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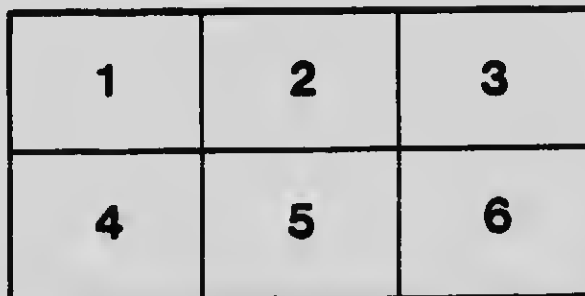
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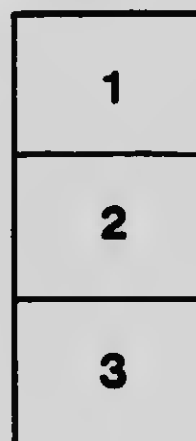
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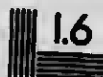
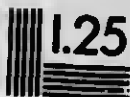
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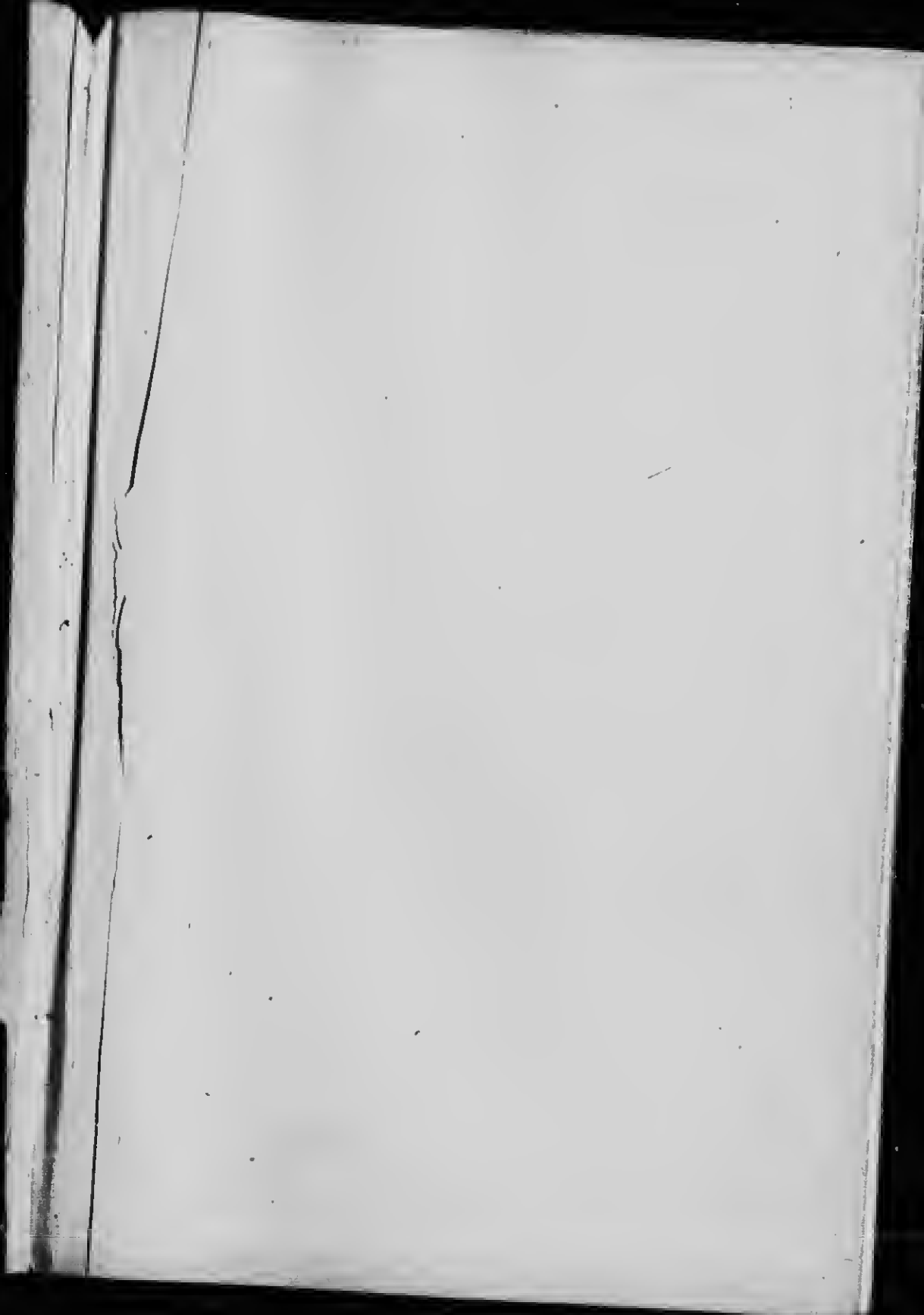
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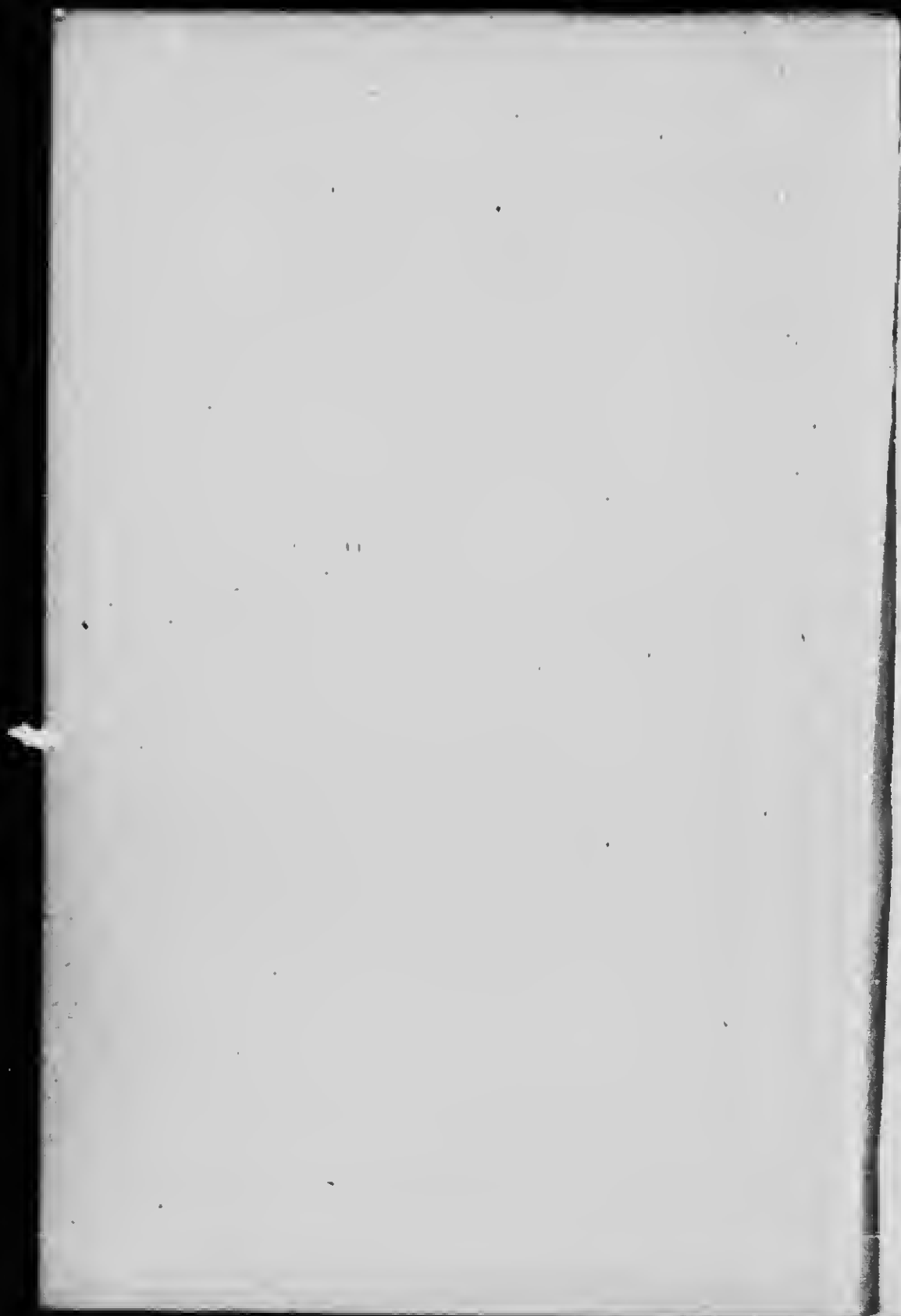
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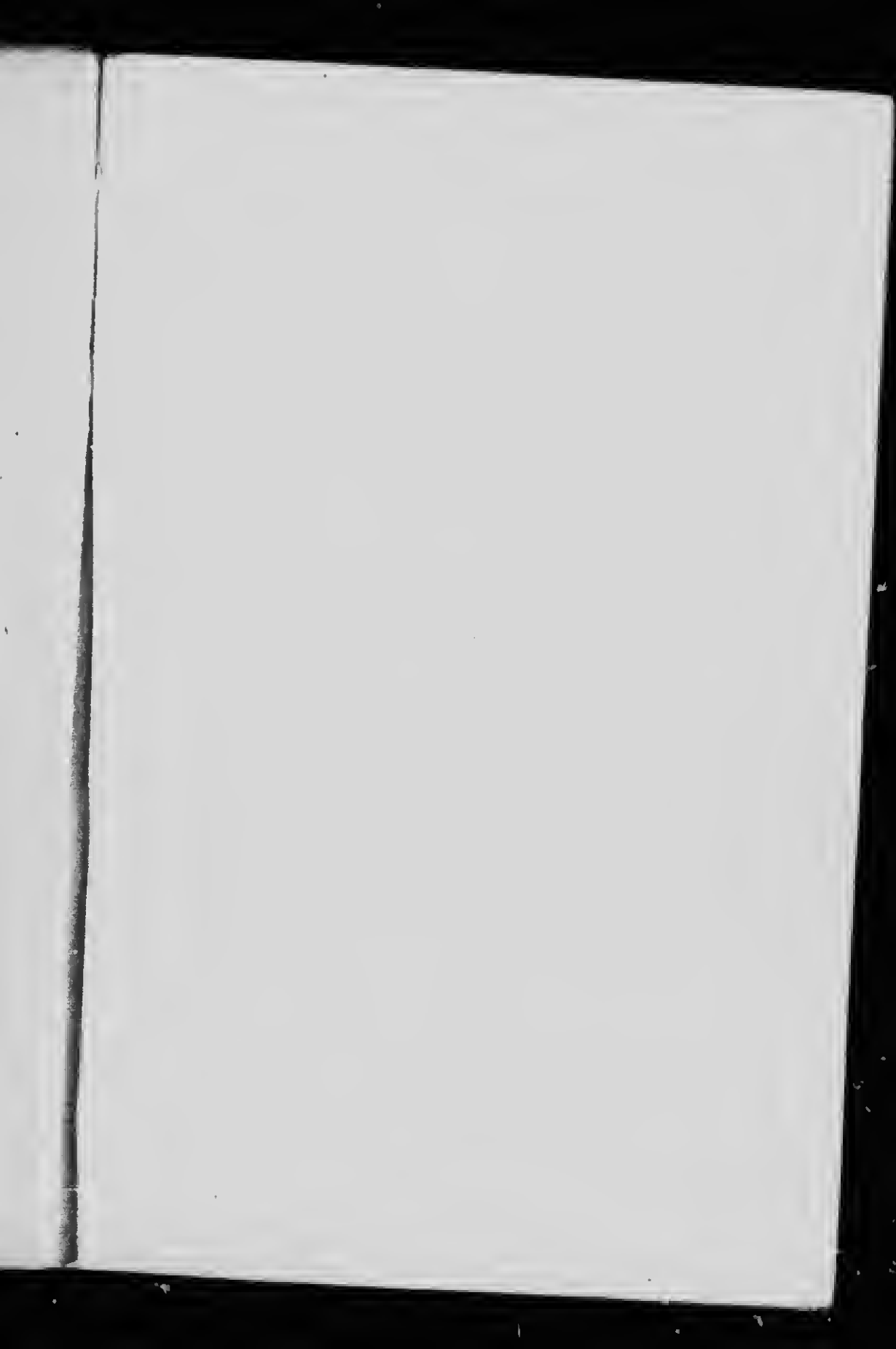


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"I struck the revolver upward."



# The Camerons of Bruce

BY

ROBERT LORNE RICHARDSON

Author of "Cala of the North Coast," etc.

With Illustrations by George E. Milroy



TORONTO  
WILLIAM BRIGGS  
1906



took the revolver upward."

# The Camerons of Bruce

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BY

**ROBERT LORNE RICHARDSON**

*Author of "Colin of the Ninth Concession," etc.*

*With illustrations by George E. McElroy*



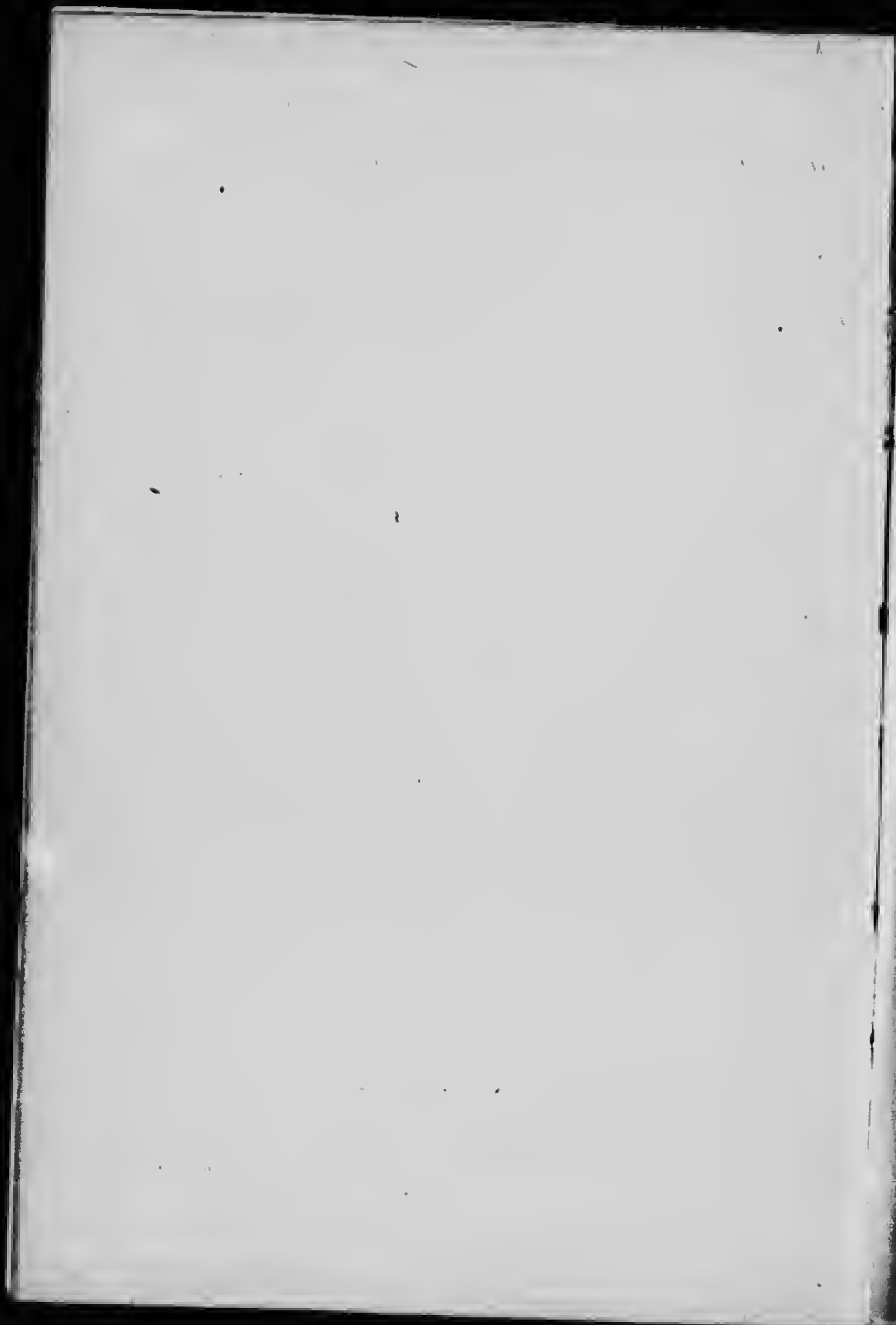
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TO THE  
STURDY SONS OF BRUCE,  
WHO, AFTER DEVELOPING THEIR OWN COUNTY,  
ASSISTED SO MATERIALLY IN THE MAKING  
OF THE NORTH-WEST.



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# THE CAMERONS OF BRUCE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### *MYSELF.*

It was during one of those Sunday rambles over the old farmstead—those rambles so redolent of fragrant memories to every boy of farm rearing—that Simon first mentioned an important duty that fate had reserved for me. I was but twelve years old at the time, but I can recall the earnestness of my guardian's dark grey eyes and the tremulous fervor of his voice as he placed his hands upon my shoulders, and, gazing steadfastly into my face as if he would read my soul, said: "Lachlan, my man" (he always called me Lachlan when he was very serious; he and everybody else called me "Lachy" on other occasions)—"Lachlan, my man, I'm proud to observe that ye give promise of becoming a braw, strapping man; and faith, lad, ye'll need to be, for ye have a mission to accomplish when ye're growed up that'll mayhap tax yer powers and yer strength beyond the usual demands. Nature and justice alike require that ye shall act when the time comes, to say nothing of yer faither's dying injunction."

I think Simon felt that he had spoken prematurely and regretted it, for he threw his right arm about my shoulder, and patting it kindly, said: "Come, Lachy, lad, let's awa' o'er the meadow to the Falkland Woods, an' see if we canna find some sport for the doggie," who was barking so impatiently. "Dinna ye mind, laddie, what I have just said to ye. I shouldna have spoken it to a bit bairn sic as ye are. The task will come soon enough, soon enough, lad, an' I'll aye content myself gin ye grow up braw and fit and determined tae right a' wrangs."

During the years that intervened until I actually set forth upon my mission Simon's words were ever present with me. They burned themselves into my mind. Never again till I reached my twenty-first birthday did my guardian refer to the subject. I spent the nine intervening years at school and attending college in Toronto. At the latter institution I applied myself with considerable zeal and not without some results, for I was the silver medallist in my graduating year. I was orphaned at so tender an age that I was obliged, when I tried, as I so often did, to call up the image of my mother, to have recourse to a little miniature that I found suspended about my neck when I reached my fifth birthday. None but those who have felt the want of a mother can ever estimate the loss, especially during the years of childhood.

Without father or mother, I had to rely entirely upon Simon. He was the only parent I ever knew. It was in Simon's arms that I slept; it was from

Simon's hands that I received my food in childhood; it was Simon who nursed me and laved my burning temples when I was fevered; it was Simon who stretched out his reassuring hand when, agitated by nightmare, I cried out in the darkness; it was Simon who taught me to pray; it was Simon who instilled reverence into my being; it was Simon who wrestled patiently with me for months until I had memorized every psalm and paraphrase in the Bible.

"You see, laddie," he would say, when teaching me the psalms, or some verses or great thoughts which he would discover in books, "it's a braw thing to store yer mind wi' beautiful thoughts and sentiments. It will be a constant well-spring to ye in after life. I weel know yer mither would have done it wi' ye, lad, and it will help ye to be more like her and to ken her better."

Little wonder, then, that I loved Simon and that I gave to him much of the affection and confidence that would have gone to my parents had they been living.

## CHAPTER II.

### *SIMON LIFTS THE CURTAIN.*

It was the afternoon following my return from college that Simon said to me, "Lachy, my man, put on your stout boots and let's awa' to the woods. I have something to say to ye."

I was a great strong youth, yet my hands trembled and my heart thumped almost audibly as I pulled on my rough boots and prepared to accompany him. I felt that an important crisis in my life was at hand. While I had often longed, after Simon's first communication, to know the secret that was in his heart, now that the curtain was about to be lifted I felt myself instinctively recoiling and I would fain have postponed the communication. But Simon seemed impatient to speak. As we strolled over the fields towards the Falkland Woods, Simon appeared to be absorbed in deep thought. He walked so swiftly that I had to exert myself to keep pace with him. When we reached the woods, he said, pointing to a great stone: "Sit ye there, lad, while I tell ye the story that I have carried these many years, against the day when ye had reached the age agreed upon wi' your faither. It was on that self-same stane that your faither the day before he died bade me sit,

while he told me the story that I am about to communicate to you, and extracted from me a promise that I would bring ye up and when the appointed time arrived, repeat the story to ye, so that ye might right the wrangs done to you and to your house. The hand of death was heavy upon your faither as he leaned wearily against this very tree and talked to me.

“ ‘Simon Thompson,’ he said, ‘you are a just man. You have lived long in this settlement, and as the school-teacher of several generations there are few family histories with which you are not familiar. I am, however, about to confide to you some facts pertaining to myself and my house which you do not know and which I shall ask you to guard safely until my son Lachlan reaches his twenty-first birthday, at which time, if you still survive, I enjoin upon you the duty of communicating the same to him. If you are like to die before then you are to find a reliable substitute to carry out my will. As you see, Simon, the hand of death is upon me; I have but a short time—perhaps but a few hours—to live, and I have brought you here so that we may be entirely alone.’

“I promised your faither, Lachlan, that I would execute his wish. Then he proceeded: ‘My father, Colonel Cameron, as you know, was active in the suppression of the invasion of Upper Canada, which culminated in the death of General Brock at Queenston Heights. With his military training received in the Old Land, his services in the colony were regarded as most valuable. As you know, he was

severely wounded at the Heights, but he recovered. After peace was restored his services to the Crown were recognized by a large grant of land in this county.

““ There were two boys, my brother Casper and myself, I being his senior in age by less than two years. Mother had passed away while we were children, and our up-bringing was largely confided to a worthy aunt who kept house for us. Of course, father was all to us that a man of his military tastes and training could be. About the period that we boys were developing into manhood, an Episcopalian clergyman, with his family, was stationed in our settlement. He had a beautiful daughter, to whom I became so warmly attached that we were betrothed within six months of our meeting. At this stage my brother Casper, who had been absent for a period, returned, and he, too, became enamored of my *fiancée*. Casper was a great powerful, masterful youth, qualities which developed in strength as he grew older. I do not think that Esther preferred him to me, but he was so determined and impetuous, while she, poor girl, seemed almost powerless to resist, that matters had reached an awkward crisis before I realized the situation. I was proud and super-sensitive, and in my condition was unable to think or act rationally. I wrote to Esther, upbraiding her, I can now see, in terms infinitely too hard, and calculated to wound her finer feminine feelings. But I think even this folly upon my part would not have proved fatal but for a reason which must be told in its proper chrono-



logical sequence. Well, Casper triumphed, and was wedded to Esther. Sadly wounded, and with a feeling of deep resentment against my brother—and, indeed, against the whole world, for that matter—I took a journey to Scotland to visit my parents' relatives. I did not return for two years, and even then the wound was not healed. But if I suffered while abroad, I was doomed to pass through a trying ordeal on my return. Esther was dying, and sent for me. Casper, whose fancied affection soon cooled, had grown tired of her, and neglected her for the comradeship of boon companions whom he found at a neighboring tavern. She developed lung trouble and, broken-hearted, returned to her father's house. She implored my forgiveness and was about to make an important communication when she was seized with a paroxysm of coughing that left her too weak to speak. Before another interview could be arranged Esther passed away.

“I was too much broken in spirit to even upbraid Casper, whom I seldom saw, for his conduct towards Esther, and besides I had a great aversion to family wrangles. Time softened my grief, and when, three years later, I met Miss MacDonald, under the circumstances which you, Simon, remember, my resolution to go through life single was shaken and I married.”

I could see by the light that shone in Simon's eyes, as he paused and allowed his memory to carry him back into the past, that there was something interesting or romantic concerning the nuptials of my

father and mother. I was strongly moved to question Simon right there, but restrained myself, secretly promising to recur to the subject at some future time. After Simon's brief meditation had passed, he resumed the narrative in my father's words: "A few weeks after our marriage a heavy blow fell upon our house. My father, Colonel Cameron, while returning from his legislative duties, met with an accident, from which he shortly afterwards died. During the last hours—and he only lived ten days after the accident—he frequently discussed with me the disposition that he had made of the estate, which was becoming immensely valuable as the civilizing operation of the axe and plough, wielded very largely by sturdy Scotch settlers, progressed. He told me that he had left some valuable mill properties and some Toronto holdings to Casper, but that he had bequeathed the homestead, including the extensive tract of land that he had received from the Government, to me. Although he did not explicitly mention it—no doubt deeming it superfluous—I took it for granted that the will was in the possession of Solomon Pinch, the village attorney, who had always acted as my father's legal adviser, and whom I knew to have been closeted with him several times after the accident.

"About this time my son was born. We called him Lachlan, after his grandfather. He was a goodly child, Simon,' and I can recall now how the fading light in your father's eyes rekindled with pride as he thought of you. 'The doctor told me that it was im-

## SIMON LIFTS THE CURTAIN.

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possible to save both mother and child. I pleaded for the mother's life. Either the doctor delayed too long, or fate, which had been dealing so many hard blows at our family, was inexorable, for the mother's life was snuffed out while the child lived.

"Once the hand of fate is against you it seems to be relentless, and apparently works overtime to discover what fresh disaster it can conjure up with which to overwhelm you. Two weeks after my wife's death I received a legal notice to vacate the homestead, as it was the property of my brother, Casper. I hastened to the office of Solomon Pinch, where I felt confident I would secure my father's will and vindicate my title. I was utterly confounded and quite overcome when the lawyer coolly informed me that I had no right whatever to my father's estate, that it had been bequeathed to Casper. When I demanded to see the will, Solomon produced one that seemed quite authentic in every particular and which undoubtedly bore the signature of my father. I was fairly broken; the successive shocks to which my system had been so frequently subjected in recent months were too much for me, and I broke down utterly. Complications ensued and I find myself at the present hour with but a brief period of life remaining to me.

