraid; it was because of the Unknown. When at last Powell could be told how he was rescued he turned to Laughing Earth.

'Well, I got to thank you,' he said.

She was candid to the last degree. She raised her eyes to his face but was careful not to look beyond him into the dark that moated them round.

'If he kill you,' she replied, 'then he try kill

Jim and Oli-sohn. When man mad very strong. Maybe kill more than you.'

Her eyes fixed his more with an air of candour than aught else. When they fell again to a consideration of the wavering flames, she was not evading his gaze—only evading the possible glimpse of some Hoodoo of these parts behind his back. Powell listened to her, his eyes wide, and still somewhat as if starting from their sockets, just listened with blank face, then nodded. Her evident lack of interest in him—lack of heed as to what happened to him—was neither here nor there, certainly not a subject for annoyance, merely to be expected. He became again the tolerated fourth member of the party; and there he sat, silent, subdued, wishing it was morning—and the night only just begun, a cold night after a hot day.

Even the unperturbed tear-tearing of the grass along the creek-side, as the pack-pony ate on, glad of the lush bottoms there, did not help to make that camp any easier to bear, nor make it any more home-like. All were distraught—from the long waiting for the possible coming of Squire, from the madman's talk and from his death; though

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perhaps Jim, among the sense of misery, had a feeling of, if not pride, then of satisfaction that he had been able to face, as he had faced, that ordeal with the lunatic. It would be a great story to tell Sadie if she was still at Morley's when he got back. And yet, perhaps it was too gruesome for her ears.

There were no shoes removed that night. They loosened their laces, dragged a fallen tree to the fire for a back log, and waited for morning in the condition of half awake, half asleep, conscious all the while of the pony's undisturbed grazing. They envied him his equine aloofness to the emotions that assailed them.

It was his whinnying, before the day came, that brought them out of the miserable mid-state between sleep and waking. From somewhere beyond was a reply. Sitting up they saw the first tranquil light drifting down out of the sky and moving on the slopes, tremendously poignant, strange, sacred. And there came the pack-horse that had accompanied Squire and Powell, loping down to join his fellow. Old friends from the same livery stable at Adam's Lake, it was a great moment for

them. The human beings looked on in silence. Then Olson drew up his legs, knees to chin, and hauled tight his laces with a 'O-ho-ho! O-ho-ho!'

'That's how I feel,' said Powell. 'And now that your 'tec work is done here, and you've got your evidence, I guess we hit back, hey? Nothing more to keep us around here, is there?' and he peered about at the waking scene. 'I suppose you must swear an affidavit, or something to that effect, when you get back where there's ink and papers and J.P's. I know now for sure you were here for evidence. I don't want to hear how the Law got wind of it. I ain't interested. All I want to know is where I come in? Accessory? No, that sure ain't it! Witness? How do I shape?'

Olson and Jim looked at each other. Their eyes exchanged glances.

'I guess we can fix it so's you don't come in at all,' said Olson.

'You see,' Jim pointed out, wily with the sane man, as he had been with the crazy partner, 'you had nothing to do with Squire in the days that——' and he nodded.

'No, sir!' exclaimed Powell. 'First clue I got

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was when we came into them last bit of woods, when he said to me—but I told you that. H——! Let's forget it! Let's cut it out!'

On him, more than on the others, did the strain seem to tell, but then he knew nothing of what they had found. They had that to ease them. He talked on as they prepared for the return, but none heeded him, talked, indeed, half to himself about how glad he was to be out of it—'glad Squire's out of it! Better that way'—he nodded toward the dug-out, 'than in a padded cell; and that would have been his end if the bearded kid had humoured him whole-hog. Whew! Humouring him! Think of humouring him home all them miles, day and night, like that police-boy humoured the fellow down—you heard about that, I suppose—read about that in the papers?'

'Oh yes. That's right. We heard.'

The one great desire was to be gone. They packed one pony well and the other light, that it might the more easily bear Laughing Earth's little weight as well as its load. They did not again enter the dug-out. Nature, with her wild creatures, would clean up all in there. When they were ready

they went swiftly away, not once looking round, athwart the bank, over the shoulder, down into the woods—Jim in the lead; then Squire's—or let us say Powell's pack-pony, for Squire is out of it now; next Laughing Earth astride the white pony; after her Powell, he taking his place there with a blank do-what-you-will expression, as if acknowledging that he was their prisoner, if they cared; and in the rear Olson, elation and disgust oddly blent on his brooding face.

At the last camp of the two 'bad mans' they stopped only long enough to gather a few belongings—such as Powell's blankets and tin cup. Squire's cup lay there too, and Powell shook his head at it as if it had a spell on it.

'Couldn't drink out of it,' said he. 'No, gentlemen, I may be what I may be, but I tell you that this trip has turned my stomach. I tell you what——'

He went on to tell them of how he felt, but no one listened. The cavalcade strung out, and temporarily he lulled. Rustle, rustle, rustle they went through fallen leaves—the time being come when still-hunters long for the year to wane, for

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another month to go speedily, make an end of Indian summer and bring the snow. He began again anon, their rustling through the enveloping silence too much for him; but still none paid attention.

Jim continued to lead, but the pony with the pack now trudged ahead of him, realising it was going home. Laughing Earth, speechless, rode behind. They went smartly. Then Olson quickened his step and swung past Powell, wearying of his hypochondriacal chatter thrown on the air. But Powell went on moaning to himself—and lagged, and announced that he could blame well sit down there, let the world do what it liked. Yet when he lost sight of those ahead, and looked round, he felt otherwise, tramped quickly after them.

It was in the last lap of the Norman Woods that there came one toward them, travelling swiftly and quietly—John Wood Buffalo, Laughing Earth's uncle and devoted admirer. He swung toward them, a wondrous combination of the old and the hardy. His keen eyes peered at Jim.

'How-do!' said Jefferies.

'How-do!' said John Wood Buffalo, and halted.

He stood there looking up at Laughing Earth as she rode along. Their eyes met and stayed—and the old man was content. The gossip, the scandal of the camp, that had wounded him, hearing it until he had had to brave all evil spirits, he could answer easily when he returned. He knew that as their eyes met. The view that Laughing Earth had cheapened herself by running away with the white men was not to be tolerated. Before she spoke, in that eye-to-eye scrutiny, he had come to the decision.