"Simon," said your father, while a strange light as if from some other world seemed to play about his face, 'I am not a bad man. I think I could forgive Casper for the great injury he has done to me, first in robbing me of Esther, and now in robbing me of

my father's estate, because I know the bogus will is his work, but I cannot die and feel that my son is to be disinherited. Casper and I were never much to each other in boyhood; there was nothing in common betwixt us. Intuitively he repelled me. Scores of times did I reproach myself for lack of brotherly affection and sentiment towards him, but he never appealed to me as a brother. Harsh as the term may seem, he is a monster, and it shall be the duty of my son Lachlan to pursue him, and to wrest justice from his hands. I am not superstitious, Simon, but it has been revealed to me that Lachlan—my son Lachlan, now in childhood—will force justice from Casper and compel him to make restitution.

“My story is told, Simon, but I have one favor to ask you. You must take the child Lachlan to your home, and rear him by your own hand and at your own hearthstone. You are the only man in the county of Bruce whom I know sufficiently well to entrust with a mission so dear to my heart. The estate which I leave, although small, will be sufficient to repay you for any outlay; God alone will reward you for the service to me and my son. Bring the child up as a lad with a mission in life should be brought up. See that he be not puny or effeminate. Make a braw man of him, and let him not forget the traditions of the stock from which he sprang.’

“The excitement and enthusiasm that your father displayed while speaking brought on a paroxysm of coughing, and it was some time before he recovered sufficiently to proceed. When he did so he was pale and

spent. He left his place by this tree and, staggering over to where I sat on the stone you now occupy, he placed his right hand on my head, as I now place mine on yours, Lachlan, and said, 'Simon, you have heard me out. Promise me that you will faithfully perform this earnest request of a dying man. Promise me, further, that when my child reaches the age of twenty-one years you will bring him to this very spot and repeat my words to him. Do you promise?'

"I freely gave him the pledge he asked," said Simon. "For a time your father seemed lost in contemplation. His eyes were fixed on the distant hills. His face wore a strange calm; doubtless he was thinking of the other world which he was soon to enter. His lips moved unconsciously and automatically, and I caught three names—they were 'Esther,' 'Faither,' and 'Lachlan.' He did not know that he spoke them. To break in upon his reverie would be sacrilege, so I remained silent upon the stone, while your father was lost in a world which, after all, did not seem so far removed from this one. Presently I noticed his eyelids quiver, and slowly he came back to earth and to the scene in which he was a figure. His manner seemed altered; all the fire was gone. A great wave of sadness seemed for the moment to sweep over his being, and he said, in a hollow voice, 'Simon, if my boy—if Lachlan—should fail us, we are undone.' His voice faltered, and his still broad and once powerful frame shook with suppressed emotion.

"'Lachlan will not fail us,' I said, firmly.

"'Thank you, Simon, for those words,' said your

father, exultantly striding back to my side and grasping my hands. 'Thank you and thank God for those words. I know they are true,' and tears of joy stood in his great hungry, hollow eyes.

"And now, Lachlan," said Simon, coming back to my side, where I still sat upon the stone, "I have nothing further to tell ye about your father. You know the circumstances of his death and all that. I have tried to recall as vividly as possible the scene enacted here nearly twenty years ago. My duty ends by asking ye if ye are ready to carry out the injunction laid upon ye by your father through me."

Such a recital and such a scene could hardly fail to move the most phlegmatic. Imagine, therefore, the sentiments of the son to whom they were addressed. If the request had been to throw myself into a boiling cauldron I think I would scarcely have hesitated. It was not necessary for Simon to go through the form of asking if I accepted the mission. Was it not for that that I had been born—nay, that I had lived and that I was to live? Had not the thought been ever present with me? Reverently I raised my right hand toward heaven, and swore the oath of the Camerons to be faithful to my father's memory, and to the injunction that had been laid upon me, and would God deal with me according to the fortitude and fidelity displayed in executing that will.

Simon was satisfied.

## CHAPTER III.

### *MAKING READY.*

DARKNESS had gathered in upon us, and the Falkland Woods looked gloomy and forbidding as Simon and I emerged from the small clearance where that impressive interview had been held. We walked together in silence over the fields until we saw the light glimmer in the window of Simon's humble cottage. I was the first to speak. "Where has he gone, what has become of him?" I asked.

"I think the death of your father, universally believed to be due directly to the disinheritance, which the neighbors suspected to be the work of Casper, was too much for him, hardened even as he had become, and he left the country suddenly. I think Solomon Pinch was the only man who kened his destination. He left with Solomon a power of attorney to deal with the estate, saying he would not return for twenty years, if indeed he ever came back. This information I procured from an old Scottish clerk who was for a time employed by Pinch. This man told me he had seen several letters from Casper to Pinch, the envelopes of which bore the postmark, "Fort Garry, N.W.T.," although the letter paper carried the legend, "Moose Lodge, Saskatchewan."

"It is strange that no supplementary tidings of him were received, as so many of our Bruce people went to the distant North-West," I observed.

"There have been abundant reports about your uncle, many of which I think were more or less exaggerated, though some of them were undoubtedly perfectly accurate.

"And their nature?" I inquired.

"It seems that Casper established himself in company with a band of Indians many leagues beyond Fort Garry, that he took one of the Indian women of the tribe to live with him, after the custom of the early fur traders. The latter act procured for him the confidence of the tribe, by whom he is held in awe, and whose counsels he dictates. Casper has built for himself a picturesque log house, which he calls "Moose Lodge," and in which it is said he holds high carnival, especially when the supply of liquor reaches the nearest Hudson's Bay trading-post."

"Then he is beyond the pale of civilization?"

"Apparently, and for a purpose," replied Simon. "It is said of him that he has become almost as savage as the heathen with whom he associates. It just proves to us that as a man thinketh and acteth so he becomes and so is he."

"How long would it take to reach Moose Lodge?"

"Then ye mean to go?"

"Certainly."

"But not alone?"

"How else?"

"It may mean death to ye."



"That is not unlikely, but I shall have to take the risk."

"Casper is a desperate man."

"Yes."

"And would not hesitate to kill ye."

"I believe that."

"And yet—"

"I must go. Have I not promised? Are not the honor of my house and my own honor at stake?"

"Yes, I know; but I was wondering if there was no other way," said Simon, reflectively, and hesitatingly.

"I always knew, Lachlan, that ye would do your duty, no matter what the cost, but somehow I viewed the matter as a distant contingency."

"And?"

"And now the duty confronts us, and—and—there seems no escape," added Simon, in a regretful tone.

"But you surely would not have any escape, would you, Simon? The duty lies plain before me, and not a day must be lost. Was it not for this that I was born, that I was bred and trained? And to lose an hour would be a reflection on the memory of my father as well as upon myself. Can you start with me for Toronto in the morning?"

"Start for Toronto!" repeated the astonished Simon.

"Why, man, for why should we visit Toronto?"

"You said that the old clerk who saw Casper's letters to Pinch had gone there?"

"Yes, but that was many years ago, and he may be dead for aught we know."

"True, but he may chance to be alive and able to

impart valuable information. Do you recall his name?"

"Yes, Sanders Sylvester."

"Were there any peculiarities about him? Did he possess habits by which he could be traced?"

Simon looked at me uneasily, as if he feared that my question indicated that I was becoming uncanny.

"Yes," he said, after reflection; "he was an inveterate user of snuff; he was inclined to stutter when excited, and he had a rupture that caused him much trouble. It was because of my advice that he should consult a doctor that he went to Toronto. But what possible connection can there be between Sander's rupture, and the impediment in his speech, and his present whereabouts?"

"Perhaps we shall see," I replied; "will you be ready for the road in the morning?"

Simon gave his reluctant consent. We had approached the door of the cottage, from which the ancient housekeeper was peering eagerly into the darkness in quest of us.

"I'm not going in just now, Simon," I said. "My mind is in too great turmoil to allow my body rest to-night. Don't mind me,—take your supper. I am going to take a turn about the concessions, but shall return all right, so do not be uneasy." I bade him a hurried good-night and strode on up the road.

I realized that for me there was action, adventure and undoubtedly danger ahead, but I was eager to go forth. My mind was in a whirl of excitement and I walked long into the night. I continued my walk

as far as the village. By and by the moon—a waning moon between a third and a quarter—rose over the Falkland Woods, and aided by the light which it shed, I found my way to the little churchyard, where I spent an hour with bowed head beside the tombstone that marked the resting place of my father, my mother and my grandfather. Their names were all carved upon the single modest granite shaft that lifted its pointed top higher than the surrounding stones. The action of the frost had caused the shaft to lean slightly to the east, but the names were still decipherable.

The sun was creeping over the hills when I returned to the cottage. The old dame was busy preparing the porridge, while Simon was bustling about the yard and every moment gazing anxiously down the line, no doubt in quest of myself.

“Why, man, ye’ve been out all night and look haggard and exhausted,” said Simon, coming toward me and placing his two hands upon my shoulders, while he gazed earnestly into my eyes, as was his frequent practice.

“Yes, but I’m none the worse,” I replied. “I was just visiting the old places that I do not expect to see again for some time and that mayhap I’ve looked upon for the last time; and now if you’ll let me have a bit wash, I’ll be ready for my porridge in a few minutes, and then we’ll take the road.”

Simon quietly acquiesced. We breakfasted in silence, and then the good man, as had been his life-long custom, reached for the Book. I suspected from the

selections he read that he had been thinking about me, but when he knelt to pour out his soul (prayer with Simon was more than I ever felt it to be with anyone else) I knew that he understood that when I left that morning I would not return until my mission was accomplished. The simple, trustful eloquence with which he commended me to Divine guidance and protection sank deep into my soul. Prayer never seemed such a reality to me before, and time after time in the coming months, as I emerged from grave danger and escaped the deadly attempts against my life, I was fain to ascribe it all to the virtue of that morning prayer of Simon's. After that prayer I never could shake from my mind the responsibility that rested upon me of having a man like Simon pray for me.

It did not take me long to gather together the few necessaries that I had made up my mind to take. These I packed in a small, old-fashioned bag, and then I was ready. Simon was ready before me. Together we walked the three miles to the village. There we caught the stage for Toronto, where we were landed some time during the succeeding night. We found a tavern on York Street and after much negotiation with a drowsy porter, whose breath, mingling with that peculiar odor ever present in the old-fashioned taverns of former generations, almost gave our stomachs a turn, we finally found ourselves in bed.

## CHAPTER IV.

### *SEARCHING FOR SANDERS.*

THE vigorous ringing of a great bell awakened us and it took but a few minutes to dress and breakfast.

"And now, Lachy," said Simon, as we emerged from the tavern door, "what possible plan have ye formed to find Sanders?"

My residence in Toronto while I attended college made me quite familiar with the streets and localities, and this was an advantage. I had expended some thought upon the best means of locating Sanders, and I told Simon my views. "We have several means of locating him, and we must just begin with the utmost patience and exhaust one plan after the other. It is highly probable that Sanders' first move when he reached the city would be to consult a physician about his hernia, so that we will begin with that clue and exhaust it before proceeding with any other."

So we procured a list of the doctors and set to work, Simon taking all the territory north of King Street, while I undertook to canvass that portion of the town lying to the south of that thoroughfare. Simon was sitting dejectedly in front of our tavern waiting for me when I returned at seven in the evening. I was tired and footsore, for I had tramped many, many miles.

"Well, Lachlan, have ye met with any success?" he asked.

"No, Simon, my quest has been fruitless," I replied. "How about yourself?"

"I did not find a single physician in my territory that had ever treated a rupture. Most of the doctors I found were young men, and not a few of them eyed me suspiciously and had me carefully attended to the door, lest peradventure I might appropriate some valuable while departing. So far as I could learn, all the old doctors are dead."

Weariness compelled sleep that night, and we awoke the next morning agreeably refreshed.

"What is the plan to-day, Lachy, lad?" asked Simon, with just a perceptible shade of irony in his tone.

"I think we might try if we cannot get upon the scent of Sanders through the medium of his snuff-box," I replied. "We shall adopt the same division of the city and call at every store and apothecary's shop where there is the smallest chance of the seductive dust being kept." Simon acquiesced and we set forth.

I could see by Simon's face when I returned to the tavern, and he instantly discovered from mine, the result of the day's work.

We sat in silence.

"There's only the stuttering clue left," remarked Simon, as he smoked vigorously in the bar-room that night " (all guests were obliged to sit in the bar-room, as there was no other accommodation), "and I'm feared, Lachy, it's a forlorn hope."

I tried to cheer Simon's drooping spirits and get

him to talk, but it was no use. He smoked so vigorously that we were both enveloped in clouds, and other guests were making remarks about calling out the fire brigade.

"Well, we'll try the stuttering clue anyway tomorrow, Simon," I said, as I wished him good-night, but just how to make the clue available I could not determine. It was not likely that Sanders would consult any doctor on the subject, and as there were no schools for the improvement of speech, it was difficult to determine how to begin. But I realized that I was under the necessity of doing something if I was to retain Simon's confidence, and so I thought hard for an hour after retiring. I dropped to sleep without solving the question, and when the ringing of the great breakfast bell aroused me, I was in distress of mind what to say to Simon. In desperation I determined to switch the programme for the day, and so I said to Simon, who looked upon me inquiringly as we supped our porridge: "I think, Simon, we might change our tactics to-day. I doubt the stuttering clue is a forlorn hope and should only be used as a final resort. Let us call at every lawyer's office in town to-day and inquire if an old clerk answering to the description of Sanders has been employed."

"Ah, that's better," said Simon, much relieved; "I have no faith in yon stuttering clue anyway, and I didna care to have the people pokin' fun at me whiles pursuing it."

And so we put in the day patiently inquiring at every legal office in the city if one Sanders Sylvester;

an old Scottish clerk who used snuff and stuttered on occasion, had ever been employed. It was with difficulty in many cases that we could succeed in getting straightforward answers. Judging by the questions put us and the comments passed, I think we were mistaken for some daft adventurers. But we faithfully covered the ground and when nightfall came and we foregathered at the tavern it was again unnecessary to exchange words as to the result.

We retired early that night, neither one making any allusion to the plan for the following day. The stuttering clue was the only one that remained, and I was sore put to it to determine how to make it available.

We were taking our porridge the next morning in the little dining-room when we heard loud voices in the bar-room close by. "I don't give a d—— fer rye whiskey or for all the gin you kin beg, borry er steal; what I wants is a glass o' McLarn's malt. Gimme a taste o' John A.'s treble X, an' I'm wid ye. I'm from the county o' Lanerick, an' we knows wot good likker is there. There's nawthin' kin beat John A.'s malt. W'en I takes me bitters I'll have nawthin' else if it kin be got."

So spake one voice in loud, coarse tones.

"Strange," said Simon, "I often heard Sanders speak of McLarn's malt. It seems that he once spent a winter season in the town where it was manufactured, and, like our friend yonder, he conceived a great partiality for that brand."

"Did Sanders drink?" I asked, seizing eagerly upon what might prove another clue.



"Oh, yes; he was unco fond of his bitters. I thought you knew that; but how could you if I neglected to tell you? It was usually when in his cups that Sanders stuttered the worst."

I was too much interested with this communication to pay further attention to the noisy tippler in the adjoining room, who refused to be pacified until furnished with what he called a "stiff hooker" of McLarn's malt.

"I have it," I said, bringing my hand so heavily down upon the table that it startled Simon. "We'll visit every tavern in the city and call for a glass of McLarn's malt. It may be that we can get some clue to Sanders by inquiring from the barkeepers."

"Good Lord, man!" exclaimed Simon, in alarm, "and what will become of us if we drink whiskey in every tavern in town. We'll be in no fit state after the first two rounds or so to speir about Sanders. And besides, Lachy, my man, ye ken weel that I hav'na touched or handled the stuff syne the day I was ordained an elder of the kirk."

"You understand, Simon, how it is with myself," I hastened to explain, lest he might fear that I was becoming reckless. "I cannot bide the stuff, as you know. We must just trust to luck and do the best we can."

We did not separate that day. We made the tour of the taverns in company. I did most of the talking. I shall always carry with me the picture of the grave and respectable looking Simon as he would take his place by my side at the bar, pour out his glass of

liquor, and when the bartender was not looking, slyly empty the contents into the colossal "spit-box" filled with sawdust that in those days occupied a prominent place on the floor of every well-kept bar-room.

"It wasna that I minded the tavern-keepers so much," Simon afterwards explained to me; "nor did I care a pin's worth for the spectators, but I suffered powerfully in self-respect. I canna have the assurance to handle the bread and wine for many's the day. What would the respectable folk of the county of Bruce say if they but saw me standin' up wi' you, Lachy, at the bars and callin' for yon malt? If it ever gets out on me I am utterly undone and there will be nothing for it but just to resign my eldership."

At every bar that we visited I managed to inquire about Sanders, but we were always doomed to disappointment, and it was with a somewhat heavy heart that we left the last tavern without obtaining the slightest clue and returned to our own hostelry. We had eaten supper, and Simon was having his evening smoke (he never smoked except after supper), when a group of roystering, tipsy men approached the bar. "Oh, t' 'ell with that stuff," roared the same voice we had heard in the morning while eating breakfast; "I want McLarn's malt, and nawthin' else 'll do me."

The rebuked bartender withdrew a glass of liquor which he had handed out to the speaker, and promptly substituted a great oval flask in which the nectar distilled by "John A." and bearing the historical three XXX's was contained.

The drinking man placed his left hand about the

glass that was furnished, so that the bartender might not see how much he took, and filling the tumbler to the brim he hurriedly swallowed its contents at one gulp, and, heaving a great sigh of satisfaction, as if his throat were as long as a giraffe's and he had enjoyed every inch of it, said:

"Ach, that's good—that's d—— good. There's nawthin' like McLarn's malt. John A. knows how to make it."

Perhaps it was the sheer desperation of the situation that made me do it. I had exhausted every avenue of possible information that I could think of. Simon and I had pursued every clue to the last without result. The case was desperate; I believed that we had to surrender the hope of finding Sanders. When the inebriate before me spoke the words, "McLarn's malt," I mechanically, and without thinking, rose, and striding to his side grasped him by the shoulders, and gazing into his uncertain eyes, which possessed that peculiar stupid, brutal expression characteristic of the drunkard, said, "Man, do you know Sanders Sylvester?"

The suddenness of my action puzzled and upset the inebriated man, and for a moment he was nonplussed and looked stupidly and helplessly at me.

"Do you know Sanders Sylvester?" I repeated, slowly and earnestly.

I noticed a gleam of intelligence shoot across the besotted face and the light of understanding flit over the eyes.

"Do I know who?" he said.

"Sanders Sylvester," I replied.

"Sanders Sylvester," he repeated, "S-a-n-d-e-r-s S-y-l-v-e-s-t-e-r," slowly, as if trying very hard to recall some memory, to break into some brain-cell that had long been closed. Then suddenly, as if the cell had exploded and released the contents, he said: "Sanders Sylvester, old stuttrin' Sanders, old snuff-box Sanders, well, I'll be blowed ef I don't. Say, we've drunk bar'ls an' bar'ls o' McLarn's malt, has me an' Sanders. 'Ere's t' John A.'s treble X an' Sanders. Whoop la! everybudy drink t' Sanders."

My joy, after the days of disappointment that we had endured in connection with our search, was so great at finding a clue at last, that I actually gave the unfortunate fellow a hug, and without contemplating the effect on the astonished Simon, I invited all hands to take something at my expense.

Simon's reproof was so mild when we retired that night that I fancy it would not have taken much further provocation to have induced him to break through his long abstention.

It was idle to attempt any rational conversation with the devotee of John A.'s nectar that night; his state of intoxication was too great. I ascertained who he was and that he lived adjacent to the tavern, but I did not lose sight of him until I saw him assisted to his own miserable quarters. Then I sought my bed and remained wakeful long into the night, wondering what the outcome of my discovery would be.

## CHAPTER V.

### *SANDERS UNFOLDS A TALE.*

DAYLIGHT found me dressed and uneasily pacing the sidewalk in front of the miserable habitation of my drunken friend of the previous night. I did not care to enter until some one was astir. After a time the front door opened and a half-clad, unhappy-looking child of about eight years, with a pinched face, was pushed out into the street, while a female voice in a high key said: "There, Sal, tell the bar-man it's all you've got, an' that your father must have something to stiddy his narves in the mornin.' Ef he don't git it, he'll go outen his mind. Tell 'im it's es little as 'e kin do arter a-gettin on 'im drunk the night afore."

When the child passed out, I entered the house without announcing myself, and found all the inmates in one large room. The mother—alas! the poor creature (nothing so affects me as the pale, pinched mother of a drunkard's family)—was trying to kindle a fire with elm slivers, while a couple of youngsters, with nothing on them save brief flannel skirts and a coat of grime and dirt, were tugging at the greasy frock that partially covered her wasted form. The husband and father, whom I immediately recognized, lay snoring on a mattress in one corner of the room.

After saying good morning and apologizing for the intrusion, I pointed to the prostrate sleeper, and asked if I might speak to him.

"Tibby sure," said the wife, "ef ye kin only wake him. Tom's a powerful sleeper when 'e's in 'is cups, an' he had an unusual load las' night w'en 'e coomed in."

I tried to arouse the sleeping drunkard, but he yielded very slowly to my physical importunities. Finally he opened his bleary eyes, and gazing stupidly at me for a time, said: "Stranger, kin you give us a touch o' McLarn's malt?"

I was about to explain that I did not have any with me when his little daughter Sally entered and handed something to her mother.

"'Ere, Tom, 's a taste wich I sent fer, knowin es how you'd swear awful ef yeh woke up an' cudden' git a drop."

She poured the stuff into a cup and gave it to her husband. He drank it with a deep sigh of satisfaction and with the usual exclamation of "Ach, that's good." The liquor seemed to have a magic effect upon the unfortunate man, for after it had had time to "soak in" (his own expression), he appeared quite himself and inquired my errand. When I told him of the incident of the previous night, he seemed to have some faint recollection of it, and said: "I s'pose yo've come to find out where Sanders is?"

"Yes, that's my object," I replied.

"I hope yeh mean no harm to Sanders, fer ef I thought yeh did, yeh could go hang fer all o' me. I'd

sooner injure myself nor Sanders, fer it's a good fren' he's always a-bin to me, and a better jedge o' whiskey you'd not find between 'ell and 'alifax. It was Sanders as introjuced me to McLarn's malt, and it's jolly close fren's we were fer years."

"Ay, ay, Tom, that yeh was, that yeh was," put in the sad-looking wife, between the vigorous blowings that she aimed at the elm slivers that wouldn't light.

"Hold your tongue, Sairey, an' speak w'en yer spoken at," answered the husband.

I think it was my earnestness, in addition to my assurances that I meant no ill to Sanders, that caused "Tom's" suspicions to disappear, for he became confidential immediately and informed me that while he had not seen Sanders for a number of years he occasionally heard from him. In Sanders' effort to break from whiskey he had determined to go and reside in a country place where the temptation to drink would be greatly minimized. Accordingly he had engaged with a saw-mill owner doing business a score or two of miles east of Toronto, and when last heard from was still there.

Before mid-day Simon and I were on our way to the mill-owner's limits, which we reached the following evening about sunset, having been carefully directed. As we approached the house we saw an old man moving cautiously over the meadow in front, leaning rather heavily upon a stick.

"There's Sanders!" said Simon, excitedly, as he recognized the quaint old figure, now crippled with

rheumatism, laboriously making his way from the mill towards the house. We quickened our pace and caught up to Sanders just as he was turning into the lane.

"Good evening, Sanders Sylvester," said Simon, going up to him, taking him by the hand and gazing intently into his face, as if to make sure he was right. Then, slowly, "Do you know me?"

Sanders was an old-fashioned, rough-spoken man, but he was proverbially shrewd and was never at a loss for a ready answer. In the present case he was taken entirely by surprise. He, however, returned Simon's steady gaze for a time; then the light of recognition illumined his expressive Scotch face, as he answered: "Know ye, man, know ye? It's over sixteen years syne I saw ye, Simon, but, man, I'd know yer hide in a tan pit."

It was fine to see the two old friends greet each other so heartily, and it was not difficult to conclude from the warmth and cordiality of the greeting what fast friends they had been in the old days. We spent the night in the hospitable mill-owner's home. The latter retired at an early hour, leaving Sanders, Simon and myself to talk. Day was breaking before we separated to rest. Sanders possessed a fine memory, that did not appear to be impaired by intemperance, as is usually the case.

"Ay," he said, "I mind it a' gey weel. Yon Casper wis a bawd ane. He used to confab wi' old Pinch daily, and thegither they pit up mony's the uncanny



job, but I ken the warst of a' wis the one relating tae Col. Cameron's wull."

I saw that it was best to allow Sanders to do the talking, and resolved to confine my share of the conversation to asking brief questions. Besides this, Simon was doing good work as interlocutor.

"Did you ever see the real will," I ventured, "before the bogus one was produced?"

"No' mysel'," answered Sanders, "but auld Nancy, the maiden sister o' Lawyer Pinch, wha keppit hoose for us until she slippit awa' wi' her bawd legs the year afore I resigned, aince telt me she saw it, an' that its proveesions were aye as Simon telt ye. It cam aboot in this way. Ane night, shortly after the sensation about Col. Cameron's wull, Casper ca'd upon Pinch, an' they were closeted till long intil the night. Nancy, wha was an uncanny suspecious body, watchit the pair through a crack in the door and listened tae the conversation. Casper, wha is as muckle a man as ever pit stane at fair and wha has mighty courage, has ane sma' weakness."

"What's that, Sanders?" said Simon.

"He's a bit supersteetious. Nancy telt me that she heerd him relate tae Pinch the nicht in question that he had a dream, an' that it had been revealed tae him that the verra moment the original wull wis destroyed, or left his possession, his doom wis certain unless he recovered it."

"An' did he take heed to the warning?"

"Aye, that he did, for although he was present in Pinch's office yon nicht for the verra purpose o' de-

stroying the wull, Nancy heered him say that he couldna dac it, an' sae he proposed tae Pinch tae sew it up in a leathern girdle which he produced, an' which he declared he wad carry about his body till his death. 'It was a strange sight,' said Nancy, 'tae see the twa men at the job o' sewing the wull in the girdle and then sewing it about Casper's waist. Tae enable my brither to mak a guid job o't, Casper strippit aff tae the pelt. When the job was dune Casper said, "Pinch, I'll carry that till my dying moment." "Indeed, man, ye'd better," answered the lawyer, "for if it is ever discovered while I'm alive my life's not worth a purchase, as I drew the document and had it attested."'

"An' sae," said Sanders, turning towards me, "that's where ye'll find yer faither's wull at this verra day, if ye but hae the bit courage tae try an' recover it; but I doot, Simon, if any ane wha knows Casper wad care tae tackle sicca job," and the old man nodded significantly at Simon, as if to say, "We both know the man, and understand the character of the metal of which he is made."

"Well, Sanders Sylvester," I said, quietly but firmly, "I mean to try to recover that will."

Sanders looked toward me for a moment, then, putting his spectacles on, he came close up and surveyed me intently for a time as if studying every lineament of my face. At length he said, nodding towards Simon, "Aye, Simon, he's gey like his grand-faither; he seems every inch a Cameron, an' I doot-

na' he'll keep his word. But he has a tough nut tae crack in Casper—a tough nut."

I was a trifle dismayed at the turn of the conversation. I realized that I had spoken in a manner that might be interpreted as boastful, and this I did not relish, as I was not conscious of entertaining such a sentiment. I had a deep conviction as to my duty in the matter, and I felt that to shrink from it would involve cowardice and plunge me in contempt. I did not care, however, to make any explanation, preferring, rather, to rest under the possible misapprehension.

"Did you ever learn how the bogus will came to bear the signature of my grandfather?" I asked Sanders.

"Na, not exactly," said Sanders, reflectively, "an' yet," rubbing his forehead and thinking deeply, "I mind that Nancy did say something aboot the matter. Oh, yes! She telt me that her brither, wha wis sair troubled wi' nightmare aboot this time—as, indeed, he should weel be!—used tae mutter a great deal in his sleep, an' ane nicht he spoke aboot this verra subject. He was chuckling tae himsel' aboot the way he had gotten Col. Cameron, while upon his death-bed, tae sign the document, on the representation that it wis a discharge o' some mortgage. 'But it isna legal, it isna legal,' Nancy heered her brither say, 'as it wisna attested by twa well-kent witnesses,' as the requirements o' the law ca'd for at yon time. This point seems to hae been overlooked," added Sanders, "although it may be that the names o' bogus witnesses

were added, but I canna tell about this, I canna tell."

"What has become of the Pinches?" I asked.

"The last I heerd o' them," Sanders answered, "wis that Nancy had deid some years ago and old Solomon had disappeared. He used tae spend muckle o' his time about Toronto when I wis there, but he aye gin me the cold shouther. He didna want to foregather wi' me, and it became sae at last that we didna speak when we met. The collection o' rents an' administration o' the estate wis handed ower tae a legal firm in Toronto, and after that Solomon Pinch disappeared altogether. Like enough he's deid be this time, gin he didna tak leave o' his senses altogether, which wisna unlikely, as he lookit and talkit gey looney afore he left the country—at least his acquaintances telt me sae."

There was only one other point on which to question Sanders, and I proceeded to do it:

"What do you know of Casper?"

"Gey little, an' even that's mair than I care tae ken o' sicca uncanny body."

"But you know his whereabouts?"

"Well, I learned a' I could when I was in Pinch's office after Casper left."

"And?"

"The man first went to Fort Garry, a spot that I ken must be far beyont the outposts o' civilization, for I noticed by the post date on the envelope that it took twa months for the letter tae come."

"Did he remain there for any length of time, or do you think he is still there?"

"Weel, I canna just tell hoo long he stoppit at the Fort, but it couldna hae been langer nor twa year, for aboot that length o' time after his first letter I found anither on Solomon's desk. Baith the address an' writing inside were in Casper's hand. I didna think shame tae pry, an' sae I just read the contents. Casper said he had gone on an exploring expedition in search o' gold on the Saskatchewan wi' a couple o' white men an' a number o' Indians. His white companions were lost while crossing the river in the spring rush o' water, but he had saved himsel' an' continued his journey till he reached the shores o' a sma' lake just north o' Lake Winnipegosis, where the band o' Indians to which his companions belonged were encamped. Here he remained, an' as the isolation from civilization and the picturesqueness o' the place pleased him, he determined tae locate there for a time, and tae that end wis building himsel' a hoose."

Sanders paused at this stage. Thinking that he had finished his recital, I broke in with: "And you never heard from him again?"

"Oh, yes, I saw anither letter in which he described his home and surroundings. He said he had built himsel' a log hoose, which he had ca'd 'Moose Lodge,' after the lake by which it was located; that he likit the Indian character gey weel, an' that he wis mair comfortable like than he had been for years—indeed, he had some notion o' settlin' wi' the Indians a'the-gither."

"And do you think it possible that he has done so permanently?"

"Weel, I never learnt through Casper himsel', but an old neighbor in Bruce, wha had a brither a trapper in the West, got word frae him that he had seen an' visited Casper, an' that he was livin' in apparent wedlock wi' no less a personage than the dochter o' the Indian chief hiinsel'."

"Did they have any children?"

"That I couldna say, as the trapper didna relate."

"Were any other inmates spoken of?"

"Not that I recall exactly, although the trapper mentioned that Casper had gathered aboot him some boon companions who shared his debauches when the supplies o' whiskey arrived."

Although, as I have already said, Simon, Sanders and I talked all night, I have set down here only that which bears upon the subject that was so close to me. Before they separated to snatch a brief rest Simon and Sanders had many matters to discuss, many reminiscences to recall, many questions to ask and many laughs to indulge in as amusing incidents were recalled. We had a couple of hours' sleep before breakfast, and then we took leave of the hospitable millman ("sawyers," they called them in those days) and his wife. Sanders accompanied us up the lane to the gate, leaning so heavily upon his staff that I concluded when we said good-bye that I would not look upon his fine old expressive face again. He gave me his blessing and "God protect you, lad," before I moved away. It seemed difficult for him and Simon to take

leave of each other. They had been warm friends in Bruce in the years gone by; there was something essentially kin between them, and they lingered over their parting. Something seemed to indicate to their minds that they would never see each other again, as indeed they did not, for Sanders only survived six months. But they managed to preserve that stern exterior that I have so often observed in the Scotch character, when I knew that the fires of sentiment or affection were fairly consuming them within. "What! me feelin' badly?" they would exclaim, with indignation, if you but indicated by an expression of sympathy that you appreciated and understood their apparent emotion. "Why, man, you've gone clean daft. It was only a bit o' smoke in my een," or "It was a bit crumb that went the wrong road."

"I aye likit Sanders," said Simon to me, after we had walked a mile or two in silence, "and it was weel worth the journey tae see him agin and hae a bit crack wi' him, to say nothing o' the value o' the interview tae yoursel'."

## CHAPTER VI.

### *I PART WITH SIMON.*

It was more difficult to say good-bye to Simon than I had reckoned. For days I had rehearsed the scene and had promised myself to be as brave and as indifferent as I could be. I had walked out of Toronto with Simon a couple of miles along the road that led to Bruce, it being his intention to take the stage when it caught up to us, as it was timed to leave an hour later than we did. I had planned it all out to have a nice family chat with this man who had been so much to me, and for whom I had such deep affection. I wanted to thank him for all he had been to me, for his tender watchfulness over me, and in my father's name I wished to commend his faithfulness in carrying out the great request made at the Falkland Woods so many years ago. But a strange spell had come over me. The hour had come to speak, and I was dumb. The words that I had rehearsed to myself scores of times had flown from me; it seemed as if even my vocal organs refused to articulate. Simon also was silent. Once I mechanically looked towards him and noticed that he was pale, jaded, tired and old looking, and my heart went out to him. The rumble of the stage wheels in our rear warned me that if I was to speak there was no time to lose. But the spell continued and we both trudged along in silence. I believe now that Simon knew and understood my



feelings. The stage-coach gained rapidly upon us and in a moment would be up with us. We both paused instinctively. He placed his two hands on my shoulders, as had so often been his wont, and, holding me at arm's length, gazed intently into my face.

"Oh, Lachy lad!" was all he said. I knew it was all he could say.

"Oh, Simon!" was the only response I could make, while the tears stole down my cheeks.

He noticed them and for the only time in his life his voice broke. He pulled me kindly towards him, and stooping down, for he was a tall, gaunt figure, he kissed me on the cheek, while he said, in accents broken with emotion, "It is enough. God preserve and prosper ye, Lachy, lad—no, Lachy, my son, for you're the only bairn I've iver had, and I've loved ye as such."

I was too much overcome to reply, but I pressed his hands warmly, while the tears, which I could not repress, continued to moisten my cheeks. At length I managed to articulate, "I'll try to be faithful, Simon, and to be worthy of my father and of you."

"Aye, that ye will, lad," he replied.

At this moment the stage drove up. The driver eyed us curiously. When he looked at us the second time his face took on a reverent expression, while he hastened to arrange a seat for Simon, who had spoken in advance for it.

Before Simon mounted he handed me a small parcel with the remark, "Here, Lachy, lad, ye'll find something that'll mayhap be gey usefu' tae ye betimes;

it's a' that your puir ould foster faither has tae give ye."

As I took the parcel from his hands I slipped into them a tiny case which I had purchased in Toronto. It contained two small photographs, one of my father, which I had had reproduced, and in the opposite side one of myself. I knew Simon loved me and I believed the little photographs would please him.

The driver cracked his whip and the old lumbering coach rolled away. I stood in the road bolt upright gazing after it. The tall, gaunt, lonely-looking figure of Simon, sitting in the rear seat stern and courageous like one of the great pine rampikes that still rear their jagged tops toward heaven in the old county of Bruce, appealed strangely to me and worked upon my already over-wrought emotions. I wondered if Simon would look back and wave his hand at me. But he did not, and when the coach made a turn in the road and disappeared a great sense of loneliness came over me, and I sat me down in the road and for a time allowed the tears, which I could not restrain, to flow silently. I don not think I was then or am now emotional, but my life had been a somewhat lonely one, and I was only a boy, after all. I never until that moment realized how much Simon was and had been to me, and I feared that I had looked upon his loved face for the last time. At least all those good people in Bruce county who knew Simon and understood his real worth will honor my tears when they read these lines. He was all that I had, and his like is seldom met with.

The sound of wheels in the distance aroused me, and taking up the parcel that Simon gave me, I



"When the coach made a turn in the road and disappeared, a great sense of loneliness came over me."



sprang over the fence and strode across the meadow, taking a short cut back to the city. Besides, I wanted to be alone. The morning was sacred to me and I could not endure to have it marred by the common-places of high road interruptions. I came to a little burn issuing from the woods and interrupting my course. I found a great plank stretched across it for the accommodation of the owners of the field. I sat me down on this plank, allowing my feet to dangle within two inches of the water. Here I opened Simon's parcel. The first object to attract my notice was a letter addressed to myself in Simon's handwriting. I broke the seal and read:

*"Lachlan, my lad,—*You are going away and while I am confident Heaven will prosper your mission, it may be that I shall never look upon your face again, for I am old and worn and in the natural order cannot have long to live. It's a terrible thing, I'd, to go through life without folk of your ain, with no child to call you father, and no one to call you brother. If it hadna been for you life would have been dark and uninteresting. I'm now old and frail, with, please God, but a brief span left to me. There is one small boon I would ask of ye. I suppose my weakness comes from being a lonely old bachelor. I've gone through this world alone, but I want company and companionship in the grave, where we bide so long. If you have it in your power, and I do not survive your return, see that I am buried near your father and grandfather. They were dearer to me than I could tell on paper, and I would like to lie near by them, so that I shall have company when the great trump sounds. I have wrapped up a few articles which I think will be useful to you. Goodbye, and may God protect you.

"Yours,

"SIMON."

Reverently I undid the well-wrapped and carefully sealed packages that made up the parcel. The first contained a small leathern pouch filled with gold pieces, amounting to about \$250.00. The second contained Simon's gold watch, that he had carried from my earliest recollection of him. I examined it minutely. On the inside of the hunting-case I found this inscription, "To my very dear friend, Simon Thompson, from Col. Cameron." The next packet contained a small pocket Bible, a new one, which I concluded had been purchased by Simon during our visit to Toronto. I found on slight examination that he had carefully turned its pages and marked many passages that he thought would prove useful to me through life. The fourth and last packet, which was much larger than the others, consisted of an assortment of needles, thread, yarn, buttons and so forth, that my benefactor reasoned would be indispensable to me on such a trip as I was about to undertake. Carefully I folded and bound them all up again and, with a heart filled with affection and gratitude to Simon, hurried back to the city.

## CHAPTER VII.

### *RUTH.*

THE day was spent in arranging for my journey. All possible information about routes, etc., was procured, and I was ready by nightfall to set forth. I decided to go by the United States route, as I found that, with the exception of some stretches, I could travel by the railroad the greater portion of the way—at least as far as the state of Minnesota. The next morning found me journeying westward.

The trip was practically devoid of incident until the town of St. Paul was passed and I found myself in company with a considerable number of fellow-travellers making their way by stage-coach down the Red River valley towards Fort Garry, in quest either of land or adventure.

The sixth day out our party was augmented by two young people, Captain Kawlings and his sister. I learned that they were on their way to Fort à la Corne, the point where the two great branches of the Saskatchewan River unite. They belonged to Quebec, where the Captain was connected with the permanent militia force. They were hurrying northward to succor a brother who had gone into the Great Lone Land as a missionary among the Indians. He had selected the Prince Albert district for his field of spiritual operations, and had spent several years seek-

ing to evangelize the redmen, when he met with an accident that seemed likely to deprive him of his life. He wrote to his people from Fort à la Corne, telling of his misfortune and intimating that he never expected to see any of their faces again. No sooner was the message received than a family council was held and it was promptly determined that the military brother should go forward at once to either bring the injured man home, or if the injury was unto death, to attend him in his last hours.

It was from the young Captain himself, who made friends with me the first day we were travelling companions, that I learned these details. "I was about to set out alone," he said, "when my sister Ruth here" (to whom he introduced me) "insisted upon accompanying me. Father was very much opposed to her going, on account of the dangers and inconveniences incident to travel in such a far-off land, but mother commended the proposal and here we are. 'You see,' said mother, 'Louis may require the most careful nursing, and it will seem good to have his sister with him. I would gladly go myself, only the infirmity from which I suffer' (she had serious heart trouble) 'prevents me, so Ruth had better go.'"

Ruth was a girl of about nineteen or twenty years, brave and self-reliant. She was rather above than below the average size of girls, but she had that about her that compelled respect. Innocence and trustfulness shone in her face. From her eyes—and she had great, glorious brown eyes that would illuminate and



render attractive the homeliest face—there shone more womanhood than I had ever seen in maiden face; though, to speak truth, my lines had been cast and my thoughts trained in such avenues that it never seemed to comport with my life to have anything to do with maidens or their faces. Perhaps this was why Ruth's eyes struck me like a great sunburst when she turned them upon me, at first shyly, then inquiringly, as if she were slightly interested and wondered if I merited more than passing notice; then kindly and frankly, as if the hasty inspection satisfied her and she was prepared to give me her confidence. Judged by the strict standards of beauty, Ruth could not be catalogued as pretty, but there was that about her face that could not fail to attract where intelligence accompanied the inspection. Fine arched brows, a complexion suggestive of ripe peaches, good nose, forehead that scarcely did justice to her intellect, large, well-shaped head, crowned with a wealth of brown tresses that were naturally inclined to curl, but which she kept under suppression by rigid braiding. It was only her face that appealed to me that morning in the stage-coach, when Captain Rawlings said: "Ruth, dear, let me present Mr. Cameron, of Bruce County, Ontario, who is on his way to the same country as ourselves," but I am older now and I can recall, and will be pardoned for speaking of her form, as I remember it. She was dressed in the greatest simplicity and with a view to comfort in travelling, and there was about her an air that revealed good taste and good breeding. Although developed beyond her years, there

was no superfluous *avoirdufois*. She was agility itself, and her physical development was suggestive of horseback riding and abundant out-of-door exercise.

Ruth's voice impressed me as sweet, low and musical beyond expression when she looked into my face, as I have already stated, and said: "I'm so very glad to find company on our journey. It will help the time to pass. I think my brother is tired already," and as she turned to the Captain, her face was radiant with good humor and good health.

The young Captain protested that he was not weary of the journey, although he confessed that he disliked the mode of travel. "If we can only be of service to poor Louis," he added, "we shall not mind the trouble, shall we, Ruth?"

"No, indeed," said the sister, with a sigh, "if he but knew that we were coming it might cheer him up a bit."

At the place where we changed horses that day the Captain climbed on to the box-seat with the driver, and I was left in the rear seat with his sister. At first she seemed rather reserved and disinclined to talk, but after a time her reticence yielded to the natural buoyancy and open friendliness of youth, and we soon found ourselves like two school children chatting away as if we had known each other from childhood. She told me about her family. Her father had been a British engineer sent by the English Government in the early forties to examine and report upon the fortifications of Quebec. He liked the new land so well that he applied for and was granted permanent

service at the old Capital. The family consisted of three boys and one girl—Ruth. The eldest boy, Louis, always of a spiritual turn, had become fixed with a desire to spend his life as a missionary among the Indians, and when a call was made by the Bishop of Rupert's Land for workers, he promptly volunteered and went to the far West. He became deeply absorbed in his work, and so well pleased was the Bishop with his ministry that in his reports to the S.P.C.K., which contributed to the maintenance of the mission, mention was invariably made of the value of the unselfish efforts of the young man in behalf of the natives.

Louis was riding his pony along the banks of the Saskatchewan one day, near Fort à la Corne, when the embankment, which had been undermined by the wash of the waters against it, collapsed, and he and the animal were precipitated down the steep side into the water. Louis managed to scramble to the shore, but he found that his back was injured and that he could not stand upon his feet. He lay for two days and nights exposed to the weather, and had resigned himself to die, when on the third day he saw an Indian canoe on the stream, occupied by two natives. With what strength remained he shouted to them. They heard, and coming to his assistance, placed him in their frail craft and conveyed him down the river to the Fort, where he procured shelter and such assistance as was available. When the Bishop heard of the accident he sent word to have the young mis-

sionary brought to civilization as soon as he was able to travel.

During this brief recital the girl displayed such emotion as was natural on the part of a sister both fond and proud of her brother. A period of silence followed the telling of her story, and then she began to question me, and before I was aware I had related my own history.

"And you are now on your way to find your uncle?" she said.

"Yes," I answered, "and, please God, I shall find him, although the issue of my adventure sometimes looks extremely dark to me."

"We are all in the hands of God," said the girl, reverently, "and although the outlook is often gloomy and foreboding, I have still an abiding faith that we succeed in the ratio of our actual deserts, and in so far as our motives are pure, high-minded and unselfish."

I quietly nodded my assent, and she proceeded.

"Sometimes we chafe and whine and criticize the All-Wise One because He does not act in the manner that we poor mortals in our blindness think He should, but do we not usually discover, after the problem has been solved and the clouds have rolled away, what a sad mess would have been made of things had God acted in accord with our desires?"

Again I bowed my assent.

She continued, her eyes glowing with animation and interest: "Do you not, Mr. Cameron, often grow impatient of the view-point and outlook of the majority

of our poor race, including perhaps yourself, if the fact that you're a Scotchman does not affect your judgment?" with a merry twinkle in her eyes. "I know I do. How often we coddle ourselves, and how apt we are to drift into a frame of mind that convinces us we are oppressed beyond the experience of our fellow-creatures; and how we sometimes puff ourselves up with the idea that we are the only ones who are upright, who are noble, who are heroic, and that if it were not for us mundane affairs would sink into chaos. Whenever such ideas as those come to my mind I think of the experience of the prophet Elijah. You remember how, after the glorious vindication of himself and of the God of Israel on Mount Carmel, he fled to the wilderness, and there complained that the altars of God had been broken down, that the prophets had been slain, and that *he* only was left and they were seeking his life to take it away. I am always humbled when I recall the answer God made him, 'I have left me seven thousand that have not bowed the knee to Baal.' And so, Mr. Cameron, when we find a disposition to strut and plume ourselves with the idea that we supply a particularly important portion of the economy of the universe, and when we are apt to fancy that we are the ones and the only ones who carry the burden, and that things would go to smash if we were removed, it is well to remember Jehovah's answer to Elijah."

"You have preached the best sermonette to me, Miss Rawlings, this afternoon, that I have listened to in a long time."

She blushed deeply, as if she had been recalled to a consciousness that she had overstepped the bounds of gentle maidenhood in talking as she did. Observing her heightened color and embarrassment, I at once added, "I sincerely thank you for your words, and I do not misunderstand you. Indeed, I am oppressed with a deep sense of the honor you have done me in opening your mind so freely."

She turned her great eyes inquiringly to mine, but she detected nothing but sincere respect and warm admiration. This satisfied her, and after gazing out upon the great prairie for a long time, she turned to me quietly, and I could see the moisture in her wonderful eyes as she said, "How beautiful, how very beautiful is the scene!" speaking so low that I think I was the only one in the coach that caught her words. "Never until now could I realize the real meaning of those lines of Bryant's:

'These are the gardens of the desert, these  
The unshorn fields, boundless and beautiful,  
For which the speech of England has no name—  
The prairies. I behold them for the first,  
And my heart swells, while the dilated sight  
Takes in the encircling vastness. Lo they stretch  
In airy undulations, far away,  
As if the ocean, in his gentlest swell,  
Stood still, with all his rounded billows fixed,  
And motionless forever. . . .

'Man hath no part in all this glorious work.  
The hand that built the firmament hath heaved  
And smoothed these verdant swells, and sown their slopes  
With herbage, planted them with island groves,

And hedged them round with forests; fitting floor  
For this magnificent temple of the sky—  
With flowers whose glory and whose multitude  
Rival the constellations. The great heavens  
Seem to stoop down upon the scene in love—  
A nearer vault, and of a tenderer blue,  
Than that which bends above the eastern hills.’”

When she had finished the quotation she continued to gaze away out upon the ‘airy undulations,’ as if she were unconscious of the presence of any companion.

“I think one would soon learn to love these prairies,” I said, venturing to break the spell. I was sorry after I had spoken.

“Learn to love them!” she repeated, emphasizing the *learn*, “why I do love them already. I love them enthusiastically,” and her eyes spoke the warmth and genuineness of her admiration.

“One could almost wish that he were of the prairies,” I ventured, barely above my breath and feebly making my first attempt at a love passage; although if I had been taxed with it then I would have stoutly denied, with oath, if necessary, that I was in any way smitten with the charms of this attractive girl.

She turned quickly towards me. The instant her eyes encountered mine I realized for the first time in my life that I was a coward. I dropped mine instantly and pretended to be absorbed in adjusting a strap on the cushion. She remained silent for a time. I was afraid to look her in the face. I feared

that she must be offended, and I was growing very uncomfortable when she said:

"Mr. Cameron, I understand that you are a Scotchman."

"Yes," I answered, plucking up my courage. "I'm proud of nothing else so much as of my Highland descent."

"Is it true that Scotchmen never say things they do not mean?"

I began to feel embarrassed and did not know exactly how to answer, but I blurted out something about the "inherent earnestness of my race."

"What did you mean by the speech you made a few moments ago?" and she looked at me searchingly.

"Oh—oh, nothing particular," I stammered, growing embarrassed, and hoping that the lumbering of the coach was so loud that I could not be heard.

But she caught my words. "Then you stand convicted of insincerity," she said, rather shyly. But there was a kindly twinkle in her eyes that reassured me.

"I am sorry, Mr. Cameron, that you give evidence of possessing the frailties of the human race. I thought perhaps, as a *real* Scotchman, with an unbroken pedigree, you might be—well—different,"—hesitating before she used the word and then adding, after another pause, "and—and—the real thing, you know." Then she laughed merrily, while her eyes glowed with mirth and youthful animation that she could not suppress.

That laughter of Ruth was always to me the sweetest



music that ever broke on mortal ears. Although I scouted any suggestion to myself then that she attracted me, I am bound to confess to-day, after the lapse of many years, that if she were the homeliest girl abroad I could not resist her laughter; that alone would compel my admiration. But lest I should make any mistake with myself I hastily decided the question in my own mind that I was not particularly attracted by Ruth. It was true she pleased me, but then so doubtless would other girls. And so during the next half hour's ride, as we sat in silence, I sternly settled the question with myself about the girl. Her eyes were fine, and her laughter—yes, it was certainly charming music, but that was all. What had a youth like me, a youth brought up with such ideas of stern duty, to do with love, and girls, and sentiment? No, no, it was quite incompatible, quite impossible, and the very thought must be dismissed from my mind. Presently, to demonstrate, if not to Ruth, at least to myself, the total indifference of my mind to anything pertaining to sentiment, I assumed a look of airy frivolity while I hummed to myself the air, "The lassies are a' ain tae me."

But I cannot say that I was as indifferent as I tried to make myself believe. Somehow the girl's eyes and the girl's laughter had taken such a grip of me that in spite of myself I was nervous, preoccupied and apprehensive. Well, after I had unalterably settled my feelings toward the girl there was no harm in talking to her, and so we resumed conversation.

It is marvellous how the hours fly when one is in-

terested. Although it was, of course, as Toots would say, "of no consequence" to me, still I found the girl a most interesting talker, and politeness demanded that I should listen, and of course it was but simple courtesy that I should answer.

Well, the afternoon sped all too swiftly, I was fain to admit, as I noticed the shadows lengthen, and realized that darkness would soon be upon us. It caused me to start uneasily and resolve to put myself through a rigid self-examination that night, when I heard the driver say: "Cap'n, them ar' young folks in the back seat's be'n talkin' quite a spell, hain't they? Seems t' me thar 'bout ready t' hev thar picters took."