What she said Jim did not know, but old John listened and nodded—and made a reply that was clearly meant to stop her. He wanted no further explanation. He too admired the big Cree-speaking man, and he understood that a young woman might see enough in him to come out and dare many terrors to warn him of danger. Had not he, an old man, come into these woods out of affection for this young woman? And could any talk foolishly of them?

When Olson came into view there was no spirit of enmity between him and John Wood Buffalo.

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The old man wheeled, as if to join them, then looked back. Evidently, whatever Laughing Earth had said, she had not told all the story of what had happened at the dug-out. Powell, in the rear, caused John Wood Buffalo's hand to tighten round the rifle he carried. He held it with hand raised, elbow out to rear, tucked close to his side, in a grim grip at the small of the butt, where his finger could slip to the trigger at a moment's notice.

'It's the one that's left,' said Jim to him. 'One man die. He go mad and try kill his partner.'

The Indian delayed long enough to see which it was that had survived and then, Powell appearing, gave a grunt that was clearly meant to convey something to the effect of: 'It might have been worse!' Turning, he fell in line behind Laughing Earth. As they thus moved on, Olson explained the rest, all that was needed; and, as they progressed, homeward bound, the burden of these woods decreased.

'It will be all right with a good wagon road running through,' said Olson that night, in camp, their last before striking the rolling country.

'Wagon-road!' cried Powell. 'What's there

to be a wagon-road to? No, sir! It can stay like it is till the Millenium—and after. Might be more inquiries, and *me* toted in next time! Wagon-road! What's there for a wagon-road to go to?' He was highly disgusted at the suggestion.

'True, true,' replied Olson, leaning forward to pick an ember from the fire with quick fingers, and light his pipe—and cover from Powell any momentary expression that might have been evident; for he had nearly answered: 'Why, to the finest prospect this side of the Rockies!'

He did not want Powell for a neighbour. No such lucky strike can be kept quiet; there would be a wagon-road, and that before long. There would be a railroad too, in the near future. But he would be glad, after convoying Powell 'out,' never to see him again.

'Well, sir,' said Powell, voicing his 'feelings' once more, 'if Eureka, Ophir, Eldorado, and all was back in them hills I'd leave 'em there. I tell you what—that madman and this I've been through——' he rumbled and grumbled on with his symptoms. He was sick and tired of the

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wilderness; he was for some job where there were folks; he would rustle a job for himself, and when he had the price he would hit for some town of size. He wasn't going back to Saint Anthony's! No, sir! He meant it too. You bet you!

The glimpse of the society of an Indian camp did not lighten his heart. The transient tepee was not enough antidote for these last weeks. He wanted more than wooden sidewalk even. He wanted the comfort of cement beneath his feet, the gleam of store windows on either side instead of the leagues of woods that had come to seem as though every tree was watching—yet heedless—beneath its branches.

It has to be said that the Indian camp was not sociably inclined towards him. He was dubiously eyed at first, as indeed were they all. But even after the air had cleared, and John Wood Buffalo was looking with cold, metallic eyes at this or that member, and had spoken words that were clearly words of contempt, even after that Powell was certainly looked upon as an outsider. Nor did he try to ingratiate himself. As it was when Laughing Earth had explained why she had saved his life, so

it was now. As it was when he saw John Wood Buffalo's glance at him on the trail, as it had been all the way so far, so was it here. He didn't care. He was now like a philosopher 'doing time,' looking forward to the end of his sentence; or as a soldier who, having enlisted when jilted or drunk, sick of it all, and unable to buy himself out, looks forward to the end of his term. It would be over some day. They would come to a railroad track and wooden sidewalks, and he would go on to some place where there were electric tramcars buzzing and clanging through crowds! He accepted the savages' treatment of him—or rather lack of any treatment; he was content to sit mute, to await patiently the next homeward move.

Olson was diplomatic. He chatted quietly to John Wood Buffalo; he inveigled into talk one after another of the band; he was telling the story of how one of the men who pursued them had gone mad. He told it well, vividly. The Norman Woods seemed less desirable than ever to all who heard. Of what he had found there besides a gruesome tale he said nothing. But in his pocket were the 'spacamints'—and there they reposed.

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Jim, as his partner thus talked on, centre of the circle, looked at Laughing Earth, who sat a little without, and marked the admiration in her eyes as she listened—admiration and adulation. She turned, saw him, and something impelled her to rise and come to his side. It was a movement few remarked, or, remarking, considered; for Olson had the chair—or the floor—or whatever you call it when one talks and others listen in an Indian camp, and he had their deep attention. She came, a little limping, and sat down beside Jim, leaning backward on her hand.

‘You friend of Oli-sohn,’ she said—in that Indian tone that leaves one wondering whether a statement has been made or a question asked.

‘I’m a great friend of his now,’ he replied. ‘Good friend before, but now——’

‘I know,’ she said. ‘If I see Oli-sohn,’ she put a very sweet cadence into the name, ‘long time I get like that, more and more. You think Oli-sohn hate me for kill man?’

This time he knew it was a question.

‘Why should he?’ he asked.

She pondered that. The Mission English grammar faded.

'White woman not kill man,' she said.

'If need be,' Jim declared, wondering why he could not find easier phrases. 'Bad white man come along—then maybe white woman kill him sometime.'

'He not hate me?'

'No!' He spurned the suggestion.

She heaved a little sigh. Some of her people were now watching her, and she glanced at them momentarily.

'He say not much about it,' she remarked. 'I think he sorry.'

'It was very brave of you,' said Jim, with something of that puzzled look in his eyes that a member of one race gives to another in converse.

There came a rull in the 'smoke-up,' and Olson turned to his partner.

'How about hiking on?' he asked.

'At the first word!' said Powell. "'Mush! Hike!' and I'm up.'

The Indians plainly had contempt for him as a loquacious person.

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'All right!' replied Jim.

Laughing Earth leant closer.

'You good mans,' she said. 'You tell your partner I think he——' she bent her head, touched her breast with a finger. 'I lof,' she said. 'Lof? You say lof?'

Jim nodded.

'He not lof me,' she said. 'Very good—very kind—but not lof. No.'

Then she sat back. Olson rose. Jim rose too. Powell sat still until both were on their feet, as one who would not be at all hopeful, but would only rise when he was sure that a departure was to be made.

Suddenly Jim found that the Indian girl had slipped away quietly from his side. She was nowhere to be seen. Then John Wood Buffalo, with a muttered comment to Olson, and with that in-toed shuffle of his (man's natural walk before he took to wearing boots and shoes) passed into a tent. They delayed, all silent. There was a sense of constraint, or expectancy; and when the old man reappeared carrying a little bundle all tied up with thong, Laughing Earth at the same time

emerged from another tepee. She came more speedily than her uncle, despite the still painful foot. She came straight to Jim (perhaps in some feminine diplomacy) and handed him a small package, securely knotted.

'Present,' she said. 'For you.'

'What is it?' he asked, greatly touched, which was scarce etiquette, but he did not want, as they say, to rob her.

'Not much. Only moccasins. If I know I make you and Oli-sohn good pair. These all I have. From me. You take.'

Then she walked up to Olson and with a shyness that did not show when she talked to Jim handed him another packet.

'You take, Oli-sohn,' she said. 'You good to me in woods. Very kind.'

'Pshaw!' he replied.

But she repeated it to him in Cree, and in Cree he answered.

'You were a brave woman,' he said. 'I will not forget. I will send you a present when I get back.'

She may not have shown 'maidenly modesty,' but there was no immodesty, and there would be no taunts for her when they were gone. She

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was a heroine after returning from her mission into the Hoodooed woods, lair of the Thunder-Bird, to warn 'Oli-sohn' and his young bearded partner.

Gravely then did John Wood Buffalo hand his parcel to Olson, all tied and knotted. The etiquette Olson knew perfectly well. It was not to be opened till they were far on their way. He took it with an inclination of his head, and looking in John's bright old eyes, grasped his hand. Immediately after this they drove the horses before them, moved off.

They climbed the hill, looking round ever and again to wave. They came to the crest; and from there saw the last of the conical white tepees, with the smoky tops, beside the creek bend. They waved again and dipped over the hill-top.

To Jim's eyes—but perhaps that was because of all he knew; maybe in his knowledge he saw more than another might—there was a great pathos in one little figure in the group down there, Laughing Earth standing still—not moving when they turned to look, not until the last turn of all, and then giving a quick, fluttering wave.

CHAPTER XVII

' SO-LONG—AND GOOD-LUCK '

IN camp that night they thought to open the packets, but refrained. Some whim came to both to wait till Adam's Lake was reached, for with the opening of these gifts they would, as it were, close the episode, and each felt minded to linger over it. So they did not undo the much-knotted buckskin thongs.

' That Laughing Earth is a great beauty,' said Jim.

' She was surely a peach,' Olson agreed, looking into the fire.

' Poor girl. A savage and a beauty.'

' Ah-ha ! But John Wood Buffalo is the goods, though, man ! ' said Olson. ' Why, he must have seen blame near the first white man up here. I tell you, that old buck's life is a yarn out of sight. The girl? You bet. She's all right. She's all right, all right. I can understand them old-timers

linking up with an Indian girl, here and there. You don't want to sneer about Indian wives everywhere. There's squaw-men and there are men with Indian wives. I've met some. But I don't know, I don't know. That John Wood Buffalo is an interesting old fellow; I think I'd rather pow-wow with him. You want to know their language, though. Even them that talk English—they're not themselves, the same as if they were speaking Cree.'

'I suppose not,' said Jim, picturing Laughing Earth as he had last seen her. 'So I've heard. Yes, so I've heard.'

But when they opened their packages at Adam's Lake he smiled to himself. There was no doubt which were the moccasins that had been the more carefully chosen. For his own taste he preferred the simply designed and executed ones that were his; but the heavily beaded pair had been given to Olson. And again he seemed to see her, to catch the plaintive notes in her voice as she sat beside him that five minutes near the end and talked.

Suddenly Olson exclaimed aloud over the other parcel. Jim thought he meant to open it first, if

it had not been that his undoing of the girl's present had caused Olson to tackle the smaller one at the same time. Now Olson undid the string round John's gift, rolled the packet open, and held forth a calumet—one of the old stone-bowled calumets that to-day it is difficult to buy.

'Say! Look at him! Look at that carved stem! Look at the stone bowl! Do you know how they make 'em?' Do you know how they got the stone for 'em in the old days?'

There he sat in the big barn-like approach to the livery-stable where they had unpacked, yarning of calumets, with the stableman listening and wondering where they had been, yarning on till the proprietor, who had seen them arrive from the hotel, came in at the door. Rolling, corpulent, ruddy, cigar between his fingers, slightly short of breath—there he came, the livery-stable boss. You know the type. They have had ups and downs, seen many kinds of men, and an air of the unfathomable has fallen on them. They will perhaps open up to the Olsons they meet, but to the Squires they are monosyllabic, go not one step beyond business. He came out of the sun into

his big entrance shed, paused with cigar pointed in air.

'You did scare me!' he broke out.

'Scare you?' asked Olson, looking round.

It seemed a strong word, that 'scared,' for Mr. Billings was merely looking mildly astonished. He put his cigar in his lips and adroitly rolled it from one side to the other.

'Your partner did,' he explained.

Both watched him, interested.

'Yes sir. You took me back some years in my life. You're the split double of a man I knew. Of course your shape's younger than his was even then—when I saw him last—but it's surely remarkable. I wonder if you are any relation of—well, I don't know his right handle, only his pan-handle, so to speak. He blew into this country when we were trying to break ourselves of saying "Fort" Edmonton, cutting off the prefix. He was called "Scotty"—and to distinguish him from other Scotties we made it "Penny Scot," because he was broke then. "Penny Scot."'

'Richard MacDonald Jefferies was his full name,' said Jim.

'You don't say! Well, that don't help me to verify none, for I never heard his name, but if——'

'That's right,' Jim went on. 'He was my uncle.'

'Well, say! There's a family resemblance, all right. That beard of yours does it.'

'That,' murmured Olson, 'was why he made sure he had found him.'

'Ha-ow?' inquired Billings.

'You made sure you had found him again,' said Olson.

'Oh yes, sure. Yes, it made me jump, all right. And how is your uncle, sir? Still in the land of the living?'

'No. He's been dead some years,' answered Jim.

'Is that so? He was a right interesting man. And you're his nevvv? Well, well.'

He looked at Powell who, small of his back against the wall, elbows on knees, sat as it were on his toes—in an attitude that seems common to men in stables the world over, common as the groom's foible of wearing a belt and working about

with suspenders off his shoulders, trailing round his hips.

'Your partner gone into the hotel?' Billings asked Powell. 'I didn't meet him coming over.'

'No. He's—he's staying up in the hills.'