As the Captain made no answer, the driver went on, as if soliloquizing, but his voice was loud enough to reach me, although I don't think that Miss Rawlings heard or understood him, for which I was devoutly thankful.

"I reckamember well th' fust time I sot eyes on my Sairey Ann. She wuz a stunner in them days. Best lukin' girl ye iver seed. Tibby sure she didn't hev much book-larnin', but she wuz all right, jist the same, wuz Sairey Ann. Well, her mother introjoced us an' left us together at the fall fair in the ole town uv Perth, Ontario. In less'n thirty-five minutes we'd hed four helpin's uv honey, hed drunk three glasses a piece uv Mrs. Lowery's ginger beer, wuz a-tradin' uv conversation lozengers, an' a-gittin' down t' pints that come out on the lozengers 'bout gittin' married, et cetera; an', would ye b'lieve it, Cap'n, w'en Sairey's

mother found us, in less'n two hours, we hed hed our picters tuk an' wuz ingaged t' marry. Yes, 'n, Cap'n, I may as well tell 'e w'en I'm at it, we did marry, an' Sairey Ann's my wife t' this day an' the mother uv my ten childer, uv wich I hain't saw neither sence five years comin' Chrisamus, w'en I left for th' West," and the driver heaved a sigh and was silent for a time. It was doubtless in explanation of his separation from his wife and family so long that he added, after the lapse of several minutes, "Tell 'e what, Cap'n, times is hard and things is riz."

I observed that it was growing dark. We had made good time during the day and if all went well we should be at Fort Pembina the following night.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### *AN ACCIDENT.*

To **SHORTEN** the road to the stopping-place for the night, the driver decided to leave the regular trail and cut across the open prairie. The country proved to be so rough that there was serious danger of a breakdown on several occasions. Night was falling rapidly and we were, as the driver judged, within a mile or so of the stopping-house when the wheels of the coach on the right side dropped suddenly into an excavation or fissure, and the vehicle was instantly overturned, the passengers and contents being tumbled promiscuously into the cavity on the prairie. I felt the vehicle going and jumped clear. I saw Miss Rawlings, as she was being tossed out, and springing towards her, I succeeded in catching her in my arms and breaking her fall, although she received a pretty severe shaking up. Most of the passengers (there were six besides the Rawlings' and myself) escaped without any injuries, but on hearing a cry of distress from the vicinity of the driver, who with Captain Rawlings and some heavy baggage had been thrown ahead a distance, I left Miss Rawlings' side and hurried forward.

"I'm all right myself," said the driver, springing to his feet and seizing the struggling horses by their bridles until some one cut the traces and released them,

"but I'm feared the Capn's done fer. He couldn't jump, an' that big lumberin' trunk fell on top uv him. Better run to his relief. It's too bad fer th' poor girl."

I was greatly shocked, but hastened to Captain Rawlings' aid. He lay groaning under a huge trunk. His face was ghastly white, as I could see in the waning light. In an instant I flung the trunk from off his body, and stooping down, raised his head tenderly and spoke to him. But he made no answer; he was unconscious. How I wished that I could spare his sister the agony of seeing him, but that was impossible. Her first thought was for her brother, and scarcely had I lifted his head on my arm before she was on her knees by his side.

"Oh, speak to me, Alfred!" she cried, excitedly. "Say you're not killed!" And as she stroked his face the tears stood in her eyes. She looked appealingly to me. "Tell me my brother is not dead," she said; "why do you look so grave?"

"I don't think your brother is very badly injured," I said, reassuringly. "He has fainted, but he'll come to in a moment. Calm yourself and we'll hope for the best."

Soon the Captain began to moan. I knew that was a good sign and told his sister.

"He must be very badly hurt," she groaned, in agonized tones.

"We'll know in a moment," I answered, and as I spoke the Captain opened his eyes and stared strangely about. It was not so dark but he could distinguish his sister's face as she bent over him.

"Oh, Alfred, dear Alfred, say you are not badly hurt! It would kill me to have you perish here."

He rapidly came to himself, and taking in the situation, for he was a brave, cool-headed young man, he said, quietly: "Don't excite yourself, my sister. I have a good deal of pain, but I do not think I'm very seriously injured."

"Oh, thank God for that!" said Ruth; "then he's not killed. I was afraid that awful trunk had crushed the life out of him."

"Where is your pain, Captain?" I asked, endeavoring to hold him in as comfortable a position as possible.

"In my chest," he said, "where that trunk fell upon me; and I know my left arm is broken. It feels as if it were crushed in half a dozen places."

With the assistance of a couple other passengers we carried the Captain a few paces and laid him on a couple of blankets spread for his reception. Then we gave him a little brandy to prevent a collapse from the pain, whilst I made a hurried examination of him. I found his legs intact. His head had escaped injury, but his left arm was broken in two or three places.

"How do you feel, Captain?" I asked, and his sister with pained face hung upon the answer.

"I've a horrible pain in my chest," he replied, "and my left arm feels as if it were crushed to a pulp."

"Oh, it's not so bad as that," I replied, reassuringly. "It is broken in a couple of places, but that is not serious. Let me examine your chest."

I unbuttoned his coat, waistcoat and shirt, and with

the aid of a lantern, which the driver had succeeded in lighting, I examined him. I found an ugly flesh wound on the left breast, where the big trunk had fallen sideways, lacerating the flesh badly.

The sight of the bloody wound caused Ruth to shrink back with horror, but I quickly assured her that it did not appear serious to me, and that it was the blood that looked alarming. Water was procured, and with the best skill I could command I washed and dressed the wound, covering it with clean cotton and binding it up tightly with cords, which we tied about his body so as to staunch the flow of blood.

I explained to Miss Rawlings that I thought the trunk had struck her brother sideways and had torn the flesh away, which was less dangerous than if it had fallen squarely upon him, as in that event it would probably have caused serious, if not fatal, internal injury. The look of deep gratitude and thankfulness that my words of assurance gave to the sister were pathetic, and I had strange feelings as she placed a hand upon my arm, and looking into my face, while big tears glistened in her great eyes, said: "Mr. Cameron, we have no friend here but you. Without your aid my brother might be left to die on these prairies. God has sent you to us in this sore trial. I feel that we must lean upon you. I never seemed to be so utterly helpless before."

"You are greatly exaggerating my poor services," I replied. "I am not doing anything that anyone else with sentiments of humanity in his make-up would not do. I am indeed grateful to be of service to you and

your brother, and you may be very sure that I shall do everything possible. But pray do not regard it in the exaggerated light you do."

She seemed satisfied and turned back to sit by her brother. Darkness had gathered rapidly, and as there was no moon we had to act quickly if we were to get out of our predicament that night. There did not appear to be any initiative in the company, so I suggested to the driver to take his horses, hurry on to the stopping-place and return with assistance, so that the injured Captain could be removed to shelter as soon as possible.

"I'll stop with Rawlings," I said, "till you return."

"Yes, and I'll remain also," said Ruth.

I urged her to go on with the other passengers, but she was decided and I did not press the matter further. The rest of the passengers followed the driver and I was left alone in the deepening darkness with the Captain and his sister. Our situation was as gloomy as it was novel, but I noticed that Miss Rawlings did her best to appear cheerful, and her manner undoubtedly had the effect upon her brother which she contemplated, for he, too, was remarkably courageous under the circumstances and despite the pain from which we knew that he was suffering. But as the time passed the pain in his chest lessened and he began to feel stronger and more cheerful.

"I'm not so sure, Captain," I said, after the lapse of a longer time than I thought was necessary for our companions to return with assistance, "I'm not so sure



but you could walk to the stopping-house if you were put to it. It's only about a mile and a half away."

"I should think I'd be good for that distance," he said, cheerfully; then, divining my thought, "you're afraid the others have lost their way."

"Yes, I'm inclined to that opinion," I replied. "The driver is not a bright fellow, and I was not impressed with the ability of any of the passengers to find their way out of trouble."

"If you could manage to fix up my arm a bit," said the plucky Captain, "I think I'll try." It caused him real pain, which he tried to hide from his sister and me, as we bound his broken arm across his chest, to keep it stationary while we walked.

"Now, if you'll give me your arm I'll try and stand up," said the Captain, after a brief rest.

His sister helped on one side and I on the other, and in a moment he was on his feet.

"I'm a bit dizzy," he said, "but that'll disappear, so the sooner we start the better."

I had remembered, as we rode over the hill which led to the gully where we met our mishap, seeing the stopping-house in the distance. The driver pointed it out to me, and after the upset I made a mental note of the direction. It was directly beyond the coach, reckoning the line from the point where we had laid the Captain after removing the trunk from his body. As a lad reared in the country and accustomed to the woods, I was not unfamiliar with methods of keeping the right direction. I noted that the wind was blowing squarely from the direction we wanted to go, and

so I concluded that if we kept our faces sharp to it we could not go far astray, and so we set forth.

The Captain placed his right arm across my shoulder, and by my direction leaned much of his weight upon me, whilst his sister tried to help on the other side. He bore up bravely, and although we were compelled to rest a number of times, we continued to push forward until we had covered a distance which I thought greater than was necessary to reach our destination. My fears, however, were groundless.

"There's the stopping-house," exclaimed the Captain, as we reached the summit of a small mound, and sure enough we had come straight to the place and were within a few rods of the door. We hurried forward and entered, to find a number of plainsmen and rough characters seated in the big gathering room. As we suspected, the other members of our party had missed the place and must still be wandering about the prairie in the darkness.

I noticed a deadly pallor upon the Captain's face as we entered. Poor fellow, he had borne up bravely, and no one but himself could realize what he had suffered. He sank into a chair which one of the loungers, who also noticed his condition, kindly proffered him. A warning cry from his sister caused me to spring to his assistance. His head had fallen forward, but I was just in time to save him from tumbling out of the chair onto the floor. He had fainted from sheer exhaustion and pain. Miss Rawlings was greatly disturbed in mind, but I assured her that all would be well. Rough but kindly hands

assisted in carrying him to a room in the rear, where we laid him as comfortably as we could upon a bed. There we applied restoratives and presently had the satisfaction of seeing him open his eyes.

"I guess the walk was too much for me," he whispered, weakly, after he came to himself.

"You have borne up bravely, Captain," I answered, "and now that we are safely in shelter and have you where you can be nursed, all will go well."

"Are you suffering much, Alfred dear?" asked his sister, stroking his brow.

"Yes, a good deal. My head seems strangely giddy and my arm pains me greatly. Is there no doctor at hand?"

I inquired of the landlord, who stated that the nearest physician was at Fort Pembina, twenty-five miles away.

"Then we must send for him at once. There must be no delay, as the Captain is suffering acutely. Have you any messenger that you could arrange with to go?"

"Not unless 'Mountain' Dick could be secured."

"Where is he?"

"In the room yonder."

"Bring him in."

The landlord departed, but I noticed an uncertain expression in his face which was difficult to understand. Presently he returned and reported that Dick was too badly "loaded" to comprehend what was desired.

"Take me to him."

The landlord complied, leading the way to the loungers' room, where he pointed to a besotted-looking character, with bleary, uncertain eyes, seated in a chair. Approaching him, I said, "A man's life is in danger in yonder room. Could you ride to Fort Pembina for a doctor? We will see that you are well paid for the trip."

"Who 'sha man—wash's name," and the inebriated fellow looked unutterably stupid.

"Captain Rawlings," I answered, quickly.

"A blasted mil'try chap. Can't git Mountain Dick t' help bloomin' mil'try man. One blashted Cap'n horsh-whipped me lasht year, an' I shwore I'd git even wish the breed. No, stranger, y'r bloomin' Cap'n kin die f'rol Mountain Dick cares."

"Why did the military man horsewhip you?" I asked.

"Sh' none o' y'r d—— businish," he answered, with the insolence of inebriety.

"Because he insulted a lady who had just arrived by stage from St. Paul," chimed in a lad with a strong aroma of horses, who had just entered the room and whom I took to be the stable boy.

"Yer a liar!" sung out Dick. "I wash only tryin' t' kish the laidy, an' she o't t' bin proud t' kish Mountain Dick."

Whoever the strange military man was that horsewhipped Dick, my heart went out in admiration of him. I saw that there was no use in wasting time with the fellow; he was too drunk to go, even if he were willing, and so turning from him in disgust I

asked the landlord if there was no other messenger.

"The stable boy here, whose jist came in, knows the trail, but he's too young to send out alone."

"Is there anyone here who would volunteer for the trip?" I asked, looking about at the crowd. "It may mean the Captain's life."

After a pause, as no one answered, I turned to the landlord and said, "If you'll hitch up your best team to the lightest conveyance you have, I'll go myself with the lad. There seems nothing else for it, and we cannot neglect a fellow creature under the circumstances."

"But you'll wait till daylight," said the landlord.

"Not unless it's impossible to set out now."

"Oh, there's no particular danger, but the night's cold and it's a long, dreary ride even in the day time."

"Let there be no delay in making ready, so that we may start at the earliest moment," I said.

The landlord himself went out to hitch the horses. While he was gone I hastily swallowed some food and arranged with the boy who was to be my companion to procure a fur coat for me.

"Ye'll need it gey bawd," he said, "as it grows muckle cauld aboot daybreak."

When I was all muffled and ready to start I entered the Captain's room, where Miss Rawlings was seated holding her brother's hand and bathing his face, which had grown flushed with fever caused by the pain.

"You're not going to leave us, Mr. Cameron?" she said, looking anxiously and piteously at me, as if she feared to be left alone.

"Only for a short time," I replied. "I am going to find a doctor for your brother, and as it may be quite a drive I've prepared myself, as you see, for the cold."

The look of warm gratitude that she gave me was sufficient to inspire me to undertake any expedition, however hazardous. The quiet, earnest "God bless you" that she pronounced, while her eyes spoke with an eloquence that I cannot describe, kept a glow at my heart throughout the long, dreary drive of that night. I pressed the Captain's hand as I was leaving. "Keep a brave heart, Captain, bear the pain as best you can, and rest assured that I will return with assistance as soon as possible."

I asked the landlady to carry some refreshments to the Captain, and at the same time to see that Miss Rawlings partook of supper, as she must be worn and hungry, and then, springing into the buggy, we were off.

## CHAPTER IX.

### *WEE SANDY'S SURMISE.*

THE night was cold, the trail was dreary beyond description, but somehow my heart was warm, and I experienced a strange joy of soul, a sense of mental exaltation which I could account for on no possible hypothesis, as I had quite settled it with myself that Miss Rawlings could never be anything to me. On one occasion I found myself repeating her name "Ruth—R-u-t-h," why it tasted very sweet to me now. I thought it strange that I had never discovered and appreciated the beauty of the name when I used to read the story about Ruth and Naomi gleaning in the harvest fields of Boaz. The name had no particular charm for me then, not more than a score of other names, but when I came to think of it and to repeat it a few times now, it was positively beautiful; there was something about it suggestive of generosity, of lofty sentiment—nay, of majesty. I wondered why all the queens had not been named Ruth. How commonplace Cleopatra, Elizabeth, Mary, Carolina and even Victoria seemed, compared with Ruth. I was not sentimental. Indeed, I had settled it all with myself that I was painfully matter-of-fact, so away with thoughts of Ruth; I would banish her from my mind. But her face and her form came back upon me with a rush, in spite of my determination and my quite

settled aversion to women. Finally I concluded that her presence on my mental pathway was due to the unhappy accident that befel her brother and in connection with which I was making this nocturnal journey. Yes, that was the explanation; how strange it did not occur to me sooner! Under the circumstances, therefore, I concluded that it was quite legitimate and eminently natural for my mind to dwell upon Ruth. Ruth! How strangely the repetition of the name set my blood tingling! And so I gave free scope to my imagination. I opened the sentimental throttle, so to speak, and the thrilling speed that I acquired, the emotional semaphores that I passed, the ecstatic curves that I turned, were bewildering even to myself. What would Simon think of me?

My train, however, was telescoped and sent smashing off the track by a remark from my young Scotch companion, of whose existence during the past two hours I had been completely oblivious.

"Ye'll no' be ain o' thae bodies wha's thinkin' o' stairtin' a hog ranch near th' Fort?"

I laughed outright. "Why, my little man," said I, "what on earth put that thought into your head?"

"It was gey natural I suld think sae, for I hae been telt on a' sides that it tak's a muckle lot o' thocht tae tackle a hog ranch, an I'se be sure ye ha'e thocht hours wi'oot a single word tae Wee Sandy. If ye was'na thinkin' o' a hog ranch, I'se canna speir what it was."

"I'm afraid I've been a very poor companion," I said, putting my arm about the boy's shoulder and patting it kindly.



"Weel, that's no lee," answered Sandy, who was not disposed to make friends on the instant, after the slight that I had put upon him by my long silence. Then he added, "Ah'm no' sayin' but wi' th'accident tae yer frien', an' the worry of stairtin' a hog ranch, ye ha'e had muckle tae keep yer mind busy wi'oot wastin' words on Wee Sandy."

I protested that I had no intention of starting a hog ranch or any other kind of a ranch.

"Then it maun jüst be that yer in luv, like sae mony louts I ken, for there are but twa things I've ivver heerd o' that'll keep a man thinkin' hard fer twa morta! 'oors, an' that's a hog ranch an' bein' in luv. I canna bide thae louts when they're in luv," added Sandy, with emphasis, as if he thoroughly understood what he was talking about.

"How far are we from the Fort?" I asked, changing the subject.

"I suld'na think we're mair than twa miles."

I tried to make amends to Wee Sandy for my poor companionship during the early part of the journey by chatting with him freely until we drove up to the square in front of the Fort.

## CHAPTER X.

### *THE DOCTOR.*

It was still very early, so we drove to the largest stopping house, put the horses up ourselves, and quietly entered the hostelry, which was unlocked. We sat in the loungers' room, which was not uncomfortable, to await the opening of the house. It was not long till the porter appeared.

"Where does your doctor live?" was the first question I addressed to him.

"Just across the trail opposite the Fort," he answered, "but he started for Fort Garry yesterday. They've been having a bit of trouble up there, and he thought there might be more work for him than there is here, for he hasn't had a call—except to the bar—for this many's the day."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed in despair, thinking of the suffering Captain, "and have you no other doctor?"

"No, that we haven't."

I was quite undone, and throwing myself in a chair gazed vacantly and despairingly into the fireplace as I thought of the poor Captain and his anxious sister.

"Is there nobody that can set a broken limb?" I finally ventured.

Suddenly the porter broke out with an exclamation. "Why, yes, yes!—what was I thinking about? There's a man with a party that arrived from Fort Garry last night. I heard them call him Doctor—Doctor Schultz, I'm sure it was. Perhaps he could do the trick for you."

"Take me to his room." I followed the porter upstairs, and we soon received a response to our loud and impatient knock.

"Who's there?"

"A man in distress."

"What's the matter?"

"A broken limb."

"Quite sure it's nothing worse?"

"I think not."

"Then it's not very serious."

"Can you set broken limbs?"

"Why, of course I can; that's part of my business."

With a great sigh of relief I explained the situation, talking in the hallway while the doctor was dressing. Soon he opened the door and invited me to enter while he questioned me. I was struck with his appearance. He possessed a tall, commanding figure, a keen, penetrating eye, and a face that expressed great force and determination. He was a man that anyone would single out as an intrepid, resourceful specimen of his race, a man to be reckoned with, a man born to dominate.

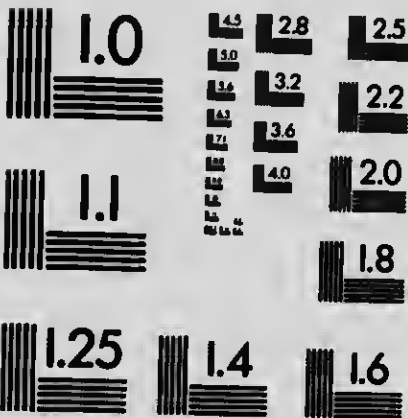
"Where is your patient?" he asked, quickly.

"A good many leagues from here, Doctor, I regret to say."



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"Oh, that's different"—

"Yes, but the case is urgent, and if you would excuse my persistence I would earnestly beg you not to delay."

"Oh, we'll not delay," replied the doctor, "but as we have a long journey ahead we shall have to make proper preparations, otherwise we could not accomplish our purpose. The horses must be fed and we must breakfast ourselves. But I'll promise you that no time shall be lost."

I liked his businesslike style.

"Captain Locksley!" he shouted, going to the staircase and calling upstairs in a voice that doubtless awakened the entire household. "Ho, Captain Locksley, up, like a good fellow. There's no time to be lost. A fellowman lies injured and I must go to him at once. Your best team, Captain. Have them ready in three-quarters of an hour."

"Ay, ay, Doctor," came the quick response.

"And, Captain, rouse your good wife when you're at it, and have her prepare something to eat. We cannot drive so far on empty stomachs, Captain."

In a few minutes the Captain (half the men in this country appeared to be either captains, majors or colonels) was down, had the fire lit and the horses fed. His wife followed quickly and it was no time until we were on the trail hurrying towards the wounded Captain. Wee Sandy was instructed to follow at his leisure when his team was rested.

If I chafed during the night trip to the Fort, I was amply repaid for it by the return journey. It was a

mental tonic to talk with the Doctor. He knew all about the plains, was literally running over with incidents of Western life and Western lore, and his mind appeared to be a perfect reservoir of information pertaining to the country. He was the man of all men that it was not only desirable but essential for me to meet, and for nearly three hours I listened to him talk. He was in capital spirits and seemed to enjoy talking.

"I have rarely encountered such receptive soil," he remarked to me, half apologetically, as we neared our journey's end, "and if I have talked to you incessantly you'll forgive me."

"Forgive you, doctor!" I exclaimed, "why you've entertained and instructed me as I could scarcely have deemed possible in the space of time. I expect to spend some time on the plains myself, and your experiences are sure to profit me."

We were about four miles from the stopping house when the Doctor, whose keen eye appeared to detect every object on the plains, drew a small field-glass from his pocket, and bidding the driver stop a moment, stood up in the vehicle and, after looking intently for some time, said, "Why, I'm blest if there isn't a strange-looking caravan wandering aimlessly over the prairie!"

It suddenly flashed upon me that it might be the stage-driver and passengers, who were benighted after the mishap, and who might have been lost ever since.

"Is it possible to make out the character of the wanderers through the field-glass?" I asked.

"I think not; but you may try if you like, although I doubt if your eyes are better than mine."

I tried the glass, but the figures were so indistinct that I could not make them out.

"Drive on, Tom," said the Doctor, "and we'll have a chance of observing them at closer range soon, as they are moving in the direction of the trail."

I explained my suspicion as to who the party was, having previously related, when telling about Captain Rawlings' injuries, the particulars of the mishap to the stage.

We had bowled along a mile or so when the Doctor said: "Pull up, Tom, a moment, till we take another peep at yon caravan."

"Yes, Cameron," he said, after a moment's survey of the party, "I guess those are your belated fellow-passengers all right. Here, have a look yourself."

"You're right, Doctor. I recognize the coach driver and the fat Irishman, and the big Yankee with the maps which he is still carrying. They see us and are making to intercept us."

A short drive and we were beside them. When the situation was explained, and they all realized that they were safe and within a mile or two of shelter and security, each one yielded, as members of the human race always do, to the characteristics that dominate them in their normal state.

The driver, who had never abated his profanity throughout the night, continued to swear in his most artistic fashion. My brief sojourn on the plains was provocative of a certain kind of admiration for the



originality and picturesqueness of western profanity. The Irishman, who had had frequent recourse to prayer and the invocation of the Virgin and all the saints to deliver him from the fate that he was sure had overtaken him, now vied with the driver in the volume and originality of his oaths. The big Yankee, who had maintained a discreet silence and refused to commit himself, in order to be able either to swear or pray as the exigencies of the adventure might call for, now threw in his lot with the driver and the Irishman, and the volleys of refined profanity, punctuated with airy illustration, and excursions into all the ramifications of Hades, aroused even the admiration of the Doctor, who had lived amongst such characters for many years.

"If we could only bottle it up, Cameron," he said, "there'd be enough sulphur to start a match factory at the Fort."

"Do all plairs swear like that?" I asked.

"Bless you, . . . Most of 'em are much worse. There's a swearing club at the Fort where the liveliest kind of competitions are indulged in, and where it is necessary to pass a qualifying examination that would arouse the envy of Lucifer himself. Unless the driver and the Irishman and Yankee could improve on this morning's exhibition they would stand a poor chance of matriculating," and the Doctor laughed heartily.

A brisk drive of fifteen minutes brought us to the stopping house, and with the least possible delay we hurried to Captain Rawlings' side. His faithful sister was still in attendance. She had never left him

except for a moment to procure water or refreshments. It is difficult to say to which of the two the arrival of the Doctor afforded most relief. The girl gave me a look of radiant gratitude that amply repaid me for the journey.

The captain had had a pretty bad night of it, having suffered great pain from his arm, and such was his weakness from the loss of blood from the chest wound that he was almost in a state of collapse. Indeed he had swooned two or three times during the night. However, the arrival of the Doctor brought cheer to his soul, and he greeted the physician with all the warmth that his weakened state would permit. The Doctor, accustomed to such scenes, had stripped off his coat and waistcoat, rolled up his shirt sleeves, produced his instruments and bandages, and was ready for his task.

It took a long time to adjust the fractured bones in the arm, especially with the member swollen as it was, but the superior skill of the surgeon overcame all obstacles and in an hour and a half the arm was in splints. Attention was then directed to the chest wounds, and it was found that a couple of ribs were broken and one had penetrated the inner wall of the chest. This was the cause of the great pain. It taxed the Captain's endurance to the limit to have the ribs adjusted. He swooned several times, but, recovering, bore up manfully throughout the ordeal.

"Thank God," he murmured, with a low sigh, when the Doctor concluded his work and proceeded to resume his garments. His sister looked the relief which she surely experienced.

"You should be all right, Captain Rawlings, in a month or so if you will but rest quietly where you are."

"A month!" exclaimed the Captain, in a weak voice. "Doctor, I cannot endure it here a week."