'Oh!'

Olson thought there was suspicion in the tone.

'Going to winter there,' said he. 'We met this gentleman, and his partner.'

'Oh, you did,' said Billings, and Olson was sure then that he had been suspicious—for he clearly, at that, dismissed the matter.

They roped their blankets anew for shoulder transport in place of pony-back, and went to the depot to inquire about the trains, that were now running in both directions, Adam's Lake no longer rail-head. Hardly had they stepped from the loamy road to the ringing boards than the dull hoot of a locomotive sounded from westward.

'Mine's due!' said Powell grimly.

They did not ask him where he was going. Nobody said anything till the engine puffed to a standstill in the station. They just stood grouped there, blanket-rolls at their feet, staring before them

in the way of men back from the hills and standing on a veritable depot platform, off which one can step for all the world. Powell looked at Jim and Olson, lifted his roll, moved away, moved back. Then Olson held out his hand, and the other grabbed it.

'Thank you,' he said. 'You're a white man, Oilson. After all we been together in them places,' and he nodded beyond the depot toward the lands back there, to north, whence they had come.

Jim held out his hand next.

'How are you off for money?' he asked, as Powell shook his hand warmly, giving way to an impulse Olson had felt as well, but had eliminated as an overdose of sentiment. The woods and the wilderness had cast them close, they had been able to get back together without discord; but, after all, this man was with them only on sufferance.

'All right,' said Powell with a voice of astonishment, and shook hands with Jim a second time. 'All right. You're surely white men, both of you.' He turned away. 'So-long.'

'So-long—and good-luck!' said Olson.

The conductor sang out 'All aboard!' Powell

mounted the steps of the car nearest to them and, not looking round, passed inside; the glass of the door, waggling to a standstill, blurred his back with reflections from outside. The train rolled out. The conductor stepped aboard. The train picked up speed and was gone. Jim and Olson found the agent looking after it, flicking his hands together as though he had pushed it off.

'When's ours?' asked Olson.

'There's not one the other way till 22.50, but there is a work train coming along so soon as the line's open. You can go on her, and if you speak fair I guess they'll let you stop on to the end of steel with them.'

'How far is that?'

'Almost into Saint Anthony's.'

'Gee-whiz!' exclaimed Olson, and turning to Jim said he: 'If we hold her down all the way you won't be able to get your beard shaved!'

'Oh, never mind my beard!' replied Jim.

CHAPTER XVIII

' JOURNEYS END——'

IN the caboose of the freight train in which they joggled, click-clicking out the homeward miles, there was hanging a looking-glass, and when Jim saw himself in it a plan was formed in his mind. He would go back to Saint Anthony's incognito. He would masquerade as a new man, another man, in his old haunts. He kept this intention to himself as they went on joyfully through evergreen woods, balsam-trees filling the air with fragrance. He was not distressed, even, by a great patch where a forest fire had made all desolate and left only charred roots and great crumbling black poles.

As they rolled on to the journey's end, halting at brand new depot-buildings, surrounded by tents and a shack or two, to drop off the expected cases of tinned goods, or a sack of potatoes, one of the train-men took up a pail, clambered to the roof and returned with water from the locomotive. He

performed his ablutions, produced a collar from somewhere, slid a tie into it, hung it on a nail, and then brought forth something that was a razor and yet not a razor. It looked more like a date-stamp holder. He proceeded to soap his face, lathering away cheerily, while the conductor eyed him gravely.

‘Blamed if I know why you soap yourself,’ he remarked.

‘Why of course you soap yourself for shaving!’

‘Shaving? Beg your pardon. I thought they were tweezers you had.’

The brakesman grunted and lathered on. Those in the caboose were interested, Jim especially so. He looked on sympathetically, waiting for the brakesman to finish the cheeks and see how he would get round the lower angles. The shave with the safety-razor did seem highly successful at first. The brakesman swept down his right jaw, down his left, then showed his face to be admired.

‘Now you get on to the chin!’ whooped the conductor.

‘All right. You watch me,’ was the reply.

He scraped—and scraped. He put on more soap and scraped again. The bristles still showed.

‘Nothing happened!’ the conductor chuckled.

But the devotee of the safety-razor set to once more. He scraped too gently, so that he left the soap on, just lined over by the safety’s prongs. He tried grimly, with an air of ‘hair off or face off.’ The blade, on the stubble, buzzed and rang. He lathered again—and had to drop off at the next stop with soap on his chin! When they were under weigh again he got back to work.

‘Sit down on the stool,’ advised the conductor, and took up the little instrument with his big fingers. ‘I’ll harrow them off for you. All aboard!’

Down sat the brakesman, and the conductor pulled the safety down over the chin once, and peered at the result.

‘All right—once more,’ he said. ‘Practice does it. There, feel that, my son. There you are! Soft as velvet.’

Very gingerly, the brakesman felt the reddened but hairless ridge of his chin.

‘That’s some shave,’ said he.

‘Next please!’ sang out the conductor, highly

gratified. ‘I believe I could scalp your beard, mister.’

‘No, thank you,’ said Jim. ‘I think I want my beard.’

‘No scissors in your bundle? You whip it off, and I’ll finish you. There is time.’

‘No, thanks.’

On they rolled, over bridges, rumbling across high up, with creeks shouting far below, and night falling, until they came to railhead within three miles of Saint Anthony’s. There they clambered down in the dark, with the confusing rays of the conductor’s lantern held over them, beside the looming derrick of a steam-plough, picked out the bulk of some rough shacks, saw the glow-worm like sheen of one or two big tents, were dimly aware of figures here and there, smelt new-turned earth and creosote.

‘There is a stack of new railway ties somewhere near by the smell,’ said Jim.

‘All right!’ Olson chanted. ‘We’ll get used to the dark in a minute or two. How far is it to Saint Anthony’s?’ he inquired of an upright darkness with a little globe of light moving from half-way to its middle and up again.

'Just keep hitting it,' a voice replied. 'Better get a candle in the store—and an old tomato tin, or something to stick it in. The grade ain't cleared all the way.'

They followed this advice, and were soon 'hitting it' in the somewhat chill night with their feeble light, the pines stretching up on either hand, the shadows sweeping round. The smell was good and dry. They walked exhilarated and a trifle amused.

'A fire-fly would be about as useful as this,' remarked Olson. 'The night fairly puts it out. Let's do without it.'