"Oh, you'll get patience and grace to do it," said the Doctor, "if you'll only be rational. The wound in the chest especially makes it necessary for you to be very quiet for a time. I should like to stop a day or two with you, but I have pressing business at Fort Garry that must be attended to, and shall have to start in the morning."

"I expect to go to Fort Garry myself," said the Captain, "just as soon as I can move. I, too, have rather pressing business in that country."

"Well, you must not talk about it now. The strictest quietness and most complete rest are what, as your physician, I enjoin upon you."

After the operation I joined the Doctor, by his own request, in a short walk over the prairie.

"Do you think I could be of any service to the Rawlings' if I remained," I timidly asked the Doctor, least perchance the Captain's condition might make it my duty to stand by them.

"Oh, there is absolutely nothing further that can be done for the man. He is young and full of vigor and will soon pick up. If he remains quiet all will be well. In a few weeks he will be fit for the road again."

I am not sure that the Doctor's answer pleased me. I think I should have deemed him much more humane

if he had urged the necessity of my remaining. At least, that is how I tried to reason it with myself. Looking back now at the Doctor's words, I am prepared to acquit him of the slightest lack of consideration. The Doctor was not a mind-reader and could not detect what I would not have been prepared to admit to myself, that there was anything in existence that I would permit to interfere with my mission.

"Then you think the young lady—Miss Rawlings," I said, hesitatingly, "is perfectly competent to take care of her brother."

The Doctor eyed me curiously and nodded his assent. "Perfectly," he said, with an emphatic accent on the word.

I didn't mind so much the Doctor's opinion, but I thought he might have refrained from emphasizing the word so emphatically,—but then how was he to know? I thought a while before venturing it, but I finally decided to risk it. "Do you suppose a lady is perfectly safe in a wild place like this, without proper guardians?"

"Cameron," said the Doctor, turning upon me sharply, and with a merry knowing twinkle in his eye, "I think you had better stay. The people who keep the stopping-house are eminently reliable and respectable, and the days of midnight attacks by redskins or bandits are gone by, but for all that it looks as if you could spend a few weeks here most enjoyably." He emphasized the last word even more strongly than he had the word "perfectly" in a former sentence.

I was abashed, and fancied that I felt annoyed,

because I thought the Doctor was ungenerous in his suspicions. If he but knew how deeply he was in error, I thought,—but why tell him?

“If I were a youth myself,” added the Doctor, “I wouldn’t mind spending six weeks looking into those glorious eyes and acting as fellow nurse to a stricken brother.”

I felt that I had allowed the Doctor to get the best of me and that I must appear very ridiculous in his eyes, and besides, the mere mention of Miss Rawlings’ name in that connection impressed me as sacrilege. I think the Doctor read my feelings, for he instantly changed the subject.

“When do you expect to go north?” he asked.

“Just as soon as I can get away,” I answered, “for I have important business in your country.”

“What’s the matter with coming along with me to-morrow?” he asked.

Here was my chance to demonstrate to the Doctor that he had misjudged me, and it was also an opportunity of vindicating myself with one Lachlan Cameron, whose good opinion I was so anxious to possess, so I promptly accepted the offer. I did not, however, as promptly experience that deep sense of relief and exuberance at discovering by my action that I was as free as air and had but one care on earth, namely, the accomplishment of the mission upon which I was bent.

## CHAPTER XI.

### *PHILOSOPHY AND LOVE.*

My early training had instilled self-confidence in me, and this, coupled with the natural egotism of my race, had led me to conclude, as I walked back over the trail by the side of the Doctor, that I had myself under complete control, that I had so schooled myself that I could discuss at will any feeling or sentiment that might arise in my breast. But I was only a boy and I had my lessons to learn.

After we had partaken of an early supper the Doctor and I were sitting in the Captain's bedroom, whilst his sister busied herself adjusting the furniture and fixings in the apartment so as to render it as attractive as possible.

"I think your sister requires a rest almost as badly as yourself, Captain," said the Doctor.

"It's fresh air I need most," said the young girl. "It's a long time since I have spent so many hours without exercise."

"You need a walk, dear," said Alfred. "Mr. Cameron will go with you, and the Doctor will talk to me."

"I should think Mr. Cameron must be very tired himself, as he has had no rest in twenty-four hours."

"On the contrary," I said, "the long drive was refreshing and restful as well, and if you'll do me the

honor of allowing me to be your escort, I shall promise not to lose you on the trail, but to bring you back in safety." The brother smiled his approbation as his sister bent over and kissed him before we passed out of the house.

It was one of those ideal May evenings that last with the twilight till almost ten o'clock. The grass was green and the foliage luxuriant. The frogs sang their song merrily. Peculiar taste as it may seem, I always loved the "music" of the frogs in the spring time. Poor little creatures, why shouldn't they sing? Frozen solid during the long winter months, it is small wonder that they should sing when they thaw out and when the sunshine warms them back to life. We took the main trail leading south. The turf was hard and level, and as the south wind blew softly in our faces, tempering the atmosphere, which for some days had been somewhat chilly, we both instinctively realized the beauty and comfort of the scene.

"How I love these gardens of the desert!" said Miss Rawlings. "Look yonder at the sun sinking in the west; was ever such a glorious sight!"

The great orb that had done his herculean work all day was pouring out in prodigal profusion the richest of his deep red rays. We both stood transfixed as we watched the great deep blazing ball drop slowly into the earth just as he drops into the liquid horizon at sea.

"Miss Rawlings," I said, admiringly, "you have a poetic nature, and I think you impart the contagion to me, for I do not think I ever fully realized before the beauty of a sunset."

"Everything is beautiful that God has anything to do with," she answered, quietly, and then continued: "The trouble with our race is that most of them spend their lives in searching for something beautiful, for something to please, for something to satisfy, when all they have to do is to cease their search and look about them and they will find the beauty and pleasure at hand. We poor mortals are always chasing the unattainable, but I suppose that is due to the finiteness of our minds. To me there is no more pathetic thought than the absolute knowledge that practically every member of the race is wearing out in the struggle to attain a goal that will never be reached, and which even if reached would not satisfy. Could it honestly be said, if all hearts were read, that one victory out of five thousand is a real one? The price paid, often in moral surrender, is usually so great that the victory is, after all, miserable failure. No victory accomplished at the expense of a defeat to a fellow-mortal is a true victory, it is worse than failure; just as every advance unjustly made at the expense of some fellow-mortal is no advance, but a retrograde step, a step that if not repented of and atoned for will ultimately sink the offending one to perdition."

I saw that Miss Rawlings was a philosopher, and I encouraged her to continue, for I realized that she was presenting truths that seem to be forgotten or overlooked in our everyday life.

"Speaking of the struggle in which all human beings voluntarily engage," Miss Rawlings went on, "the sad part of it is that so few even approach the



darling object of their ambition. But perhaps," she added, after a little reflection, "it is better that mankind should have some object in life, some incentive to work for, something, even though it be a chimera, to chase. Without this, might there not be danger of life degenerating into a mere aimless existence?"

"There is so much to be found," I said, "that is good if we will but open our eyes and look about."

"Oh, I'm so glad you have a grip of that paramount though simple truth," said Miss Rawlings, enthusiastically. "I have found the world full of good, of the beautiful, of the sublime. If you cannot always find it in the human race you can find it in nature. Just look at those clouds with all the tints of the rainbow. No inspired brush could produce such marvellous beauty; and yet we see our fellow-creatures grovelling along with eyes bent on the mark. It seems quite natural for the beasts to keep their eyes on the soil, but for us, whom God commanded to stand erect, and walk with head uplifted, surely it is intended that we should look skyward, 'lift our eyes to the hills,' as the Psalmist says, and if we must have communion let it be with the stars, or, better still, with Him who made the stars."

So we walked for some miles down the trail, and as the fair young philosopher talked about the sky, the stars, and then about Him who made the stars, her glorious eyes shone with a light that could only be kindled in Paradise. Her pure soul seemed to elevate mine, if not to her own level, at least to a plane from which I, too, seemed to realize something of the

lofty beauties about which she discoursed. Whilst her words enthralled me and cast a strange spell over me, when she ceased to speak, and the spell was broken, I began to think of the great disparity that existed between us. But she soon set me at my ease by saying jauntily:

"I suppose, Mr. Cameron, you will set me down as a pious enthusiast because I have talked so freely to-night; but please do not, for I am a very matter-of-fact girl, with most of the infirmities of my sex, and with probably more defects than the average."

"Thank Heaven for that!" I exclaimed warmly, and without considering for a moment my words.

Miss Rawlings laughed loud and long. "Why, Mr. Cameron, do you know what you said?"

I was so ravished with the music of her laughter that I promptly confessed that I had not weighed my words.

"Why, you thanked Heaven because I possessed all the weaknesses and follies of my sex."

"Did I?"

"Yes, you did."

"Then I repeat it. If you were very much different we poor mortals would look upon you as being in the same category as the angels, and we love to have you mortal like ourselves." I was certainly coming along. What would Simon think?

She stopped in the trail, and looking laughingly into my eyes, said, "Then you would not like to have us" (she modestly used the plural number) "angels?"

"No," I said, bluntly, "I prefer you" (I used the singular) "a little lower than the angels—be it ever so little."

Again she laughed her ringing, musical laugh. She turned her great eyes toward me, and as I looked upon her fair form and saw the wealth of hair streaming over her snow-white neck I experienced a strange sensation. I was at one transfixed. I had gone through the world in the most cold and matter-of-fact manner. Sentiment had been rigidly excluded from my existence, and yet here I was, after a couple of days' acquaintance with the girl, smitten in the most absolute fashion. I tried to make myself believe that it was all an illusion, that I, the cold, unsentimental Lachlan Cameron, of Bruce county, was still complete master of myself. But it was a futile task. As I looked at Miss Rawlings—at Ruth—I was seized with a wild desire to take her in my arms, to tell her that she was my life, my soul, my Heaven; that I loved her madly, distractedly; that I could never separate from her, that I would gladly fly to some far-off island with her and there spend æons as her bond slave if necessary, if she would but allow me.

Perhaps she read in my eyes that a tumultuous storm was raging in my breast, for she placed her hand gently on my arm and said, quietly: "Mr. Cameron, I fear it is growing late; perhaps we should hurry home. Alfred may be wanting me."

I was awed and for a time silent at the revelation that the nature of my feelings had made to me. I

offered my arm, which she readily accepted, and we resumed our walk towards the stopping house.

"Miss Rawlings," I said, "I've accepted the Doctor's invitation to accompany him to Fort Garry to-morrow."

She gave a slight start, as if surprised, and it warmed my heart to distinguish a slight tone of regret as she said, "Oh, I—we—my brother and I, shall miss you so much. I had hoped that you would be with us a few days."

"Confound the Doctor!" I thought to myself, "why should he have asked me to go with him, and why was I unlucky enough to consent to go." Then to Miss Rawlings, I said, "Well, really I should have liked to stay with your brother and yourself. I asked the Doctor if I could be of any further use to you, but he said not, and then proposed that I should go with him. I accepted, but I'll tell him to-night that I sha'n't go."

"Oh, no, no! you must not do anything of the kind. My brother can get along all right. I'm an excellent nurse and can take care of him." Then, regretfully, "The only difficulty will be the loneliness of it all. Until Alfred is able to walk the time will drag so heavily."

"Won't you let me stay?" I pleaded, ashamed of my rapid degeneration.

"No, indeed, you've done too much already. What would have happened my poor brother and me but for you Heaven alone can tell."

"Pray do not think of that," I urged. "My ser-

vices have been entirely too slight to deserve a second thought. It was only a trifling act of humanity which anyone would gladly render," and then I added (I was always too precipitate), "and besides, I am amply repaid; the incident has enabled me to know you."

"Oh, you do not know me yet, Mr. Cameron, or you might change your mind about what you appear to regard as the fortuitous nature of the accident."

I should have liked to blurt it out right there. I wanted to declare on the spot that I was madly in love with her, but the Scotch in me suggested delay, although I have learned since that in love affairs my fellow-countrymen are none too canny. I feared to leave Miss Rawlings without some declaration, or at least some understanding that we should meet again, but how I was to bring it about I could not determine, and we had reached the house before any suggestion occurred to me, so that I said in plain, blunt language as she stood on the door-step:

"I shall not go in for a moment, Miss Rawlings. I want to take a turn alone in the moonlight. I've something that needs to be thought out."

"Oh, you are thinking of that unnatural uncle of yours."

"No," I said, "I'm thinking of someone a great deal nearer the angels than he. The fact is, Miss Rawlings, I want to think about you for a time."

"About me!" she said, in a tone of surprise. "Why, what on earth can you want to think of me for?"

"I shall have to say good-bye in the morning, unless you allow me to remain for a time, and I would not like to think that we shall not meet again."

She gave a slight start and said earnestly, "Why, certainly not. We shall surely meet again; if not in this country, I shall have my brother procure an invitation to have you visit our home in Quebec."

There was at least something in that, but it seemed a long way off. She paused on the door-step as if expecting I had something further to say, and I said, in a tone from which I could not eliminate a slight touch of sadness:

"We are both going to a land where there is danger, and it may be that we shall not see each other again. Would you mind my thinking of you as one who has said sacred things to inspire me; as one who has afforded me a glimpse of the Divine, as—as a very dear friend. My way through life has been a bit lonely, for, as you know, I've been an orphan from childhood, and without kin."

She offered me her hand. I stooped reverently and kissed it. She was silent, but I noticed the moisture in her eyes as I lifted my hat. Then I turned and strode rapidly away down the trail, with a strange tumult of feelings doing battle within.

## CHAPTER XII.

### *"WILL YE NO' COME BACK AGAIN?"*

It must have been after midnight when I returned to the stopping house. I was weary in body, but my brain was in a whirl about the girl that had so suddenly entered into my life and now bulked so largely in it. I had hoped during my walk that I could reason it all fully and argue myself out of what I regarded as my folly, but it was of no avail. The more I tried to argue myself away from Miss Rawlings the tighter did the bands of love appear to become riveted, and when I lifted the latch and passed into the stopping house I was in a more hopeless condition than ever. The inmates had all retired and the house was in perfect quietness, so I took the lamp, that had evidently been left on the table in the lounging room for me along with a few words scrawled on a piece of paper, "Take the first room to the right upstairs," and hurried to bed.

It was long before sleep came to me. The personality of the beautiful Miss Rawlings was constantly before me, and, to be frank, I think I preferred wakefulness with Miss Rawlings' image with me than sleep with the fair one absent. At last tired nature triumphed and I slept, but I dreamed of the girl, so that she was not absent even in unconsciousness. I dreamed that we were engaged, that we were

married, and that on our wedding day my Uncle Casper had carried her off and she was lost to me. Then I awoke with a start and it was a long time before I dropped to sleep again. This time I slept and slept soundly, no fair image disturbing me.

The big bell had been ringing loudly for last call to breakfast, about half past nine, when I started up and looked at my watch. Then I dressed hastily and descended to the lounging room to find the Doctor, who immediately proceeded to banter me.

"Thought perhaps you and Miss Rawlings had started to walk to Fort Pembina."

I took his banter good-naturedly and asked after the Captain.

"Had a splendid night of it and is perfectly normal now. Slept quite a portion of the time, and now asks if he cannot move in a week."

"Then you think there is no necessity for me to remain," I said, realizing that my chances were slim.

"I guess we could arrange to break a leg or two if you are really anxious to sojourn here for a spell!"

"How long before you will be ready to start?" I asked.

"I have ordered the horses for ten."

"Then I'll be ready," and I hurried to the dining-room and hastily swallowed some refreshments. The few minutes that remained to me before our start I spent with the Captain and Miss Rawlings. His eyes beamed with kindness and gratitude as I expressed the regret that I experienced in leaving him.

"You've done me a good turn, Cameron," he said,



earnestly, "in fact, you most likely saved my life, and you may be sure that neither I nor my sister shall ever forget you."

"Nonsense, Captain," I said, "I've done nothing worth mentioning, and, as I said to Miss Rawlings last night, the pleasure that I have found in making your acquaintance is ample reward."

"But we shall surely see something of you in the North-West. See if you and my sister cannot devise some plan by which we can keep in touch even in that country of magnificent distances."

I could have hugged the Captain for those words, and when I glanced at his sister she, too, looked pleased, but dropped her eyes when they met mine, while a blush crept into her face.

"You can think of some plan and communicate it to Dr. Schultz, whom we all hope to see at Fort Garry. I trust that we shall be able to go north much sooner than the Doctor says."

"It would be safer to follow his advice," I said, "and take no risk."

"Oh, I'll be out of here in a couple of weeks," said the Captain, as I bent over him to press his hand and say good-bye, "and if I don't run across you away up there, I'll be grievously disappointed."

His eyes followed me and Miss Rawlings, who accompanied me to the door. She walked out with me fifty yards or so whilst Wee Sandy was hitching the restless ponies. Bless his little Scotch heart, I think he understood the situation and took his time,

although he always stoutly protested he "could'na bide thae louts that are in luve."

"Well," I said, looking into Miss Rawlings' eyes and taking her hand. To save my life I could think of nothing else to say, and I felt so strongly that something should be said.

"Well," she answered, half sadly, half jocularly, for there was some merriment in her eyes. I think she divined something of my feelings. I am bound to make the frank confession that there is nothing more awkward, nothing more stupid, than a young "lout" (I think Wee Sandy's term fills the bill) in love. I marvel that the young girls, who have so much more gumption and adaptability, ever bide them.

"I'm going away," I said, somewhat vacantly and stupidly, and no doubt with an accent that must have conveyed the idea to her mind that it must of necessity be a matter of some concern to her. Undoubtedly it was that Scotch egotism of mine.

"I'm so sorry," and she spoke earnestly and kindly. It was far more than I deserved, and her tone brought me to myself.

"But I don't want to go," I broke out, like a petulant boy. "I can scarcely bide the thought of leaving you."

I did not intend to say much, but I plead inexperience and the rashness of youth. A slight expression of pain overspread her face, in which there was so much of the mature woman.

"I forgive you for talking to me thus," she said, "because I have seen sufficient of you to know that

you are only a boy—although I think a good one," she added, after a pause.

"But I'm a big boy—a reasonably old boy—a boy that has always had to think as a man, and that should make a difference," I pleaded, in extenuation, and fearful lest she should mistake my feeling for that of boyish fancy.

She smiled at my earnestness, and extending her hand, said: "Mr. Cameron, I am deeply interested in you, and I think you have that in you that will make you a good man. Follow your noblest ideals, set your standard high, and if you fall short the result will not be as disappointing as if you had set forward with lower standards." And then, looking up into my eyes, she said: "We are but children yet, and have only known each other two days. Let us leave ourselves in God's hands. If it is right that we should meet again we shall meet in His own good time. And now good-bye. I see the Doctor cracking his whip uneasily. Keep a stout heart and be true to the memory of your ancestors and to the mission upon which you are bent."

She allowed me to raise her hand to my lips and the next moment I sprang into the seat by the Doctor and we were off. The breeze, which was with us, brought the notes of that old Scotch air, chanted by Wee Sandy, "Will ye no' come back again?" I could have kicked the boy. The Doctor said nothing, but I observed a smile playing quietly about his lips.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### *PIERRE DUMONT, THE GUIDE.*

DURING the drive to Pembina and then on to Fort Garry I communicated to Dr. Schultz such fragments about my business as seemed necessary in order to procure his advice on the best means of carrying out my purpose.

“You’ll need a reliable, courageous and experienced guide, and an Indian that you can count upon remaining faithful to you. The latter can, if necessary, act as a go-between with his own people and thus keep you posted as to the doings of the enemy.”

“Perhaps you could suggest a guide?”

The Doctor thought deeply for a time, and then, striking his knee emphatically with his open palm, said: “I know the very man that will suit you. He’s been employed for years carrying mail packets for the Hudson’s Bay Company in the far north. He is cool-headed, courageous, crafty and resourceful, and if he enlists with you, you can count upon his loyalty to the death.”

“What’s his name?”

“Pierre Dumont. He belongs to an old family whose name and acts are associated with the early history of the country. It has always seemed to me that there was an instinct about this man Pierre that was more than human. I have often travelled the

plains with him and I never knew him to fail. I recall an occasion when, crossing a country broken with wooded stretches, we got hopelessly lost, and being without compass, our case appeared desperate. 'Well, Pierre,' I said, 'I guess 's all up with us.'

"Pierre answered not a word, but smoked deeply, great clouds issuing from his mouth. After a brief space he struck off through the woods, motioning to me to follow. He found a great tree near the edge of the wood that was leaning. This enabled him to climb it easily. When he reached a height of about twenty-five feet he stood up and turned his head in this direction and that until he had boxed the compass, sniffing strongly all the while. At length he fixed his face steadily in one direction for a time. Then he said slowly: "Smoke, Doctor, smoke! Pierre smell smoke. Come, we mus' hurry, soon be dark." Leading the way, Pierre hurried me along and in half an hour we walked straight into an Indian encampment, where we received shelter and succor.

"Can you help me get Pierre?" I asked.

"Yes, he has just returned to the Fort and is available."

There is much that I should set down about my sojourn at Fort Garry, which lasted about three weeks. I never admitted even to myself that I prolonged my stay in the expectation of arrivals from Fort Pembina, and I am not prepared now to make any such admission. I should like to tell of some of the characters I encountered, and the kindness shown me by Dr. Schultz. He secured Pierre Dumont for me, and

Pierre found a reliable Indian. The guide furnished me with a catalogue of everything needed for the expedition and helped me in every possible manner to complete the necessary outfit.

When I was ready to set forth I felt like a person accoutred for a military expedition. I purchased a couple of powerful revolvers and a supply of ammunition, and as I had always excelled at college at single-stick practice, I thought it not unwise to take along a sword that was proffered me by Dr. Schultz. In addition, we (Pierre, the Indian, and I) were each provided with a good rifle. No matter what the exigencies at Moose Lodge might call for, we required arms on the plains, especially for the game we should encounter, and, it might be, to defend ourselves from possible attack by small bands of marauding Indians, who were sometimes abroad at this period.

Let me minutely describe the members of the "expedition" as we set forth upon the trail leading west from Fort Garry that early June morning.

As to myself, and I recall that I have not previously furnished any inventory of my physical qualities: A figure six feet one inch in height, straight limbed, lithe and supple, without a superfluous pound of flesh; shoulders broad and powerful, arms long and sinewy, chest full and deep, eyes dark blue, and an ample shock of chestnut hair. I once accidentally overheard Simon describing me to a friend. I afterwards consulted the looking-glass to compare notes and check up his veracity, which suffered sadly on that occasion. But then Simon was very fond of me and I found no

difficulty in excusing his exaggeration. My own impression with regard to myself at that time was that I was angular and awkward, that I was too tall, that my hair was too thick, that I was too thin, and when I compared myself with other young men I made up my mind unalterably that I was not fitted for courtly society, that I was too blunt and plain of speech, and that my proper sphere was where work and hardship prevailed.

Pierre Dumont: A thick-set, well-knit frame, five feet and a half tall. A well-shaped head, covered with a mass of straight, jet-black hair, shorn straight across as if cut with a cleaver. A pair of deep black eyes, with that steely glitter characteristic of the French half-breed, especially if the owner has been drinking. In Pierre's case, however, the glitter was not due to the use of intoxicants, for the guide was a reasonably abstemious man. His head rested on a thick, strong neck that was too short. In his ears he wore a pair of small gold rings, which he sometimes claimed had been put there to improve his eyesight. His bronzed complexion resembled that of a gypsy. He would weigh about one hundred and seventy-five pounds, and was a man of forty years. He possessed untiring energy, great craftiness, and indomitable courage, as I discovered later. He had little to say, but was an excellent listener.

Mug-a-winosis, the Indian (Pierre abbreviated it to "Muggins," by which handy nickname we always addressed him), belonged to the Stoney tribe, which had long roamed the great stretches at the foot-hills of

the Rockies. Of the various tribes that for centuries were the lords of the soil in the Great Lone Land, it is doubtful if there was another that possessed the fine qualities of the Stoneys, as the early missionaries testify. Muggins had come down the Athabasca and Saskatchewan rivers from Old Fort Assiniboine the previous year, as pilot for a small party of placer gold-seekers in the Peace River country. The party was joined by Pierre Dumont at Cumberland House. Pierre promised to see that Muggins was returned to his people, hence his membership in my party. Muggins was a great, tall fellow, and so closely resembled me in stature that Pierre christened us "de twins." His black hair hung in greasy abundance over his shoulders; Muggins was proud of his hair and used to dress it every Sunday. The sloping forehead did not mean lack of mental strength, but was rather characteristic of his race. He had a pleasant face, from which was absent the gloom and taciturnity that usually characterizes Indian physiognomy. He did not know his exact age, but he could not be above twenty-eight years. He had picked up quite a few English words and not a few Anglo-Saxon ideas. Although he made himself understood by me with difficulty, he and Pierre could talk freely, as the latter was familiar with the language of a number of Indian tribes. When necessary I had Pierre interpret for me.

By advice of Pierre, we travelled on shaganappi ponies, taking with us a small tent and only a few articles, such as tea, flour, etc., that were deemed in-



dispensable. Pierre knew the country and the Hudson's Bay posts, where provisions could be procured, and as game was plentiful and the resources of Muggins unlimited, we did not expect to suffer. Starting at noon, we reached by the following night the point where the flourishing town of Portage La Prairie now stands. Pierre had a number of relatives residing in the neighborhood, and after supper he called upon them. He returned hurriedly to the tent and announced that there had been a wedding in the circle and the inevitable celebration was being held.

"Ma gosh, dat's good tam she's geeve hus. Beaucoup fer heat, an' beaucoup fer drink, an', ma gosh, she's dance hall nite. Plaintee nice gurl fer you han' me an' good-lookin' squaw fer Muggins."

I think Muggins must have understood what Pierre said, for his black eyes glowed and his face brightened (he had a wonderfully expressive face) as he said:

"Cha wug mi, cha wug mi."

I looked inquiringly at Pierre.

"He want me fer spik you fer let 'im go."

"By all means," I said, "let us all go. I should very much like to witness the celebration of a wedding among the natives of your land."

And so piloted by the happy Pierre, we started for the scene of "hostilities," a term that is used advisedly, as the culminating sequel will show. On the way, Pierre, who, during his brief previous visit had learned some interesting particulars about the nuptial event, detailed them to me.

"W'at you call dat—de victims?" said Pierre, with a knowing grin.

"The principals," I said, correcting him.

"Well, wateffer she's name be. De principals she's be big Hingun named Meshqueggan (dat means Red Clout). She's took crazy notion 'bout two, tree, four weeks ago git marry, fer fear hall de gurl she's gone; as if dare not plaintee go roun' lookin fer big sucker like Red Clout hall de tam. More suckers an' better ones hon de sea dan she's be ivver caught. Red Clout, she's hawfully hugly lookin' mans, mak fright de girl wen furst he's look. Well, he mak tracks fer wigwam Virginie Deloçine (dats ma second cousin), but de fadder an' de modder she's drive Red Clout hoff. Dey's tell him can't spare Virginie, she's cut de wood, she's mak de cookin', she's look haffer de chil'ren, an' she's mos' useful hall roun'. An' beside, Virginie, she's pretty girl, an' she's turn wat you call de cool shouldare to Red Clout. Well, she's mak no difference to Red Clout; hall he want is wef, an' one female she's goot as nudder one so long she wear de petticoat. Nex' gurl Red Clout mak fer was Man-in-im-mack, meanin' Snowball in de Hinglish. Jus' saw Snowball once; face like bus-hup fryin'-pan an' figure like sack wool. Red Clout, she's pop, wat you call dat, de haxion?"

"Question," I said, correcting him.

"Spose so. Snowball, she's haxcept, but de mudder he's hinterfere an' tell Red Clout she's need Snowball mor'n him, an' unless he's pay fer Snowball he's no git her. Dis prop'sition knock Red Clout cold, fer

he neffer had dime to his name, an' so he's part sorrowfully wit Snowball.

"But Red Clout, he's have better luk nex' tam, fer he not let de grass grow hunder his moccasins. Nex' day he hax fer han' uv Troisresad" (Three Beads), "young girl 'bout t'irteen, fourteen—too young fer tell de diff'rence 'tween goot man an' poor. Red Clout, she's tak no chances dis tam, an' she's git Tree Beads to de prees' privately 'fore de ole folks she's know. De gurl, he's tell ma haunt dis mornin', Red Clout she's mak 'im b'lieve if she's no hurry hup, she's lef' hon de shelf halltogedder. Pretty mean hadvantage tak' young gurl, but Red Clout, she's mus' git wef s'pose she's got fer steal 'im. W'en Tree Beads' fadder hear uv mar'ge he tam mad an' he swear like 'ell. He call Red Clout names I not like fer say afore Muggins," and Pierre winked at me. "He call 'im a tam 'ell, a beeg tief, and whole lot more bad names. But he's cool hoff queeck w'en Red Clout promis' lend him Tree Beads couple days hevery wik an' come over hissself an' help wid de work. W'en Red Clout fetch hout flask han' hininvite fadder-in-law have drink, she's come solid wit hole man, who fin'ly promise lend Red Clout nuff monee fer pay prees' fer tyin' knot, as holy fadder pressin' fer his fee. Hole man also hinsist hon makin' beeg partee fer celebrate de mar'ge. Preparations she's been goin' hon' fer two wicks, an' to-nite's de beeg nite an' we 'ave 'ell've good tam hif de whiskey she's honly come plaintee."

"What's the nature of the preparations?" I asked.

"W'y, de cookin', uv course. How kin you have

fun widdout lots fer heat an' drink, an' so de hull relation she's been bakin an' preparin' fer two wicks. Hit's safe bettin' dat hall de butter an' grease in de settlement's bin borried fer de 'casion. Can't cook widout grease, an' plaintee uv it. Uv course hit won't be returned to de lenders until de nex' weddin', w'en de hull settlement be 'cessed ag'in fer grease. Grease an' weddin's, or radder weddin's an' grease, goes han' in han' togedder, as it were. But I'm 'tipatin; jus' wait till y'see de cookin' fer y'self."

"Any wedding presents?" I asked, finding that Pierre was in such a communicative mood.

"Naw—who's give dem? Tree Beads' fadder an' modder tink she's give nuff wen she's contribute de wef. Gin'lly its de male wat contr'butes de presents, pa'ticuly w'en she has t' buy de ole folks hoff. But wait," said Pierre, reflecting a moment, "dare gin'lly is one present; dare's de dress wat de husban' gits fer de wef, an' I hunderstan' Red Clout she's git jorgosh" (gorgeous) "one fer Tree Beads. I jus' caught lil glimpse tru de door. Ma gosh, she's, wat you call dat, stunnin'. Blue, lak de sky, wit red ribbons hall tied roun' an' hangin' as t'ick as Saskatoon berries. Den dere was beag orange ribbon hangin' down an' trailin' 'bout two, tree feet hon de flure. Hull ting mus' a cos' Red Clout 'bout two dollar an' a 'aff. W'ere she's borry de monee is de grande sekrett, fer he nebber haff nuff hisse'f fer git de tabac. He jus' hax fren' fer light, an' w'en emptyin' de live coal from fren's pipe he manage scoop in half de tabac. He's cute man's Red Clout.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### *THE HALF-BREED DANCE.*

By this time we had reached the scene of festivities. Night had let down her curtains and it was comparatively dark. From the small log shanty where the wedding company was assembled there issued a sound of revelry. Lighted candles placed in the windows enabled the guests to discover the house and assisted them in finding a place to tie up. There were no out-buildings, so every available spot where a cayuse could be tied was pre-empted. Many guests had come in such aboriginal vehicles as were available, but judging by the number and variety of ponies of all descriptions that were tied in the sheltering trees and scrub about the house, most of the guests must have ridden on horseback to the feast.

We entered without ceremony, Pierre leading the way. The house consisted of two rooms, divided by a thin board partition, part of which had been removed to give the dancers more room and "full swing," as the host explained later. From one end of the inner room an ordinary ladder led through an aperture in the board ceiling, which was black with smoke and dust, to the loft or garret above. The two ground floor rooms were packed, it seemed to me, far beyond their capacity; indeed there must have been danger of the walls bulging. I learned that

practically every resident of the settlement had been invited, and that nearly a dozen others, who had been overlooked, had, in accordance with the custom of the country, come to the feast unbidden.

The atmosphere was fetid and stifling, at least to me, although my companions did not seem to mind it. The smoke was so thick and offensive (for the substitute used for tobacco gave forth the vilest odor) that one required to be in excellent physical condition to avoid nausea. This substitute for tobacco is called in the Indian tongue Kinnikinick, and is manufactured from the inside bark of willow trees, with a small admixture of real tobacco, if procurable. The natives profess to like the substitute almost as well as the seductive weed itself.

As we pushed our way through the crowd in the front room, Pierre's kinsman, the host, recognized him and immediately demanded that the dance, which was being prosecuted with the greatest vigor, should cease while he gave us a formal introduction to the company. In his childhood days he had been nursed by one of those splendid old Scotch half-breed women who were the early physicians of the country, and whose deeds of self-denial, humanity, benevolence and real heroism form perhaps one of the noblest chapters in the history of the great North-West. Pierre's kinsman had inherited from his nurse that accent peculiar to the descendants of the hardy Scotchmen with whom the Hudson's Bay Company was officered almost exclusively from the date of its incorporation centuries ago. Most of these men married native

women of the country. The progeny had, and has to this day, an accent peculiar to itself, just as it has always possessed a hospitality equalled by no other people so far discovered.

"I dawnt think we sood dance whateffer till mie friends is interjooiced. Here's Pierre Dumont, who used to live in Kildawnin; I rawt him a letter mieself awnly last week askin' him to come. He didn't get it, but I'm glad to nawtis that he's here bie accident. Then we have a distinguished descendant o' the Cameron men, about whose great march ye've all heered, with us th' nite" (I looked at Pierre in slight annoyance. He had evidently spoken about me in advance, but he made no sign), "an' I bespeak for them a kiend reception. I dawn't want anyone t' leave me house hungry or thirsty."

I bowed my thanks, Pierre nodded pleasantly, and the host gave orders for the dance to be resumed. Instantly we were surrounded by the company, all anxious to shake hands with us and exhibit their good-will and the warmth of their welcome. We were addressed in various languages, English, French and Cree, but the language of good-fellowship and kindness which the eyes of all spake was like the language of love, universal. I was intensely interested in the function, it was all so entirely novel to me. I must in advance crave the reader's indulgence for dwelling with amplitude upon the details.

"Too much one sex," growled Pierre in my ear. "I mak de count myself an' find nine mans fer one gurl."

"I noticed the great discrepancy in proportion," I replied.

"Seems allus be de sam at dese dances. Don' know w'y Prov'dense she's sen' more men dan gurls, but seems lak hit's allus so. Seems lak Red Clout she's wend fer marry queeck, so's not git lef' hin de race. Mebee she's tink not nuff gurls fer go round."

"It's bound to spoil the dance," I remarked.

"Naw, hits not spoil de dance, but mak it tam hard fer all de boys git de chanst fer dance wit' de gurls. Jus' look at de rush yonder."

A French four that had been "holding the boards" for some time had just concluded. The female "operators" seemed to be experts at the terpsichorean art, for the instant the last crash of the heels had resounded on the floor and the caller-off shouted "seats" there was a furious dash for the girls. It resembled the mad rush in the old county town of Bruce on circus day, when the ticket waggon opened for business. The man who grabbed the female first held on. It was not a question of "Will you honor me with the next 'dawnce'?" as I understand they say in polite society; it was a case of grab, and then "what we have we'll hold," possession being not only nine points of the law, but the judge and jury into the bargain. No one cared to dispute possession with those great burly halfbreeds, most of whom exhibited the signs of firewater in their eyes. The females apparently had nothing to say in the case; they appeared content to be borne off by the man who ex-



hibited the greatest enterprise and persistence and physical strength.

"Is there not danger of the dance coming to a premature end when the girls tire out?" I asked of Pierre, who was standing by me enjoying the spectacle.

"Naw, de dance neffer end so long de wiskey she's hol' hout. In de good ole days I've saw de dance keep hup fer two, tree days an' nights widout stoppin', but den dare was beaucoup de wiskey an' plaintee pipe an' tabac. Dat was w'en de Companee" (the Hudson's Bay Company), "she's gif de spree at de post 'bout Christmas. No," continued Pierre, reflectively, "no danger de gurls gif hout. I haf mak, wat you call dat, de hestimate, based on much hexperience, an' I kalklate dat ten gurls she's dance hunner men t' stan'still."

I am bound to confess that my observations at the present dance confirmed Pierre's estimate, for I was amazed at the agility, endurance and perennial good-nature of the bright-looking half-breed girls, without whom the dance would have been impossible.

Cotillion and "French four" followed each other in swift succession, the same girls with different partners participating in every dance. The music, supplied by two fiddlers, who took the job in turns, was fast. The wielders of the bow beat time to their own music with both feet, v'hich they kept pounding on the floor with wonderful expertness. It was a memorable sight to see fifteen or twenty couples beating the floor to the fast music, some of the big men, with perspiration streaming down their faces, shouting

excitedly as they fairly lifted their partners off their feet and swung them swiftly round, making an average of four hundred revolutions to the minute.

"Holi main gauche!" roared the caller-off.

"Right hand t' partners!"

"Half right and lef'!"

"Balance hon de corner!"

"Gran' right an' lef'!"

"Swing!"

"Run away, hall!"

It was when the figure "balance hon de corner" was called that the real execution was witnessed. The great, burly Scotch half-breeds, who have such Christian names as "Dunc," "Murdoch," "Sandy," and "Hugh," vied with their French half-breed *vis-a-vis* as to which could pound the floor the hardest. At these particular junctures the dust which the "hoe-downers" (Murdoch McKinnon's cognomen) raised was so thick that it partially obscured the fiddlers and had a tendency to choke the onlookers. The dancers, however, did not appear to mind it.

"Cotillon she's tam tame affair," said Pierre to me, just at the conclusion of one; "wait till you see de jig. de 'Red River jig' she's call 'im."

"Can't you arrange to have a jig, Pierre?" I answered, "I'd like so much to see one."

Pierre was beside the master of ceremonies in a moment and the next instant the cry went round, "A jig! A jig! Red River jig!" The fiddlers struck up a swift jig air.

There is always some delay and hesitation about

getting the jig started, because it usually begins with one couple and is kept up by one couple, the rest of the crowd forming a ring about the "performers"; just as boys do at a country school when a fight is on. In much the same way, also, the spectators of a jig indulge in good-natured badinage and criticism, according to their views of the merits of the performers. In the present case it was big Angus McKinnon, a Scotch half-breed, who broke the spell and led a lithe young girl into the arena. Angus wore a distressed look, as if he were about to undergo a trying ordeal, while his partner, with black, sparkling eyes and laughing face, appeared to be pleased with the anticipation of the "contest." They both faced each other for a few moments, Angus beating time to the music with the fore part of his right moccasined foot, waiting for the instant to strike in. The fiddler struck the note with emphasis. Angus shook himself and his feet began to fly.

"He's de best dancer in de hole settlement," Pierre whispered to me. "Hanus beats de divel w'en she's git de fair start fer sure."

But Virginie (his partner's name) was also the possessor of a reputation as a step dancer. Her skirt was short, exhibiting the nimble movements of her feet. She was grace itself as she followed big Angus about the ring, keeping her eyes steadily fixed upon his, and dancing with perfect step, which she altered to suit the frequent changes that Angus made. Round the ring they went, Virginie facing Angus up in that coquettish manner always characteristic of the jig. As

the moments passed the enthusiasm of the dancers and of the onlookers increased.

"Virginie's too much fer you, Hangus, sure," said Pierre, starting the fun.

"Not by tam site," answered one of Angus's partisans.

"Chase him hard, Virginie," sang out a voice, and the feet of the agile girl fairly flew as she crowded the big fellow round the ring, backing him into corners and compelling him to give way and find new ground. But Angus was no novice at the business. He was powerful and deep lunged and was not going to be easily bested by his slight partner. After Virginie had crowded Angus about the arena she suddenly wheeled and began sidling off. It was then Angus's turn to do the chasing. Instantly he changed step and thundered after her like a locomotive, beating the floor so swiftly and vigorously with his moccasined feet that it was difficult to follow the movements. Virginie continued coyly backing and dodging, while Big Angus followed her about, so manœuvring as to try and compel her to face him and have it out.

The excitement continued to increase as the partisans on either side shouted their approval. The couple had danced with intense vigor for fully ten minutes. Neither seemed to be fagged, and both wore a look of determination—a sort of do or die expression—as if they were bound to fight it out to the death. Angus had followed Virginie about the arena several times, changing step and vigorously hammering the floor in perfect time to the rhythm of the music, which



"Instantly he changed step, . . . beating the floor so swiftly and vigorously with his moccasined feet that it was difficult to follow the movements of the feet."



grew faster as the fiddler warmed up to the contest. Just as Angus thought he had Virginie cornered, another dusky damsel glided into the ring, "cut her out," and with her eyes hurled a bold defiance at Angus.

Virginie was applauded as she retreated towards the door for fresh air. The new damsel at once assumed the aggressive, and advancing sideways towards Big Angus, looking him intently in the eye all the time, she trotted him a rapid pace around the ring for several minutes. With teeth set and jaws drawn, Angus looked like a man who would never yield, and he would probably have kept up his pace till exhaustion supervened had not someone come to his relief.

It was Pierre that sprang into the arena and "giv de big Scotch man's," as he called Angus, "de cut hout." The performance of Pierre in the arena increased my admiration for his agility and quickness. He did not possess as correct an idea of time as Big Angus, nor had he anything like the number of steps in his repertoire, but for agility to career about the ring, the Scotch half-breed was not in the same class. The jig was kept up for fully half an hour, one couple cutting out the other until all that cared to revel in the Red River jig had done so to their heart's content.

After the jig there was an intermission of three-quarters of an hour to allow the crowd to mount the ladder, a few couples at a time, in order to partake of the refreshments served above. After supper the dancing was resumed and kept up with unabated vigor.

## CHAPTER XV.

### *RED CLOUT'S BRIDE.*

It was Red Clout himself, Red Clout the bridegroom, that invited Pierre and myself and Muggins, who remained by our side all evening enjoying the scene to the utmost, to "supper." We mounted the ladder, and pushing through the aperture in the floor, found ourselves in the garret or "banqueting hall," down the centre of which extended a long table composed of rough boards set on trusses. The "hall" was a strange and awkward apartment, the thatch and rafters extending to the floor. It was only in the centre that it was possible to stand erect. A dozen ancient crones were squatted about on the floor, their heads coming in contact with the thatch. Any one of them would have made an excellent model for the witch of Endor. Each was provided with a long-stemmed Indian pipe, and all were puffing away with the solemnity of owls. They scarcely raised their eyes or noticed us as we entered.

The apartment was filled with clouds of thick smoke, and just how, under the circumstances, the guests managed to eat the "delicacies" provided, it is difficult to surmise. A band of vigorous-looking youths were assembled around the table eagerly and raptorially devouring the food. Just as soon as the supply diminished it was rapidly replaced by an old carlin,



who dived into washtubs set at convenient places, and extracted therefrom the most picturesque collection of viands and fancy dishes that it was possible to imagine. Red Clout made signs to me to imitate his example and "fall to."

"You'll have something to eat whateffer, Cameron," said the host, coming up in friendly fashion and setting the example by munching away at a plate of doughnuts, which, upon venturing to taste, I discovered to have been fried in tallow, neatsfoot oil, or some such lubricant. Hurriedly concealing the doughnut about my clothes, I decided to attack a raisin pie, that appeared less forbidding than most of the numerous dishes ranged on the table. The first test with my teeth showed the crust to be extremely hard, but with some exertion I pried the crust apart to get at the raisins themselves. These I found to be embedded in the dough; which upon further examination I found to be composed of material very much akin to sole leather. When nobody was looking I hastily dropped it on the floor and stood upon it, at the same time mopping the beads of perspiration, caused by the stifling atmosphere, from my brow. Just then Red Clout came up to me and tendered a cup half filled with a fluid which smelled somewhat like whiskey.

"Dat's forty rod," whispered Pierre in my ear.

"What's forty rod?" I asked.

"She's bc—wat you call dat—warrant fer kill at de great distance."

I shook my head at Red Clout, and Pierre made some explanation that satisfied him. He then passed

the cup to Pierre, who hastily quaffed the contents. To square myself with Red Clout for declining his proffered cheer, I asked, through Pierre, for an introduction to his bride. The well-pleased bridegroom led me to the extremity of the apartment, where sat his bride in great state on a biscuit box, receiving the homage of the company as one after the other was privileged to bow at the "throne" and say some words of flattery to the blushing maiden, attired in the flaring array already described by Pierre. The bride was very young, even childish in appearance. She had nice, bright, expressive eyes and face, and gave some promise of developing into passable womanhood.

"Dat's him," said the grinning Red Clout, with a great effort at English, and pointing to his bride.

I bowed politely and shook the friendly hand that she extended. Pierre suggested that I should "hax her fer dance wit me," but my education in that accomplishment had been so sadly neglected that I feared to risk the venture. Through Pierre I congratulated Red Clout upon the matrimonial prize he had won, and said a word or two in praise of the blushing maid. Had I suspected the effect of my words I would have restrained myself. Red Clout in his ecstasy (perhaps the forty rod had something to do with it as well) rushed towards me, and throwing his arms about my body, hugged me vigorously. I fancy he would have tried to kiss me (a practice not uncommon among the native male population),

only, being much taller, I succeeded in throwing my head back and frustrating his well-meant design.

"It is past midnight," I whispered to Pierre, "and we must be going if we are to procure any rest and sleep to-night."

"Dat's hall right," answered the guide, and he at once proceeded to make the necessary explanations and apologies to his kinsfolk. As we were leaving the scene of festivities, big Angus McKinnon, who had led off in the Red River jig, motioned to me to follow him as he slipped from the door. The air outside was cool and refreshing, a pleasant contrast to the stifling, dusty atmosphere of the dancing and banqueting rooms. We were joined by several other burly Scotch half-breeds, Dunc McDougall, Murdoch McLeod, and Sandy McTavish. Angus opened proceedings by producing a black bottle, which he extracted from its hiding-place in the scrub, and saying as he handed it to me, "Us Scotchmen will have a horn whateffer."

One taste of the beverage was sufficient for me, and although I thanked Angus for his courtesy, the taste of that frightful concoction lives with me yet.

Pierre noticed my feelings and explained after we said good-night and were hastening to our tent: "Dat was de darnest, baddist wiskey, Mr. Cameron, I iver see me, an' I hope de taste you swallowed won't pizen you."

"It was frightful stuff, Pierre. What was it made of?"

"Dat's pretty hard fer tole you, but I fin' hout while in de garret dat one mean man she's call Malboef mak dat wiskey an' sell one beeg washtub full to Red Clout's fadder-in-law fer keep hup de fun at de spree. Ma cousain she's tole me de wiskey she's made uv ninety-nine parts water an' de odder part peppermint, pain killer, red hink, red pepper an' leetle tabac boiled in tea. Hit's hawful stuff fer drink, but dat's notten' to de 'fect nex' mornin'. Beeg hed, well, I tink him so," and Pierre laughed the laugh born of ample experience.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### *CASPER.*

ELEVEN days' travel in the mode we had adopted brought us to the shore of Lake Winnipegosis. We struck the Lake at the north-west end, now known as Dawson Bay. From that point we continued our journey northward till we reached the Saskatchewan River. There we learned from some Indians that my uncle's establishment was located on the west shore of Moose Lake, a small body of water belonging to the chain of which Winnipegosis forms the main body, and located directly to the north about forty or fifty miles. We swam our ponies across the Saskatchewan River and, turning eastward, continued our journey. I judged that we would reach our destination in a day. On the way I had told Pierre, whom I had grown to trust thoroughly, as much regarding my enterprise as I deemed necessary in order to secure the benefit of his advice.

I shall be forgiven for confessing that as I neared the home of my unnatural uncle I was much perturbed in mind as to the final outcome, and not a little agitated over the prospect of an encounter with so unscrupulous a man. I was strong of body and firm of purpose. I felt that my cause was just, and, to whatever the conviction was due, I had a firm belief that I would

succeed. I slept little during the last forty-eight hours of our journey, my mind being in perpetual agitation as to the best means of approaching my task. On Pierre's advice I finally decided to separate from him and Muggins and ride my pony into the encampment alone, call upon my uncle in as friendly a manner as possible, and leave the issue to fate. I did not fear open assassination at the hands of my uncle, and whatever the issue might be I did not anticipate immediate action. It was arranged that Pierre and the Indian should make a circuit and approach the encampment from the north, as if returning from regions beyond. They were to locate Moose Lodge, and whilst pitching their tent in some secluded retreat outside the encampment, it was arranged that they should reconnoitre about the lodge, especially at night, and if possible Pierre was to become attached to the household. A series of signals was arranged in case of extremity, and a place of meeting assigned if consultation was deemed essential. With all these preliminaries fixed I secreted my best revolver about my person (leaving my rifle and sword with Pierre), provided myself with ammunition, then, nodding good-bye to my guide and Muggins, trying all the while to look as brave as possible, I rode off alone.

The trail that led to the Lodge wound tortuously through a light growth of trees and scrub. The country was rough and broken, but there seemed no danger of getting lost, as the trail continued in the direction of the lake shore. I had travelled, as I judged, about eight miles, when the trail narrowed

and became less distinct, so that I was obliged to dismount and lead my pony in order to make quite sure that the path should not be lost. The country was growing rougher, and it seemed to me as if I was climbing. I judged that I must be near the lake shore. To satisfy myself, I ascended the first hillock encountered, and to my great satisfaction saw the water not more than three miles ahead. Returning to the trail I pushed on, leading my pony. I had not gone more than two miles when the trail twisted about and I knew that it must be running eastward. It wound deviously, and I was beginning to fear that I had taken the wrong direction when I heard a gun explode. I realized that I must be near my destination, so, pushing on through the thick scrub in the direction of the sound, I was soon rewarded. Suddenly the trail emerged from the eminence that I believed we were climbing and appeared to end abruptly above one of the coziest little valleys it was possible to imagine. It could not be more than four or five hundred acres in extent, but it was almost completely surrounded by a range of hills, at the foot of which it nestled snugly, secure from all storms that might blow. It is doubtful if the entire country afforded a more picturesque or secure refuge. I could see that an opening at the foot of the little glen led to the lake, and through this opening there flowed a stream of inconsiderable proportions, except perhaps when the valley was deluged with rain or was being emptied when the spring thaw came on. Nature had, in one of her curious moods, carved out this rare retreat, of

which my uncle had doubtless heard from the Indians, and to which he had been piloted by them.

I was so much impressed with the beauty and security of the spot, that I stood for a long time surveying it and enjoying the scene. The hills were so abrupt and steep that it was in most cases impossible to climb them, and egress from the valley could only be had at certain points, the spot where I found myself being one of these. From my position commanding the valley I made a hasty survey. Smoke was rising in thin curling columns from a dozen or more Indian tepees. A few log shanties had been erected, dotting the valley here and there. Eagerly did I scan the place for Moose Lodge, as, from the description given me, I was quite sure I could locate it. At last my search was rewarded, for I discerned the outlines of a log house of ample and rambling proportions, located beside the little stream, a short distance above the opening of the valley through which it found its way to the lake.

"And that is the home of my Uncle Casper Cameron," I said, thinking aloud. A feeling of loneliness, isolation, and proximity to danger came over me. I was not fearful, but I was overcome with a sense of my powerlessness and the necessity of assistance. I thought of Simon, and of my father, and of my grandfather, then of Ruth, wondering if I ever would see her again. I never had been accustomed to pray except in the conventional and, I fear, stereotyped fashion. There is something about the forest, the great plains, the lonely stretchies, that inspires worship and reverence. I felt my loneliness and intense need of direc-



tion and assistance, and before descending into the valley to beard Casper in his den I reverently bared my head, raised my eyes to the wide vault above, and asked the Great Father for protection and assistance in so far as my mission was righteous.