He blew the candle out, and darkness entirely whelmed them as if a lid had closed down. They stood still waiting, and slowly but surely the sky lightened again, the contours of the hills showed themselves, trees stood out individually. They plucked their hats down over their eyes, a trick open-air men learn when caught out some dark night, and do not forget. That helped. Again they stepped on merrily along the grade.

'This is going some,' said Olson—and they were brought up abruptly next moment in an attitude like that assumed by a man when the chair he sits

on gives way. They had reached, for certain, the end of a banked part of grade. Here the candle was again required, and by its aid they fumbled down into woods where the axe-men had been at work.

‘I know where we are,’ Jim broke out. The wagon-road is just a little along here. I helped to make it.’

‘That’s right,’ replied Olson. ‘Watch your feet on this tangle of scrub.’

Down they went, little alarmed squeakings of mice, or such small fry, coming from all sides. Suddenly they ploughed on to the road.

‘Right wheel!’ Jim intoned. A few paces more and they saw the lights of Saint Anthony’s. The affair of the beard came thus nearer.

Jim did not tell Olson why he wanted it kept quiet that he was in town. He merely asked his partner not to mention it, to tell no one he was back.

‘What’s the game?’ asked Olson. ‘I knew you were hatching mischief out of that beard, the way you looked when the conductor wanted to shave you.’

'I'm going to begin a new life, that's all. I'm going to begin incognito.'

'Well, every one will know you,' Olson declared, 'and either be that ashamed they'll pretend they don't, or you'll be having a deputation to give you the price of a hair-cut on the face.'

'Know me! We'll see! Why, I don't know myself. I bet you they won't.'

'Don't you start gambling just because you've got a mine on the market.'

'I don't think my own mother would know me.'

'No more do I, Jim. I'm only joshing. I don't believe your best girl would know you from a baboon.'

The suggestion did not please Jim. Only Olson's chuckle over that saved him from being influenced by it, from deciding not to be seen of men till he had visited a barber. They went to the shack for the night, and while Olson swept the place out, Jim walked 'up town' to buy some supper at the snack café. In their absence Saint Anthony's had grown. There were many new houses, and it occurred to him again that perhaps all the old inhabitants might be gone! The waiter

who served him was, of course (in a place of such a floating population), a new one, but the proprietor was still the same. He gave Jim a cheery greeting and dashed his hopes.

‘Recognised—first pop!’ he thought.

But it was not so, though he made sure by the next remark that he was being joshed.

‘Just came in with the circus?’ the proprietor asked.

Jim was of the opinion that this man did not know him well enough for such genial familiarity. He stared. The response to his stare put him at ease.

‘Oh, I beg your pardon! I noticed you were a new face, and you are buying supper to carry away, same as——’

‘He doesn’t know me!’ opined Jim to himself, elated. ‘He takes me for a circus tent-packer. Gee, I must look tough!’

There was indeed a fierce circus of sorts in town, with cadaverous clowns and terrible dancers, and freaks, and giants, and dwarfs, to rake in the wages of the toilers. A bill of that fare was pinned on the wall behind the store-keeper—and that pleased

Jim. He passed into a grocer's, but there all the hands were new; there was no one on whom to test his beard. Yes, there was! The manager appeared abruptly—a man who had often sat with him in Morley's, a chatty individual too. The expression on his face when he said: 'Good night, sir,' was not one of recognition.

'Good night,' said Jim, passing out with his purchase.

Back at the shack he reported his success. Olson listened with only half interest.

'I clean forgot,' he interrupted, 'to tell you to get a tin of——'

'I got it,' said Jim. 'Got it without being told. The stores were open, so I went in for it. Same there. Not recognised!'

So again, after an interim, canned corn was eaten in Olson's shack. But this time each had his own plate; otherwise there was no difference. There was the old firry and dusty tang; there came faintly to them the sounds of Saint Anthony's life. The shack was lit by candles, gone out of shape in the rough cupboard during the recent heat. There they ate—and mused of all they had seen

since the day they locked up here, and Olson went out to Adam's Lake; sat silent, living over again the torture of the mosquitoes in the Norman Woods, the meeting in the lonely valley beyond Cust's Peak; heard again the frogs croaking in distant marshes, heard again Squire's voice uncannily calling through these far forests, once more tenantless.

‘Well,’ said Jim, ‘I suppose Squire is picked as clean as Penny Scot now.’

‘You bet you,’ replied Olson. ‘They’ve been in and out that doorway slinking and—say! it’s a lonesome place to remember.’

Jim nodded. Olson took out his ‘spacamints’ and looked at them in the candle-light. Then he handed them to his partner.

‘They’ll assay good or I’m a Dutchman,’ said he. ‘The wolves will hear the crushers crushing, and the stamps stamping up yonder yet.’

In the morning Jim said he supposed he’d better go back to Morley's.

‘You can stay on here if you like,’ said Olson, ‘only it makes me feel downright unsociable if I keep the bunk, and kind of put out of my own

home if I take the floor! Guess I'll have a bed at Morley's myself this time. I'm not dead broke yet—and don't you forget it if your exchequer gets low. The Penny Scot Mine is going to mean feather-beds for the prospectors as well as for the shareholders. We're selling for no bottle of rye and a cigar. I guess you'd better start up there first, so's you can't say I gave you away when they all shout: "Here's Jim Jefferies back again with a false beard on!"

Jim looked in the glass, still unshaken in his belief. So he went up the main street, and when he met men there who looked at him he paid no heed, let his eyes rove casually away from them. None saluted. He dropped in at a cigar store, more for another test-case than for tobacco; finding in it new hands, dropped in at another and thus had two stocks of tobacco. In the second shop was an old-time face—and as he walked unsmilingly in, and made known his desires in the weed way, there was no indication of recognition, only a cold and distant manner.

And then to Morley's.

He had read something of the kind in a story,

he believed. At any rate it was good enough for a book, this return—to see the old revolving door again, the window of the public sitting-room, the chairs in rows there, the new men sitting looking out at the street in the manner of the old ones who had sat there before, in various sprawled and angular attitudes, as if the window were a showcase in which they were on view, or a box at the theatre whence they could watch the play of life in First Avenue, Saint Anthony's. It was good to swing the door round—old familiar act!—to step inside and see the great stove (that would soon have to be lit, at any rate in the evenings, Indian summer near an end) with its chimney going up to the ceiling, even to see the tall brass spittoons! It was like coming home—although the place was but a hotel.

No one was in the vestibule, and boldly he walked to the desk, obeying the order on the card there to 'Punch the bell.' Then he tugged his hat over one eye. His heart was going pit-a-pat, almost the way it did when he was talking soothingly to the 'bug-house' Squire in the dismal midst of the Norman Woods with the last of the

day horribly departing. Morley came strolling out in answer to the summons.

'Good morning, sir,' he said.

'Good morning,' answered Jim. 'You the proprietor of this establishment?'

'I am,' said Morley. His eyes twinkled. 'The proprietor answers you in person.'

'Can I have a room?'

'I guess,' said Morley, and wandered behind the desk, consulted a book, unhooked a key from the wall. Then he spun the book round, murmured: 'Number six. Sign, please,' and handed Jim a pen. For a moment the young man was worried, but as he accepted the proffered pen a name came, and he wrote: 'P. Scot.'

'Is breakfast still on?' he asked next.

'I'll see,' answered Morley, and walked in his all-time-to-do-it manner round the counter again. 'Here's the dining-room.'

As he spoke Sadie appeared, and Jim stood staring at the floor, pulling and pulling at his chin-trimmings.

'Is breakfast still on, Miss Dixon?' Morley inquired.

‘Yes.’

‘Go right ahead, sir,’ said Morley—and Jim did as he was bid.

He was very much excited. He found that he was making little triumphant sounds to himself as he sat there. There were only two other men at breakfast, and they were immersed in private considerations or a newspaper as they ate. The approach of a magnificent waitress, rustling and powdered, drew him from his hilarity and caused him to take guard over himself. Remote though the waitress’s manner was, suggesting she was but to be doted on from afar, he inveigled her into talk, asking what sort of place Saint Anthony’s was. With head up, and oddly taut lips, as if afraid her face might crack, she inquired where he had come from.

‘Butte, Montana,’ said he, reading the name in the newspaper lying on the table’s edge. He had only signed ‘P. Scot’ in the visitors’ book, unable at the moment to invent a last place of residence.

He found this girl pleasant enough beneath her thick powder, decided that she was living up to some standard of beauty and deportment. Her

double is in thousands of dining-rooms, tripping mannequin-like from kitchen to table, tray poised on flat of back-turned hand, with a grace rivalling the ladies in the pictures one sees called : ' Assyrian Well.' She served the purpose of getting him accustomed to a white woman again.

After breakfast he went back to the desk to fill in, after his signature, the missing name of the place he had come from. No one was about. He spun the door before him, and went out to look for known faces and test his beard yet again—and by not so much as a lingering gaze did any of those he met suggest that they recognised him. He was back early for lunch at the hotel, and Sadie was then at the desk. He bowed, and asked in his deepest voice if lunch was on. How his eyes did long to dwell on the contours of her face, that had been in his heart all that terrible way! He thought she looked strained, a trifle drawn.

'Just opening in five minutes,' said she in a voice unlike her own.

'Thank you, ma'am,' said he and withdrew.

As he sat down to table Olson entered and stood in the doorway looking round leisurely, then took

a seat at the table next to his and, to Jim's horror, managed to get the conversation there on to safety razors, thence to shaving, thence to the theme of beards. Socrates might have relished the data then voiced for decision regarding the merits, and demerits, of razors—of beards. It was at last too much for Jim, for Olson had endeavoured to catch his eye. Later on he visited the shack in the hope of finding its owner at home, to tell him what he thought of him for trying to ‘bust’ his masquerade with laughter. But he wasn't there.

He went back to the hotel, but saw no Sadie. Either she was out at the stores or immersed in interior duties. Never once did he see her in vestibule or sitting-room. As he sat there Olson came in for one moment, only to say :—

‘It's registered—joint claim. Think of a name for her when she opens up. The Assay Office ain't open—I'm off to find where he is, out of town, on the drunk, or what! See you later.’

Not till supper did he get a glimpse of Sadie, and then he saw Olson too. The tables were crowded; Saint Anthony's was fuller than ever with the ‘opening up,’ and Jim, who had delayed going in

with the hope of catching Sadie outside, entered late. To his astonishment she was there, and came to his rescue as he looked for a place by tapping a vacant chair; and in the seat opposite was Olson. Jim had not seen him go in. He must have slipped past mighty furtively.

Olson took full advantage of their proximity, though not at first. He waited until Jim had come to the conclusion that there was, at this meal, to be no private 'joshing,' and that they were a reserved bunch at that table, each attending to the inner man and avoiding small-talk. Even when Olson commenced to chat to his neighbour, Jim had no notion of what was coming. But soon he realised that his partner had been looking at the day's entries in the visitors' book on some auspicious moment when he was out of sight, and had guessed who 'P. Scot' was. He worked the conversation off mines to smelting; and then it was but a step to Butte, Montana.

But this kid's play of grown men returned to town was soon to end. Supper over, Jim sat down in the public sitting-room in one of the ranged chairs in the window, and Olson followed, flung

himself down sighing in the next, produced a knife to prune a cigar.

‘Well,’ he said very quietly, ‘I’ve got the dough for working her—if we have to work her—but I think we can do better than that. A friend of mine tells me there’s a man coming to town in two or three days who is likely to be interested. How long has this incog. of yours to last? Are you still scared that if the boys know it’s you they’ll be luring you to cock-tails and seven-up, and similar devices?’

So that had been Olson’s explanation to himself of the foible of Jim’s beard!

‘No, sir!’ said Jefferies.

‘Then why in thunder so mysterious? I humoured your whim, seeing that as a possible reason for it. Seems it wasn’t! What in thunder!’

That settled Jim. He would get to business, to the carrying out, the living himself, of a great romance he had read.

‘I’ll see you later,’ he said.

‘I’m going right down to the shack. That reminds me—I must get coal-oil, or candles, or a

long lightning-flash, or a bottle of fire-flies, or a few hundred glow-worms, or something. I'm writing letters. Beard or no beard, your incog. quits when that company promoter hits town. Look in before you go to bed, or I'll think you've gone crazy.'

'All right, I will.'

'All right.'

Olson rose and swung off to his back-lot home. Jim strolled to the door and listened there. People passed him going out; others wandered into the sitting-room. He peeped into the dining-room, and saw that the waitresses were already clearing the tables, leaving only two fully arranged for possible late arrivals. Morley was having his supper in a far corner. No Sadie was to be seen there.