Without difficulty I found the path leading down the valley, but it was so steep that I sometimes feared my pony would lose his feet and tumble over me. But those wonderful Indian ponies are sure-footed, and I found myself in a brief time on the level, winding my way along the crooked path towards Casper's home. My presence in the glen did not seem to alarm or surprise the native women and the children, the latter of whom were gambolling in front of the tents. They were doubtless accustomed to the advent of white men. I marked the absence of male Indians, but surmised that they were away on the chase. Once or twice I ventured a question in English to females whom I encountered as to where Moose Lodge was to be found, but I received no answer in words. Evidently, however, the name was recognized, for I was in each case pointed in the direction of the house, which I could now distinguish for myself.

Boldly I walked on till I came to the little gate of the rude and rustic fence that had been erected about the Lodge. The house, which was built of spruce logs, was but one storey high, but it was large. I could see that originally it consisted of one great square building, to which several additions had been made, giving it that rambling appearance referred to. It was lighted by many windows, but they were all small.

A rough but commodious verandah, furnished with rude chairs and an Indian hammock, extended along the front.

I experienced a strange physical sensation, and my heart thumped so violently that I could hear it, when, as I came up to the gate, I saw a man sitting on the verandah smoking quietly, whom from the impression I had formed I immediately decided was my Uncle Casper.

An expression of annoyance at the intrusion passed over his face, but it disappeared quickly. He rose hastily and approached me. I stood rooted to the ground, and my speech seemed to have taken leave of me. Standing stupidly and stolidly there, I scrutinized my uncle from head to foot, examining every lineament of his face, surveying his great frame, irresistibly speculating upon his resources and strength, and wondering what my chances would be in a hand-to-hand encounter with him.

As Casper approached me I was profoundly struck by his masterful personality. His great powerful limbed, deep-chested frame supported a large square-built head, covered with a mass of thick black hair, in which an occasional streak of grey appeared (as was also the case with his great bushy beard), for Casper was a man of forty-five or fifty years. He had a pair of deep, penetrating gray eyes, without a spark of kindness in them. His nose was large, his eyebrows shaggy, and as his head always hung low when he looked at anyone, his eyes were turned upward to such an extent that the white was visible at

the lower extremity. His ears stood almost straight out from the head, betokening the combative and quarrelsome nature of the man. Sin had placed an indelible stamp upon his face, for Cain never fails to brand his followers and devotees. There was a strange evil, sinister expression on Casper's countenance. Erect he walked; bold, determined and defiant he looked.

"Well, sir," he said, in a harsh, rasping voice, after surveying me curiously and closely, "what brings you here?"

"I'm looking for Moose Lodge," I replied, quietly, finding my voice and my nerve.

"You've struck it; what then?" and he eyed me with increasing interest.

"Is the master of the Lodge at home?" I asked, not wishing to use his name precipitately.

"I'm the master," he replied, curtly; "what do you want with me?"

"Ah," I said, feeling uneasy, and almost debarred from proceeding by the curtness of his replies, "your name is—"

"What the h— is it to you what my name is?" replied my uncle, in sharp tones, his wrath rising and his face reddening. "The question is, what's your business here, and what do you want with the master of Moose Lodge?" and he continued to eye me with suspicion.

I was evidently in for a cool reception, but I was not going to be turned aside. Forcing as easy an air as I could command, I said, "I've come a long way

to see the master of Moose Lodge, and I trust he will not turn me from his door with cold, harsh words."

I watched him with intense closeness, and I could detect the quick start which he gave and the slight change of color that passed over his face. He looked at me again suspiciously and inquiringly, as he said, with less heat and curtness, "Who are you?"

The moment had come to speak. The courage of the Camerons seemed to suddenly fill me, and, advancing a step until I was beside him, I looked him earnestly in the face and said, "I'm Lachlan Cameron, your nephew."

Casper was a cool man, a man of nerve, of strong animal courage and great resources. I had for many weeks contemplated this meeting and speculated upon the effect on my uncle of the revelation of my identity. I knew that I could tell by his face the character of the adventure I was to have with him, and now I keenly watched the play of his features.

Instantly there shot across the man's face an expression of deep hatred. The sinister look which I discerned at first became suddenly intensified. I knew instinctively that murder was possible to Casper. He had unconsciously betrayed himself to me. That expression of mingled hate and suppressed rage, not wholly unmixed with fear as he read the note of defiance in the manner in which I pronounced my name, lives with me still, although many years have since gone over my head. Taken entirely unawares, Casper had forgotten himself for an instant, but it was only for an instant. In a twinkling he compelled

the expression of hate to disappear, and simulating a cordiality which I well knew he did not feel, he said:

"Lachlan Cameron, my dead brother's son, I welcome you to my home." As he said this he extended his great right hand and gave mine a squeeze that caused me to realize the danger of ever getting into close grips with him.

"Cut your pony loose," he said, stripping the animal of his bridle and saddle, "he can't escape from the valley, and he's evidently in need of food, as I doubt not you are yourself."

I disclaimed hunger, but he cut me short with, "I never knew a Cameron that was not ready to eat when the dinner-bell rang. You've arrived in the nick of time, as the mid-day meal is just ready. Come, let us enter," and he led the way through the front door into a common apartment with low ceilings, but which possessed an air of rustic comfort. The floors were covered with robes of buffalo and other victims of the chase, while upon the walls were hung firearms, polished horns, snowshoes, and innumerable curios and trinkets which the Indians know so well how to make. In the centre of the room there was a large, heavy table, and distributed around were chairs of all manner of rude construction. On several shelves nailed to the walls were numerous books and papers. The table was set for dinner and a great meat pie, cooked in a rough pan, rested in the centre. On plates distributed around it were bread, buns, etc. Playing about the floor were a couple of half-breed children, between seven and twelve years of age, I judged, and

from whose features I had no difficulty in reaching a conclusion as to their paternity.

"What are you brats doing here?" said Casper, roughly, to them, as if they had no right on earth. Then, in a threatening tone, "Now, clear away to the kitchen, and don't let me see you again for the day."

The children—the eldest was a boy and the youngest a girl—looked quite ashamed and hurriedly fled from the apartment.

"Say, bring in the tea and let's get to business," said Casper, in a loud, commanding voice, as he thrust his head into the doorway through which the children had escaped. An Indian woman, the mother of Casper's children, I correctly judged, entered, and placing the steaming teapot on the table, hurriedly retreated, as if she were anxious to escape from the presence of her lord.

"Send Tannis in," commanded Casper, calling after his Indian wife.

Presently a good-looking half-breed girl, apparently about twenty years old, entered the room. Her lithe and shapely figure was covered with a somewhat fantastic waist and skirt, decorated with beads and other trimmings. She was a distinctively attractive girl, but her face was overcast with an expression of sadness, mingled with fear, an expression which seemed to have grown natural and permanent by virtue of its long presence there.

"Tannis," said Casper, in a kindlier tone than I thought him capable of commanding, "this is a relative of mine come from the far East to pay me a

visit. I never told you that I had any kinsmen, and you thought me the last of my race, but Lachlan here is my nephew."

Tannis looked at me searchingly at first, as if I might be someone to fear. The hasty inspection seemed to satisfy her, for the look of doubtful inquiry which she cast at me immediately disappeared and gave place to animation and interest, although the sadness remained. She bowed modestly, and when I advanced, took her by the hand and shook it in the friendliest fashion, she blushed looked pleasantly embarrassed, and I felt from that moment I had a friend in Casper's house.

"Come, Tannis," said Casper, "do the honors as mistress and pour the tea, and we'll let Lachlan see that although lost in the wilderness we are not altogether savages."

Tannis promptly obeyed. Casper served the meat pie and the meal proceeded. My uncle led the conversation, and as it progressed he appeared to develop into fairly good humor, even rallying me upon my Cameronian appetite. He did not at first ask any questions about the East or the old friends and neighbors. Whatever he thought of my mission—and a man of his shrewdness must have known it was not one of peace and kinship—he succeeded in concealing his feelings. Indeed, were it not for the manner in which he had betrayed himself when I first announced my name, I would have had difficulty avoiding the conviction that Casper was actually pleased with my advent. Understanding the situation as it actually

was, however, I began to think that it would have been better for me to have met Casper on hostile ground and fought it out on that basis from the start. How was I to deal effectively with a kinsman who insisted upon being friendly with me? From my first impression of Casper, and from my knowledge of his character, I doubted his ability to continue long in the mood he was now affecting. He assumed a most familiar attitude toward the girl Tannis, so that I was slightly puzzled to comprehend the relations that existed between them. Tannis, on her part, acted as if his familiarities were objectionable to her, as indeed they must have been.

"Pretty fine-looking girl," said Casper, nodding to me, but pointing to Tannis.

I acquiesced silently without speaking.

"Great limbs," continued Casper, taking a grip of one of the girl's arms.

Tannis shot a look of indignant anger at him.

"Fine eyes, eh, Lachlan?—when her teniper's up. It's worth while getting Tannis roiled just to see her eyes flash fire. Never saw such a head of hair," continued Casper, grasping the great hair plait that hung down Tannis's back below the waist. "Hain't got nothin' to equal it in Bruce county," and the ruffian went off into a fit of boisterous laughter.

By this time Tannis was ablaze with anger. Speaking in the Cree tongue, she poured what I was satisfied was a torrent of invective upon my uncle.

"Pretty high-strung piece of goods, ain't she, Lachlan?"



I was quite sorry for the girl and exasperated at my uncle for his conduct, so I said, quietly:

"If you don't mind, Uncle, I'd rather not discuss the personal charms of your young—friend, in her presence. It is clearly embarrassing and distasteful to her, and I cannot say that it gives me unmixed pleasure."

My uncle looked that ugly look of his for an instant, but immediately controlled himself and proceeded, "Just as you like. It's come to a pretty pass, though, when a fellow can't have what fun he likes with his own without causing trouble." Then, addressing Tannis rather stiffly, he said, "If you've had all you want to eat, girl, you can carry the dishes to the kitchen and let the woman and the brats feed. Better leave the tea, as we shall want an extra cup."

Tannis appeared pleased at the opportunity of leaving my uncle's presence, but as she hurried from the room she gave me a grateful glance that caused me to feel that the incipient bond of friendship which I hoped had been established between us was cemented.

"Smoke?" said Casper, reaching from the shelf a smoking outfit consisting of several pipes and a supply of tobacco.

"Thank you, no," I replied. "On Simon's advice I refrained from acquiring the habit. Simon used to say to me, 'Lachy, lad, you'll have need of all the strength and brains God gave you as you go through life, without impairing either by the use of tobacco.' I think I'd have learned to smoke but for that, as it looks so restful; and besides, Uncle, father and grand-

father smoked, and, so far as I could learn, all our relatives did."

"Well, it hasn't sapped either my brains or strength, so far as I can judge," said my uncle, emitting immense clouds of smoke. Then, after a pause, "How's old Simon? Is he still alive?"

"Yes, Simon is hale," I answered. "I left him but a few weeks ago, and I don't know that he was ever better, although he has grown much older."

"H'm," said my uncle, meditatively, "s'pose most everybody's dead down there now?"

"Well, not all," I answered, "although most of them have left the place." The thought came to me suddenly and I spoke it before counting the result. "I saw Sanders Sylvester the day before I left."

The words struck Casper suddenly and he started up.

"What, old Sanders Sylvester, the stuttering clerk that used to work for Solomon Pinch, the lawyer?"

"The very man," I answered, coolly.

Again I noticed that look of anger and hatred flit across Casper's face. He shot a suspicious glance at me with those keen gray eyes, as if he would look me through. He did not say, "What were you doing with Sanders?" but he looked it. I saw that I had shot an arrow close to the inner ring, and I determined to experiment further, even if I had to press my imagination into service to do it.

"I suppose you have heard that Sanders and Pinch are good friends now?"

I had gone too far. A look that meant murder

crossed Casper's face. He smoked deeply for a moment or two until his face was hidden with the fumes, then he burst out angrily, unable to restrain his wrath, "D—— Sanders and Pinch, what do I care about them? They're nothing to me. I don't want to hear their names again."

But if he did not want to hear their names again, it was evident that he could not shake them from his mind. He was preoccupied and seemed disinclined to talk further. His mind was evidently so greatly perturbed that he could not resume conversation. When he had his smoke out, he said: "I'm obliged to ride ten miles or so on a matter of business and shall not return early. You can interest yourself about the place; this beautiful little glen is worthy of close inspection. If I am not back by bedtime the women'll show you where to sleep. I'll give orders about supper, etc., before I go."

He disappeared through the doorway leading to the kitchen, and I could hear his loud, raucous voice as he scolded the children and gave orders to his "woman," to be executed during his absence.

Acting upon his suggestion I explored the glen thoroughly, not only with a view of enjoying its natural beauties, but of reconnoitering the place fully in the prospect of future eventualities. I returned to the Lodge at dusk. In the room where we dined I found supper spread on the table for me. Tannis entered with the tea, which she poured.

"Won't you join me as you did at noon when Uncle was here?" I said.

Tannis beamed at me kindly as she replied in broken English, "Me an' Manakee" (Casper's woman) "have de supper hour ago."

"So you wouldn't wait for the paleface from the East?"

She knew I was indulging in a pleasantry.

"Tannis have beeg appetite like de Camerons an' cudden' wait," and she laughed quietly, the look of sorrow on her face disappearing for the moment.

Simon, bachelor and all as he was, once confided to me the subtle effect on the feminine mind of adulation. I realized that I stood in great need of a friend in Moose Lodge, and so I said not a few pleasant things to Tannis as she sat and watched me eat supper. Recalling the conversation after the lapse of years, I now realize that no words of mine did anything like justice to the innate graces of this simple prairie flower, which had been reared in the northern wilds. I interested the girl by describing in my poor way the great ladies I recalled seeing in Toronto, and telling her something about the style of dress, the forms of amusement, the big assemblies, etc. I told her that I did not think any one of the great ladies would look so striking as she, in her half Indian, half Anglo-Saxon costume. While I talked Tannis's eyes sparkled and her cheeks glowed with excitement, as she was afforded glimpses into a world of which she did not dream. Then I told her of our adventure near Fort Pembina, and of the beautiful Miss Rawlings, and I repeated to her some of the already recorded lofty sentiments and thoughts of that divine person. After

I had completed my description of Miss Rawlings, I noticed that sad expression return to Tannis's face, and I asked her the reason.

"Tannis sorry to hear of such beautiful people. Dey so much finer dan me. I be very hugly compare wit' dem."

"Not at all, Tannis," I said, reassuringly. "It's neither the face nor the clothes that pleases the Great Spirit; it is the heart and the soul. If they are white and pure, the clothes will not be taken into account."

I shook Tannis's hand warmly and looked kindly into her lustrous eyes as I bade her good-night and entered the sleeping room that she indicated. But I did not dream of Tannis. My mind was filled with other thoughts.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### *PLOTTING MURDER.*

I ALWAYS had been a sound sleeper, and now I was tired with my long journey. I had not occupied a regular bed for many weeks, and it is perhaps small wonder that I slept soundly, despite the novelty and, as I thought, and not without reason, the danger of my situation. It must have been three o'clock in the morning when I was awakened by loud noises in the dining-room, which was always used by Casper as a sitting and smoking apartment. I heard angry voices of men and much rough swearing. I detected from the thickness of the men's tongues that they were in liquor. One voice I recognized as Casper's, but the other I had never before heard.

"D—— him, he comes to spy on me and to rob me of my fortune. It won't do, Jack. I must strike first or the game may be lost. A Cameron must never delay."

"Sh-sh-sh," said the man addressed as Jack; then in a drawling tone, "You're a-talking too loud, Casper. Someun'll hear ye."

"Listen to me, Jack Bushby. You're a hardened criminal, a man that can't count his victims on the fingers of one hand. I've befriended you and saved your neck several times, and I expect you to stand by me now."

"But you'll be overheard," pleaded Jack.

"Not by a d—— sight. Tannis told me she gave him the east room, and that's far enough away to be safe. Besides, I don't mind much, anyway. To think that he had the impudence to follow me here and to ride in broad daylight right into my glen. Listen to me, Jack Bushby," and Casper dropped his voice so that I heard him with difficulty, although I had been out of bed and had my ear at a small aperture in the wall for some time, "listen to me, Jack. The young fool will leave this glen by the way so many have, as you know, left it in silence, not to be heard of again."

The nature of my feelings can easily be imagined. They certainly were not comfortable. I realized that I was close to extreme danger. I had, however, deliberately chosen to come, and I was determined to abide by the issue. Slipping over to the bedside I extracted my revolver from my clothes, determined to resist to the last should an attempt be made on my life at once, as I feared.

Meanwhile the men continued to talk, but in more subdued tones. Returning to the aperture, I strained my sense of hearing to catch what was being said. I was not able to make it all out, but I caught such snatches as these: "It's got to be done, Jack. We have already plenty of blood on our heads, and what matters one more, especially if the one means to ruin you. It is the watchword of the Camerons to strike quickly and without hesitation. Delays are dangerous. Are you with me, Jack?"

The answer of Casper's pal was spoken in so low a tone that I could only catch a word or two about "some other way."

"Oh, that's a woman's way! D—— if I like a woman's way of doing what should be done in a man's way."

Bushby responded once more in subdued voice, but I gathered that he spoke of the presence of women in the house, for Casper said quickly: "Of course, of course. But we might manage to get them away. How I hate these, d—— blethering women in such cases."

Bushby whispered something in Casper's ear and the latter said: "Yes, I know; but I hate that way of doing the job, and, besides, I have nothing in the house that would answer."

Again Bushby spoke so low that I could not hear.

My uncle said: "Well, I suppose there's no great rush about the business, and if you can see the old hag to-morrow and get it, perhaps no harm will come of a day's delay. Here, Jack, let's have another horn."

I heard the sound of the pouring liquor, then I heard the clink of glasses and Casper said, "Here's a speedy passage to hell for the cub. He little dreamed what a foolhardy task he set himself when he undertook to cross the pathway of his Uncle Casper," and the man laughed a hideous, coarse laugh after he had quaffed the liquor.

"I'm wid yeh in sendin' him t' 'ell right 'nuff," drawled Jack, "but ye must do it circumspeck."

The two men talked and drank for some time, but



as their conversation drifted on to other subjects I lost interest and became absorbed in my own affairs, which I realized to be desperate. I felt, however, that I was reasonably safe for the balance of the night, but I resolved to lie awake—I could not, of course, sleep under the circumstances—and keep my revolver cocked for action in case my uncle should change his mind. I was returning towards the bed when I was conscious of a very light tapping on my window. In my already agitated condition, this greatly startled me. On a moment's reflection I thought that it might be Pierre, and so, going to the window, I peered out. The dim starlight enabled me to detect a figure crouching beneath. I tapped lightly on the pane with my finger nails and the figure stood up. I recognized the face of Tannis.

"Open," she said, in a low voice, which I succeeded in catching.

I obeyed.

"In God's name," I said, "what brings you here at this hour?"

"Danger to Lachlan,"—she used my first name, I think, to distinguish it from that of my uncle.

"Yes, I know," I remarked. "I've overheard some terrible things to-night."

"Tannis sent you to de wrong room. If Casper knew you here, he kill me sure. He never suspek. He hax me where you sleep an' I tell him beeg lie. I no tink he come back to-night."

"Can't I change now?"

"Dat is for what Tannis come to your window.

Hurry put on de clothes an' come wit' me an' I tak' you round to de heast" (east) "room."

Hastily I dressed, and being supple, I had no difficulty sliding through the low casement, and in a moment was by Tannis's side. I experienced a feeling of relief as I departed from my proximity to the murderous plotters in the adjoining room. Tannis took my hand and led me in the darkness to the other side of the lodge.

"Mus' help me push hup de window," said Tannis, trying without success to raise it.

Our joint strength was speedily crowned with success.

"You turn to de lef' wen you git in an' den you fin' de bed."

"Can I fasten the door?"

"Yes; you fin' beeg bolt hon de inside. But you ne'en be scare to-night. Now, hurry!" and the girl was turning to go.

"Tannis," I whispered, taking her by the hand. I noticed that she trembled, and I concluded that it was from fear. I did not then know the Metis character. They rarely tremble from fear. They are stolid and apparently nerveless. "Tannis," I said, "how can I ever repay you?"

"By goin' hon de bed an' mak' fer sleep. Dat please me, fer sure."

"One question more, Tannis," I whispered. "Did you hear my uncle and his companion Bushby to-night?"

"Casper kill me hif I spick."

"But you can trust me," I pleaded.

"Yes, I be certain I trus' you sure. Now you trus' Tannis. I tell you beeg story some day. Hif I hear Casper to-night I know how mak' de fren' fer Lachlan." And the young girl sped into the darkness and disappeared.

I was afraid to strike a match lest the light might be detected by someone in the household. I succeeded in exploring the room in the darkness. I found the door and bolted it. Then I groped my way to the bed, upon which I threw myself without undressing, and, strange as it may appear, I actually slept.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### *THE STORY IN THE CAVE.*

THE sun had crept over the hills and was pouring down the glen and streaming into my room through the small window, when I was aroused by a loud knocking at the door.

"What's the matter?" I called out.

"Nothing's the matter," answered my uncle, in his coarse voice, "only breakfast has been on the table for some time and we're all as hungry as Camerons, so hurry up or we'll be compelled to fall to without you."

"I'll not keep you long," I replied; then hastening my ablutions, I unbolted the door and was ready to sit down in less than ten minutes from the time Casper roused me. The memories of the night were vividly before me, and strange feelings swept over my being as I looked as indifferently as, under the circumstances, I could, at my uncle, and thought of the crime that lay within his bosom.

Tannis was seated at the head of the table and seemed as bright as if she had enjoyed undisturbed slumber. She did not raise her head when I approached the table, and to my hearty "Good morning" she gave but a cold acknowledgment. I consoled myself with the accurate conclusion that she was acting a part.

"Come, Jack," shouted Casper, going to the front door, "breakfast is on and you must be ready for it."

Casper's murderous companion, to whom I had listened in the night, entered the room and sat down at the table. He was a man of under size, but a wiry-looking, tough specimen. He appeared like a man of considerable cunning and reserve. An ugly cast in the left eye, combined with a number of great warts on his face, gave him a sinister expression. He was a man that you would intuitively avoid if you saw him first.

"Jack Bushby, this is my nephew, Lachlan Cameron, about whom I told you yesterday," said Casper.

"Day, s'r," said Bushby, with a sort of grunt, and a side squint at me with his good eye.

My feelings did not go out with warmth or enthusiasm to the man who couldn't count his victims on one hand, and who was engaged to assist in my own undoing, but I tried to look indifferent as I returned his greeting, and said, "I suppose you're a plainsman, Mr. Bushby?"

"Wall, not 'zackly," he drawled out, "though I've been a-movin' 'bout the country fer quite a spell."

"In the fur trade?" I ventured, determined to keep up some kind of a conversation for want of something better to do.

"Naw! Can't say as I'm in that ar trade, neether."

As he did not appear willing to volunteer any information, I kept up the questions.

"Horses?"

"Naw! d—— horses! I takes no stock in them ar."

"Mining?"

"T' 'ell wit' minin'."

"Prospecting for land," I ventured, the humor being on me.

"See here, young man," said Jack, whose choler had been rising at my questions, "ef I told yeh wot purfeshun I folly ye'd be as wise as I be, so ye'd better carve it out an' 'tend to yer own 'fairs an' leave Jack Bushby t' look arter his'n."

I did not in the least resent his crustiness, for I had no business pursuing the questioning, and only did it to gratify a whim. I switched off and asked my uncle some questions about the surrounding country, the Indian tribes that roamed the northern plains, and the handful of natives who shared the glen with them. He courteously answered my questions, and, as I afterwards learned, the information given me was accurate. Breakfast over, Tannis retired, leaving the men to smoke, but she soon reappeared to inform my uncle that there was a strange man at the door wanting to see him.

"Bring him in," said Casper.

To my great astonishment, Tannis reappeared in a moment, followed by Pierre Dumont, my guide.

One warning glance from Pierre and I knew my *rôle*. Casper and Bushby had their eyes fixed upon Pierre, and could not have observed the momentary surprise that Pierre's appearance occasioned to me.

"Missu Cameron?" said Pierre, unerringly picking out my uncle, and addressing him.

"The same," replied Casper, curtly. "What's your business?"

"I'm frum de far nort' an' I came wid beeg pack furs. My Hindians dey run de bad rapids hon de Saskatchewan han lose de boats. We save de furs an' get dem cache hon de shore, but haf no way fer get dem to trading pos'. I hear me from de Hindians dat you mak trade wit' de fur, so I come hon fer fin' you hout an' I mak de bargain wit' you sure."

I could not restrain a quiet smile at Pierre's ingenious romance, which he told with a face as stolid and earnest as if he were confessing to one of the fathers of his Church. Casper's eyes glistened at the prospect of making a haul out of Pierre's furs, for such an opportunity was in those early days regarded as a splendid chance.

"I think I'll be able to accommodate you and relieve you of your furs," said Casper, slowly, and after a pause, so as not to give the half-breed the impression that he was at all eager for the business, lest it might lead to the driving of a hard bargain on Pierre's part: "How far is it to the spot where your furs are cached?"

"Oh, 'bout seesty, seventy mile," answered Pierre, in a calculating tone.

"So far as that?"

"Well, I tink me she's dat far fer sure. Took me tree four days fer come, an' I be ver' tired fer sure, fer I walk mos' de way."

"Did you leave anyone in charge of the pack?"

"No, I not trus' henybody. I swear at de Hindians fer lose my boats, an' I dismiss dem an' sen' dem back to dare tribes. Den I carry de furs myself when dey're gone an' I hide de furs so no man she's know but Pierre where she's fin' dem."

"You'll be tired."

"Ver' tired,—an' hoongray," added Pierre, glancing at the table, which had not yet been cleared.

"Here Tannis, Tannis!" roared Casper, going to the kitchen door, "bring in some tea and get this man something to eat, for he's hungry.