She was probably in the kitchen, issuing orders for the next day. Then something whisked him right round—not a sound, for he had heard nothing, merely a presence—and there she was going into the private sitting-room. He chucked his chest. He walked after her.

'Pardon me, miss,' he said, before she could

shut the door behind her. ‘Are you by any chance Miss Dixon?’

‘I am,’ she said, and her eyelids drooped.

‘Oh!’ said he. ‘Oh! Well, I have a message for you from a Mr. Jefferies. He has made good. He has struck it rich in the Little Norman country—he—er—he had no paper, not so much as a pencil. He told me to look you up when I came to Saint Anthony’s, to tell you he had struck it——’

Beads of perspiration were on his forehead. He found that ‘romance’ was not so easy to live. Sadie took a great breath, and—just as he had read—put her hand to her bosom. Then she sobbed.

Jim stared. Yes, she was sobbing! He put out a hand, then refrained. Was she laughing? She was laughing! Was she laughing at him? Was she laughing at his beard? Was she laughing at Jim Jefferies away up in the Norman country? She wasn’t laughing! She wasn’t sobbing! Or, to put it differently, she was doing both.

‘Why, Jim Jefferies!’ she gasped. ‘You go and shave your beard, and come back and talk to me.’

'How did you know?' he demanded.

'Everybody knows!' said she, with a badly-restrained giggle. 'It's the talk of Saint Anthony's. "Say, here's that Jim Jefferies hit town with a beard, and calling himself 'P. Scot' from Butte, Montana, and cutting us all dead. Say nothing. Wait and see his game.'"'

'Everybody knows!' he exclaimed.

'It's the talk of the town!' she exaggerated.

A voice sounded behind them: 'Excuse me. Mr. Scot, of Butte, Montana?'

Sadie gave another laugh, and Jim, turning, saw a kid standing there with a letter. He took it, tore it open, and read:—

'Dear Jim,

That mining man I told you about has hit town sooner than expected. I want you to come right along to the Assay Office and wait there for us. Him and me are in my friend's office just now.

Yours, Jack Olson.

P.S.—He's just had supper and is feeling good.'

'All right,' said Jim, 'there's no answer.' He

handed the note to Sadie. ‘Sounds hopeful,’ he said. ‘Olson isn’t the man to write like that if he hasn’t pretty nearly signed and settled. Miss Dixon—Sadie—if I make good on this, will you——’

‘Oh, Jim Jefferies! Don’t put it that way! I haven’t even asked what you’ve found!’

He took her hand, which she surrendered to him, and raised it to his lips—and then abruptly rushed off to be shaven.

Sadie stood looking after him with a face from which it seemed all expression had gone, and he —half-turning at the door—had a glimpse of her thus as he wheeled away. She haunted him all along First Avenue. People glanced a second time at him, because of the expression of his face, not easy to define, but the expression of a man who had just found something—or lost something; of a man who had made a million in an hour, or had just been jilted—or accepted, an intense expression. Those one or two passers-by who noticed, looked again, curious, surmised him ‘up against it’ anyhow.

And he was.

P.S.T.

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Sadie Dixon's face was still before him. That dear little face of hers had changed between the lifting of her hand to his lips and the lowering of it, and he was in doubt regarding the meaning of that change. It kept him fretting. He would not have said that he had 'gone too far.' That was not the phrase for his dread, because where he had to go with her was all for good. 'Gone too far' is for dalliance. Literally he did not know where he was. He had passed the barber's, and turned back amazed at his own behaviour. He had never before started out, sober, to some place, and forgotten whither he was bound. In the barber's chair he even forgot that his next place of call was at that green-glazed office along the street where Olson awaited him with, perhaps, a fortune. Of what use was a fortune now if Sadie Dixon was offended with him, if the matter beyond friendliness had all been on his side and he had, by his action, lost her even as a friend? Should he go back and ask her—'right now'—if he had offended her? What should he do?

Shaven like a cherub, he now found himself in the street again. Yes, there was no doubt

of it—this heart-trouble of his was the most sincere occurrence in his life. As he posted along to the Assay Office he clung to a fragment of hope that Sadie would still, at least, be friendly toward him, pardon him. How could he expect her to be more than a friend? He should be highly content that she had so much as been interested in him instead of disgusted on that occasion (how far-off it seemed) when he appeared before her in, to put it at the kindest, an excited condition. It was fortunate for him, he considered, striding on and seeing no one, that she had not thought him an unctuous prig for resenting Squire's stare at her. Queer how that man and he had jarred one another from the word 'go.' He wondered if, in those old days, Squire had detected a likeness to Penny Scot in Penny Scot's nephew. Perhaps that would account for the hint of puzzlement that always lurked behind the hostility in Squire's eyes when they met.

Then again all his thought was Sadie. He felt a great unselfish longing to be always with her. He did not fit words to his thoughts; they just shuttled about in his brain, unvoiced—but if one

would translate them it might be said that to be her paladin was his desire. He found himself at the Assay Office door, and marvelled how he had come there without being either run into by a rig, or jostled by passers-by. From Morley's to the barber's, from the barber's to the Assay Office, had been a period of thought, it seemed, rather than of locomotion.

He pushed open the door, and no one was within save a boy, in white shirt and starched collar, behind the counter.

'I was to meet Mr. Olson here,' said Jim, focusing his gaze back to the reality.

'Mr. Jefferies?' asked the youth.

'Yes.'

'Come ahead this way.' He opened a hinged end to the counter, swept back a door, and stood aside.

There sat the Assay man and Olson, and another who was not a bit like Jim's notion of a company promoter—for he was not big and heavy, of the stolid four-square type. He was a little, lean, springy man with black hair and bright, bird-like eyes. He was shrewd as an augur. He was a

razor-edge sort of person. His *metier* was not that of being unfathomable.

Olson made the introductions, and Jim bowed, surveying Leonard J. Smythe, prospective buyer of their Eureka, their Ophir. Smythe did not sit up placid, and rub his face, and pucker his eyes, and say he wasn't really intending to consider mines this trip. Instead he congratulated them upon their discovery, flicking his eyes from one to the other. One almost expected him to crack like a whip as he turned around. He told them that their fortunes were made—which they knew. Then he laughed, and added that he was out to make his too. He told them, which they also knew, that they had hit no 'poor-man drift' to be worked with a long-handled shovel. He told them that it was a long way back, that smelting was expensive, and that freighting was a fright. All this he snapped out, jerking his head back and forth from Olson to Jim, from Jim to Olson, now and then taking in the Assay man, old Reynolds, who having brought these three together would be content with a small acknowledgment anon, if business was done.

All these things that this man said the other type of financier would have said too. They were inevitable—especially the bit about expensive smelting and freighting being 'a fright.' But the other type would not have remarked, in quite the manner that this one did: 'All the same, boys, I want to get first refusal of your Golconda,' or, if he had, they would have wondered what was behind such an admission of its value.

'It is a question of terms,' he brought out sharply, and glittered amicably at them. He came from roll-top desks and telephone bells, but he admired these men. On his brief rushes into the wilderness he was wont, for a moment or two at times, to wish he had been a cow-puncher, or a lumber-jack. But he could never have 'stuck it' for long. Snowed up some winter, blizzard-bound in a cabin twelve by twelve, he would have gone jumping crazy from lack of exciting 'interests' to juggle with.

When they did come to the question of terms the partners felt that he was not trying to rush them, felt that he was merely being his own alert, quick-moving self. The partners did not adopt that

common device of doubling the amount they hoped for, in preparation for a depreciation. They all put their heads together instead, discussing the proposition in a way that made admiration mutual. When the interview was over, with a promise to dine next day together, each side carried away very definite impression of the other. The little financier, with his dark eyes bright, whisked off to his hotel pondering, as well as his banking-account, two sun-tanned men, one lithe and lean, with a tendency to distant gaze and quick alternation from abstraction to keen concentration; the other large, powerful, square-fisted, with an air of being perfectly balanced, never at a loss.

'Gee, what men to be with up against a battle or a storm!' he exclaimed.

And Jim and Olson, strolling along First Avenue, looked before them meditatively, Olson smiling slightly.

'Some little man!' he observed presently. 'Some little man! I guess what he lacks in physique he could damn nearly make up for in sheer stay-with-it nerves and head. Guess he'd find a way out of a difficulty somehow.'

At the door of Morley's Hotel they halted.

'I'm going down for a sleep,' said Olson.

'A sleep?'

'Yep. I can't tell you how that there little pow-wow has eaten up my energy. I maybe don't look it, but I'm *all in* more than if I had been snow-shoeing all day the first fall of snow. I'd like to go to sleep till the thing is settled final, on or off, with that gee-whiz, jumping-jack of a man. He surely takes the stuffing out of me.'

'Don't you like him?' asked Jim, as much in ejaculation as inquiry.

'You bet you! But he's as dexterous as a June bug or a herd of grasshoppers. Watching him, and seeing his brain jump—and trying to act calm, as though I don't care a whole lot whether I sell or not—well, it kind of soporifics me, son.'

So Jim, of course, left alone for a spell, went back to decide for his distraught mind what that parting look of Sadie's meant.

The hotel was tenantless, all the guests being out and about. Only Morley sat behind the desk reading the week-old *Calgary Eye-Opener* that he had filched from his wife. He sat on tilted chair,

heels on counter-edge, cigar to one side, eyes puckering in the smoke as he grunted over the snappy pages. He glanced up as Jim entered.

‘Why,’ he said, ‘Mr. Scot, of Butte, Montana, I did not recognise you at first with your beard off!’ He began to laugh, deep in his chest. Then Sadie appeared. ‘What do you think of him, Miss Dixon?’ he asked, and Jim was glad that he spoke, for it relieved the tension of the moment. ‘Why, man, everybody recognised you!’

‘Oh, I don’t know,’ said Jim. ‘Maybe somebody did, and put the rest up to it.’

‘Don’t you believe it,’ chuckled Morley. ‘We didn’t need any posting! You now, Miss Dixon, you did not need to be told, did you?’

‘I think I should have recognised him even if I hadn’t heard,’ said she.

Jim looked at her, wishing that she would speak to him, but it was to Morley she addressed herself.

‘I’m just going down to the post,’ she added, ending their little chatter abruptly.

‘Good!’ replied Morley, but as he brought his chair down, and his heels down, rose, and shuffled

off, the scene was clear for Jim to act. Morley disappeared into an inner room while Sadie crossed the rotunda. Half-way across, however, she delayed, maybe to button her glove, or at some loss whether to nod to Jefferies before departing, or—at anyrate she paused, and Jim strode forward—to open the door for her. But he did not open it. He stood still, and so did she.

‘Do you——’ he began.

She looked up into his face. Any woman could have read his eyes. She put her gloved finger-tips on his shoulder.

‘I’ve thought of you all the time,’ she assured him.

He drew a deep breath.

‘And if we pull off this sale,’ he went on, hardly daring to touch her, just lightly holding her elbow, ‘if we make good on this prospect on the Little Norman, will you——’

‘Why, Jim Jefferies,’ she cried, with a delicious little laugh, ‘you’ve not the right view of it. I’d have you if there was no such place as the Little Norman river, no such thing as a bank, no such thing as money!’

‘But there is,’ said he, looking like a big serious child. ‘That’s just the trouble. There is such a thing as money!’

Sadie brought her hand down from his shoulder and slipped it into his.

‘Jim,’ she whispered, ‘you’re incorrigible. No—you mustn’t! Not here! Some one might see!’

‘I’ll never be good enough for you,’ he said, ‘but I’ll surely always try.’

And after that love-scene, with regard to filthy lucre it is enough to say that Smythe bought—for a fabulous sum, a sum that is still the talk, and the ambition to rival, of every prospector along that great range of buried fortunes—the Rocky Mountains.

Olson invested his share instead of spending so much as a cent in looking for oil. Others could do that. He settled down to a happy bachelorhood, with rifles and fishing tackle and the best tobacco; and the first time he went hunting up in the Cartaret country he took a blue quill pen from a stationery store for John Wood Buffalo, who prized it so much that he never wore it (not even in the historic parade before the Duke of Connaught

in which he took part), but kept it wrapped up in a bag; and to Laughing Earth he took a whole crate of canned corn, as well as a beautiful bandana handkerchief, and a pair of high-heeled 'white woman' shoes, perhaps for her to amuse the band with, skitting the walk and bearing of white women seen when they visited towns—for to be sure she could never wear them.

Jim Jefferies, of course, married Sadie Dixon. They never did any more work. Sadie 'quit' managing for Morley, and would have been spoilt by her husband had she not been the unspoilable girl she was. She just did enough about the house not to feel lazy. Jim never again hauled survey chains, or swung an axe. They even hired a man to split the cord-wood.

And all lived happy ever after.