Tannis reappeared hurriedly with the teapot and a quantity of bread and other viands, which she set before Pierre, who drew himself up to the table and ravenously devoured what was placed before him. He and Casper talked about the business introduced by Pierre, and as it was agreed that there was no hurry about it, Casper's proposed expedition to the cache to inspect the furs was left to an indefinite period in the near future. Pierre readily accepted the invitation to abide at Moose Lodge until Casper was ready to go.

"I've some business on hand," said Casper, looking significantly at Bushby, who sat enveloped in the clouds of smoke that he emitted, "that won't keep very well. After that is dispatched I'll be ready to take the road with you and buy your furs."

I readily divined the nature of the business, and a realization of its purport did not tend to increase my complacency or comfort. I was anxious to have a word with Pierre, to let him know the gravity of the



situation, in order that he might be ready for the emergency that I knew was not remote, but prudence demanded that I should move with the greatest caution. I thought of Tannis and determined to use her, if possible. The opportunity came sooner than I hoped for. Casper proposed to Pierre a visit to the lake shore to inspect some fishing boats that he owned.

"Here, Jack," he shouted to Bushby, "you come along with me and the fur-trader, and we'll leave my nephew with the women and children. You can help at the inspection."

The three men disappeared down the glen, following the channel cut out by the little stream which formed the only outlet or passage way from the glen to the lake shore.

I took a brief turn up the valley, glancing into the few Indian tents as I walked. My presence did not appear to create either surprise or suspicion, and I judged that my uncle frequently entertained white men at Moose Lodge. Returning along an obscure path I encountered Tannis. Perhaps the girl was looking for me; for my part I was glad to see her, as I wanted to tell her about Pierre.

"Tannis," I said, confronting her in the pathway, "I'm so glad I've met you here, as there is something I want to tell you."

She put the index finger of her right hand to her mouth and gave me a warning look as she said, in swift, low tones, "De trees have ears, de rocks have ears, de ground have ears. Danger fer spik, folly queeck," and she sped up the pathway.

I wheeled and followed her, but with all my youth and strength it was with extreme difficulty that I kept her form in view. The path wound deviously up the declivity that formed the west bank or hillside of the glen. The place was well known to Tannis, for she would dart into this by-path and that, then she would swing off suddenly and shoot through a small extent of original forest through which it was difficult for a man, to say nothing of a skirted woman, to make his way. After we had travelled as I judged fully three-quarters of a mile, and I was wondering if I could hold out much longer, we came suddenly upon a deep gulch in the side of the mountain. It looked as if a subterranean explosion had blown a great mass out of the rocky hillside. Holding on to branches and roots of small scrubby trees, and motioning to me to follow her example, Tannis descended into the gulch, I following as quickly and nimbly as possible. Reaching the bottom she sped to the northern extremity, over which had grown a thick mass of scrub. Parting the deep growth at a certain point, the agile girl crawled through, and I following, we found ourselves in a small cave, perfectly formed, and so absolutely hidden and isolated from the world that discovery seemed impossible. An indifferent light that struggled through the boughs partially dispelled the darkness of the place. Tannis heaved a sigh of relief as she adjusted the scrub that formed the door in order to conceal any traces of disarrangement.

"Safe here," she said.

"It looks so," I answered, feeling uneasy, if not uncanny, at the novelty of the situation.

"Tannis fin' dis place myself, an' nobodee she's know henyting 'bout it—'cept you now," she added, laughing.

"How did you find it, Tannis?" I said.

"I tink God she's put it here fer Tannis," she answered. Her mind appeared to be absorbed with distressing recollections, and by the dim light I could detect the glistening moisture in her eyes. I was drawn to the girl. I took her kindly by the hand, led her back to the leafy doorway, where we sat down on a natural bench of rock, and I asked her to tell me about her life. It seemed a long time till she made up her mind to speak. Her heart appeared to be filled with sorrow, and when she did break silence it was with diffidence. As she proceeded, however, she gained confidence and talked with more freedom. Her story, given in her own simple, broken and defective English, was as follows:

"Till haight" (eight) "years ago Tannis was happee, living wid fadder an' mudder away hup in nort'—oh, ver' long way from here—Fort Assiniboine. My fadder she's de—wat you call dat—Factor, Chief Factor fer de Companee" (the Hudson's Bay Company), "w'ile my mudder she's be Hindian woman, daughter of chief de Stoney tribe. My fadder she's teach me de Hinglish, but I no spik well."

"You speak very well, indeed, Tannis, for the opportunity you got," I said, encouragingly.

She was pleased and went on: "Well, we live dare

ver' happee till one day de troube" (trouble) "she's break hout wid de Hindians. Dey tink de Companee she's steal de fur, wich was great meestake, fer my fadder he's do hall he can fer please de tribe. De fur she's stole by some French trader, an' de Hindians blame de Companee. My fadder tell 'em sure de Companee she's not blame, but de Hindians ver' hangry an' burn de Fort an' kill my fadder an' mudder. Den ma heart break sure," and the young girl wept quietly at the recollection of the tragedy that deprived her of her father and mother.

When she became calm again she went on: "One of de Hindians she's know ma mudder and she's rescue me from de tribe an' sen' me down beeg reever wit' partee to Cumberland House, ware ma huncle she's de Factor. Well, I leeve wit' ma huncle an' try ferget ma fadder and mudder, but happee days fer 'Tannis she's no come back an' I hoffen tink I trow maself hon de beeg reever. I sit sometimes de hole night trou' an' I gaze into de beeg Saskatchewan, and I call hon ma fadder an' mudder an' hax dem fer spik wit' 'Tannis, but dey no come. De—wat you call dat—de missionar" (missionary) "she's tell me ma fadder an' mudder she's not gone, but dat I see dem 'gain, as dey jus' wait fer me hon de odder shore. Well, 'Tannis gaze hon de beeg reever hall night an' call to dem fer come and spik wit' her. Oh, 'Tannis be so lonesome widout dem! Affer gazin' hon de reever mos' hall night 'Tannis hoffen tink she's see dem hon de odder shore, same's de missionar she's tell. Den 'Tannis she's come happee 'gain an' she's call dem

fer come cross an' croon wit' her same's w'en Tannis leetle girl.

"One night, haffer sittin' fer many hours gazin' hon de beeg reever an' callin' fer fadder an' mudder, me see dem plain hon odder shore. Ma mudder she's hole hout her arms fer Tannis an' I hear her say, 'Come, an' I rock you in ma arms an' sing to you like de days w'en you babee.' Tannis could not stand it longer, she sigh long, long tam fer de mudder w'at love her so, fer de mudder w'at neffer sleep w'en babee she's seek, fer de mudder w'at sit hall night many, many tams, wit' Tannis in her arms lookin' into ma face, kissin' me, lovin' me an' croonin' to me in de song of her peope" (people), "so I spring hinto de beeg reever fer try an' swim hon de odder shore. P'raps I go drown honly ma huncle he's miss me frum de 'ouse an' he's come look fer me hon de reever jus' has I joomp in. He tink i try commit—w'at you call dat—sooside, an' he joomp in haffer me an' pull me hout. I tell him I see mudder an' fadder hon de odder shore; dat mudder she's hax me fer come to her arms an' I jus' try fer reach her. Ma huncle she's no scole me, but take me in she's arms an' carry me home. He's tell me I see mudder an' fadder some day, but dat Saskatchewan she's not de reever deys cross. I hax him de name de reever, an' he look me kindly in de face an' he's say, 'Dat reever she's Jordan.' I hax ware's Jordan, an' he tell me far away, dat p'haps I not fin' it till I grow ole woman, but dat I fin' it fer sure some day, and den I see fadder an' mudder."

I was deeply affected by the touching simplicity

and beauty of Tannis's story. My heart was full, and as silence is the only language that a full heart knows, I kept silent and nodded to her to proceed.

"Well, I neffer go hon de reever 'gain fer long tam, an' w'en I go I not see fadder an' mudder no more, an' I not call fer dem, an' mudder she's not stretch hout her arms fer me 'gain. Dat mak me sorree ma huncle he's tell me dat it is de Jordan an' not de Saskatchewan I haf fer cross before I meet dem 'gain. De Jordan she seems so far, far away. Do you know where it is?" she said, stopping abruptly and turning inquiringly to me.

"It may be very much nearer than you think," I replied, treating the question in its allegorical rather than its literal sense.

"Oh, I be so ver' glad you'se tell me dat," answered Tannis, her eyes brightening and shining with a strange ethereal light. "P'raps I fin' de reever soon an' den I cross an' see ma mudder and fadder. I like fer be fold jus' once in mudder's arms, an' have her sing me to sleep once more as she did w'en Tannis she's honly lil babee."

"Are you unhappy here, Tannis?" I asked, surprised at her words and wondering if they were due to a morbid condition of mind.

"Mos' unhappy," she replied, quickly. "Casper she's one brute, an' I hate him fer sure."

"How do you come to be an inmate of his house?"

"Dat's long storee, an' I not like fer tell you every-ting, but I tell you some an' you can guess de res'."

I bowed my head and gazed at the pebbles on the ground till she was ready to proceed.

After a considerable pause she went on: "Ma huncle he's get ver' seek at Cumberland House an' dough" (though) "we hall do w'at we can fer him he's die an' Tannis lef' wit' his woman jus' a squaw w'at know nottings, an' no understand Tannis. De nex' spring Casper, yo're huncle—I don't believe Casper he's your huncle at all—come Cumberland House in search of fur an' he stop dare. He's p'tend" (pretend) "tak grate notion Tannis, an' he hax me go home wit' him an' live in his house. He say his wif' nice woman an' I grow hup wit' children an' be like daughter wit' him. I tink she's good ting fer go. I haf no fadder, mudder er huncle advise wit' me, an' I go."

"How long since was that?" I asked.

"Jus' tree year."

"And how old were you then?"

"'Bout nineteen. I not know 'xactly, but I tink she's 'bout nineteen."

"And you've lived here ever since?"

"Yes, but I not stop mooch longer."

"Why?" I asked.

"Dat Casper he's brute. He treat me kindlee first. He tell me w'en he hax me fer go wit' him dat hees wif' she's Hinglish woman, but I fin' she's squaw. Den I know Casper one beeg liar an' I not trus' him 'gain. He promise fer sen' me Fort Garry fer go school, but he's not keep his word. Den one day he's get drunk an' he's tell me he's no sen' me Fort

Garry, dat he want fer marry me, dat he no' lik' hees woman, dat he's ver' reech, an' if I marry him I haf plentee monee."

"The brute," I muttered, speaking low.

"Yes, he's brute fer sure," answered Tannis. "Mebee you tink so hif you honly know him like me. Ma mudder he's teach me be good girl an' ma huncle she's halso warn me 'gainst bad mans. W'en I understand your huncle I keep hout way. W'en he git dronk—an' he drink plentee de whiskey now—he always want fer marry me, but I run fer life an' hide in dis cave."

"What of Casper's Indian wife?" I asked.

"She's much 'fraid Casper, an' not dare spik wit' him w'en he's dronk. But she's good frens wit' me, an' she's help me run 'way an' gif me plentee fer feed me w'en I'se hide here. Hif Casper she's know she kill woman fer sure. De brute she's offen beat woman an' lil chil'ren. He swear at chil'ren 'cause he says deys black Hindians an' not Camerons."

"So you've made up your mind to leave, Tannis," I said, as she did not seem inclined to talk further.

"Yes, I mus' go. Casper comes wilder every day. She's t'reaten fer kill me hif I no marry him, an' I sooner die dan marry Casper; besides he have wif now. Hif I not able hide hin dis cave I trow maself hin lake long ago. Dat's w'y I say I tink God she's put de cave here fer Tannis."

I think I understood Tannis's situation pretty well. I was filled with pity and admiration for the girl who had made such an heroic fight for her honor and



womanhood, and I determined to help her if I could. I took both her hands in mine, and with moistening eyes, for it was difficult to restrain my emotion under the circumstances, and in the presence of so much natural and virtuous heroism, I assured her that I would not leave her unprotected, but that I would befriend her, rescue her from Casper if I succeeded in escaping myself, and take her to a place of safety. The gratitude that beamed from her eyes was too abundant a reward for a favor not yet bestowed.

Before we left the cave I confided in Tannis such points about my own story and mission as I thought it well she should know, in order that she might the better understand and appreciate the task I had before me. I felt that I could trust her absolutely and I knew sufficient of the female nature to realize that you cannot cement their attachment to your cause more securely than by giving them proofs of your faith in their integrity. When I told her about the unnatural conduct of my uncle, Tannis protested vigorously.

"Casper no more your huncle dan Tannis. I feel sure 'bout dat, fer one time w'en he's dronk an' haf, w'at you call dat, de—de ting w'en you see de beeg snake?"

"The D. T.'s," I suggested.

"Dat's not w'at dey call him here, but p'raps he be de same ting. Casper she's ver' bad an' she's rave an' shout an' say fonny ting. She's talk 'bout de will an' she's slap de stomach an' say, 'I've got de belt an' de will right here,' an' she's further say, 'I fool dem

hall, I fool ole Sol'mon Pinch. I no Cameron, but I got de 'state an' I reech man's, an' I fool de hole lot.' Den she's go hoff on odder tings an' talk 'bout Colonel Cameron, Simon Thomson, Sanders Sylvester, an' she's mix dem hup dre'ful sure."

"Did you ever see the belt?" I asked.

"No, I never see him. Manakee—dat's his squaw—he's tell me see him sometimes, but Casper she's never tak him frum de wais'. Dere's someting 'bout dat belt dat's fonny. I tink Casper she's 'fraid fer tak it hoff."

"Could you think of any way by which we could get possession of the belt, Tannis?" I asked.

"Guess not," said the girl, after reflection. "Casper bad mans an' kill me hif she's tink I not true to him. But I hax Manakee; p'raps he's tink some way."

"Is Manakee not true to Casper?"

"No, he's hate Casper awful, but he's 'fraid hees life Casper, an' he not do henyting cross him, sure. Casper kill Manakee same's he's kill beeg dog hif he catch him untrue."

We had exhausted all the important things that had to be said. I told her about Pierre, and she promised to communicate to him the position of affairs. Tannis appeared happier than I believed her capable of feeling. Suddenly, however, the old look of sadness and fear returned, and she said: "Now, we mus' go. Hif Casper tink I spik wit' you he kill me sure. P'raps he back an' wonder ware we be. Mus' hurry," and the girl parted the boughs that concealed the

entrance, and peering carefully around to make sure that we were not watched, she crept swiftly out, motioning me to follow. I complied.

Tannis climbed quickly and noiselessly out of the gulch, the way we entered; then she sped down the mountain side as swiftly as an antelope. After she had gone half way she paused till I came up. Then she whispered, "We mus' part here. Someone she's see hus, den dare's trouble. Keep down de hillside an' you come to de stream, follow dat an' you'se come hout right," and she disappeared among the thick trees and scrub like a shadow.

I had no difficulty making my way down, and speedily reached the little burn that drained the glen. Following this, I was soon among the tents and within a few rods of Moose Lodge. I wondered if I should ever again see the cave. I was quite sure I could not, to save my life, find it myself. Passing the Indian tents, I recognized to my great satisfaction my Indian, "Muggins," apparently quite at home, seated in front of a tent with a couple of other Indians, smoking complacently. Pierre always assured me he was perfectly loyal and trustworthy, and so I regarded him. He kept his eyes on the ground as I passed, and I knew that he had been coached by Pierre.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### *CASPER'S DEADLY POTION.*

"WHERE in thunder have you been?" said Casper, roughly, as I opened the little gate at Moose Lodge. "We've been wondering what came of you. Jack, here, suggested that you had eloped with one of our dusky maidens," and my uncle laughed coarsely at his sally.

"I've been exploring your beautiful glen," I replied, "and once you get lost in its labyrinths it's not so easy finding your way out; but here I am, none the worse for my wanderings."

"Well, let's to dinner," said Casper, poking Bushby, who was dozing on a chair, and slapping Pierre on the shoulder as he passed through the door to the dining-room, where the steaming meat and other viands were already deposited on the table.

Tannis, being summoned by my uncle, presided again. She practised the greatest reserve towards me. This was gratifying, as it convinced me of her discretion. I noticed that Casper appeared boisterous and reckless. He had evidently consumed a considerable quantity of liquor during the forenoon. He affected an air of friendliness toward myself, but I could see that the manner was forced. Instinctively I feared him and recoiled from his friendly overtures. Brutal hypocrisy was painted in glaring characters

across his face. I noticed that he did most of the serving himself, being apparently influenced by his forced flow of assumed good-nature. He even went so far as to pour the tea, and passed me my cup with the remark: "You'll find that stronger tea than our family used to get in the old days in Bruce." He watched me empty my cup, and I noticed that his hand trembled and his own cup rattled against the saucer as he set it down.

We sat at dinner for over half an hour, and as I rose with the company I felt a strange dizziness in my head. Instantly the scene of the previous night flashed upon me,—my uncle and Jack Bushby's conversation, Jack's suggestion about "some other way"—I saw it all, but I was too much stunned to speak. My uncle, Jack and Pierre left the room immediately, going to the verandah.

"My God, Tannis," I said, addressing the girl, "Casper has poisoned me. Did you notice that he poured the tea himself and handed me my cup, and that his hand trembled while doing it. I've a strange feeling in my head. I should have known it, I should have known it."

Instantly the girl's face grew deadly pale. "Pizen! you be pizen, Lachlan?" she exclaimed in a dazed manner. "Tannis to blame, Tannis to blame fer not warn you. Oh, de brute, de brute!"

I shall not attempt to describe my feelings; they can be much more easily imagined. I was not afraid of death, but death under such circumstances, and at the hands of Casper, the exposure and bringing to

justice of whom I had regarded as my life's mission. And now to be miserably foiled at the outset, to be poisoned like a rat in its hole, just as I was getting into close grips, was too much, and I groaned aloud.

"My God!" I said in my desperation, "must this be so?"

Tannis was by my side in an instant. "Come," she said, "come to your room," and taking my arm, she hurried me down the wide hall to the east room, where I spent a portion of the previous night.

"Lie down hon de bed," she said, pushing me towards it, "an' I run fer Manakee. P'raps she know someting fer help you."

The moment I lay down the girl darted from the room and in an instant reappeared with Casper's Indian wife. The poor woman looked terribly frightened, but Tannis hurried her towards the bed, where she minutely inspected me. She nodded her head to Tannis and spoke something in Cree that I did not understand. Tannis seized her by the right hand and talked with vehemence in the Indian tongue. The girl was excited and impatient to the highest pitch.

"What is it?" I asked, wondering what the tempest of language meant.

Tannis spoke. "Manakee he's know de hole woman w'at gif de pizen an' he's say she haf someting dat she's gif fer stop de 'fect."

"In God's name," I exclaimed, desperately, "bring her here or get the antidote. I cannot die in this miserable way."

Tannis seized Manakee by both arms, and the

storm of words, and I judged of implorations to save my life, that she directed at her, accompanied by appealing gestures, was pathetic to witness.

"Oh, Manakee, Manakee!" she exclaimed, in broken English, "w'y you so fraid Casper. He just can kill you. W'at of dat? But you let dis boy die God punish you sure an' you neffer see happee hunting-ground."

"Say that to her in Cree, Tannis," I said. "Perhaps she will go."

Tannis said that and a great deal more. She made appeals to the woman the nature of which I could not surmise. Presently the Indian woman began to yield. Tannis's vehemence and persistence were having their effect. I noticed the tears in Manakee's eyes, and I had hope. Manakee looked upon me with pity and left the room hurriedly.

"T'ank God she's go fer try," said Tannis, "oh, t'ank de good God. Hif de medicine woman he's honly come we save your life sure."

The poison was doing its deadly work with me. Every moment increased the pain in my stomach, following upon the dizziness in the head. My mouth became intensely parched, and all the muscles of my body seemed to contract so that I feared they would break. I realized that my condition was desperate and that I must soon be beyond relief. I groaned aloud in agony. My condition excited the sympathy of poor Tannis, who knelt by my bedside and stroked my brow.

"Poor Lachlan," she said. "Oh, dat brute Casper! God punish him fer dis, sure."

Would Manakee never return? The moments seemed like years to me. As I said before, I do not think I was afraid of death; I was brought up in too stern a school to fear the monster, and I was not a timid youth. But such a death, and under such circumstances! I felt as if my blood, as if every drop of moisture in my body, was rapidly drying up. The sensation of my muscles contracting, of my flesh drying, of even my bones shrinking, of my head reeling with dizziness, of my brain on fire, and all accompanied by excruciating internal pain, was frightful to experience. I could not maintain my reason many moments longer. My condition was such that I could not pray; indeed I could scarcely think. I felt that I was going mad. I reached my hand to my face to press back my eyes, which I felt sure were starting from their sockets. I heard a noise at the door, but my reason was dethroned; I was a madman.

Tannis afterwards told me that it was two hours before my reason returned. Manakee came back in the nick of time. Ten minutes more and the poison would have accomplished its deadly mission. Indeed, as it was, the medicine woman whom Casper's wife brought to my bedside feared that it was too late. Putting the antidote in a little water, they pried my mouth open and, holding my nose, forced me to swallow the mixture.

"We t'ought she's too late fer sure," said Tannis, as she sat by the bedside and laved my burning forehead after I had come to myself, "but dat med'cin



he's great ting. You rave lak de crazy mans fer long tam, but bime-by you come quiet an' de hole woman she's say in Cree, 'Dat's hall rite.' She's say, 'She's git better now, de med'cin he's do de treek.'"

I smiled faintly at Tannis's description. Instantly she said, "I'se be so glad you safe, oh, so ver' glad. It warm Tannis's heart see you smile. Won't you please mak de laugh."

The earnestness of the girl, coupled with the humor of her request, extracted a laugh from me in spite of the tragic experience through which I had just passed.

Tannis was satisfied.

But if I was able to smile I was still far from recovery. I had had a terrible wracking, and every joint and muscle in my body ached. My flesh was sore to the touch, my stomach and internal organs still gave me pain, and my head felt so light that I believed it would float. But I realized that the crisis was past. I felt that I had been snatched from the very portals of death, and as I lay on the bed weak and limp I thought of Simon's prayer for my safe-keeping the morning I left home, and I breathed some silent words of thanks to God for His deliverance.

Much to the relief of Tannis, Manakee, and myself, Casper and Bushby had left the glen after dinner to ride some miles down the lakeside to visit a fishing station. Undoubtedly the would-be murderers shrank from witnessing the consummation of their dastardly plot to get rid of me. Pierre accompanied them. Owing to the weakness of my condition I felt that I could not move, and so I bethought me of a plan that I decided to risk.

"Tannis," I said, "we must devise some means of deceiving Casper when he returns. He will naturally conclude that the deadly mixture that he administered has done its work, and he must not be undeceived before to-morrow. I want you to tell him that I complained of feeling unwell after dinner, and that I went to my room and locked myself in it; that you heard noises of distress, as if I were sick, but that the signs of distress ceased after a time and that you presumed I had recovered. I do not think he will care to disturb me to-night. He would prefer to leave his victim quiet until the morning."

Tannis nodded her head and readily acquiesced in the scheme.

"Then I wish you would contrive to inform Pierre about the attempt to poison me and the gravity of the situation. Ask him to come to my window about midnight, so that I may talk with him."

After this I rested quietly, and as the hours passed I felt my head improve, although my joints continued to ache and my flesh retained its feeling of soreness. Tannis remained by my bedside, watching me like a nurse and suggesting many trifling services that she might render. I felt that I owed my life to this girl. I was deeply grateful, but I determined that the present was not the time to tell her my thoughts.

Tannis stayed with me until the barking of dogs in the glen warned her that someone was approaching, and concluding that it was Casper returning, she hurriedly took leave, first asking if there was nothing further she could do to contribute to my comfort, and

promising to either send Pierre to my window or come herself during the night. I could hear Casper and his companions enter the house. I could easily detect the loud, boisterous voice of my uncle, but I could not catch even a suggestion of the conversation. After, as I judged by the lapse of time, the party had partaken of supper, I heard a heavy footfall coming down the hall. I immediately concluded that it was Casper. When he came opposite the door of my room he stopped, and I could hear the door rattle slightly, as if he had placed his ear to a crack to listen. For a moment or two I held my breath, and when I was finally forced to inhale the air I did it noiselessly. Evidently Casper's visit to my door satisfied him, for I heard him heave a sigh of apparent relief as he muttered in low, vengeful tones, "That's the last of the Camerons; the lad's quiet enough, I'll warrant." And as if awed by his proximity to the supposed dead, he went off on tip-toe.

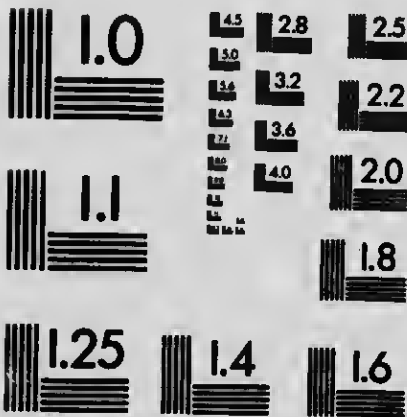
"Don't be too sure about your reckoning, Casper," I thought. "It would be contrary to the laws of God if you escape the punishment that justice has so long been calling upon me to assist in administering."

I lay very quietly on my bed for hours. At last I slept lightly, but I could not have been asleep long when I was conscious of a faint tapping on my window. With a great effort (for I was still very sore in every portion of my body), I roused myself, and crawling on my hands and knees to the window, rose when I reached it, and peered out. The faint starlight in the heavens enabled me to recognize Pierre.



# MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

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"Lif' de window," he whispered loudly enough for me to hear. Hastily I undid the fastenings that Tannis had made secure, and raised the small sash.

"Hi come in," whispered Pierre. "Hit's dangerous talk hon de houtside w'en she's not dark. Some stray Hindians see me fer sure," and the agile guide slipped quickly and silently through the open window. He grasped my hand and pressed it significantly. "Hi be ver' sorree, Misser Cameron, dat I not be here, but I not dream your huncle try fer pizen you. De gurl she's tell me hall 'bout it. Dat be fine gurl, an' mak de good fren' fer Lachlan."

I pressed Pierre's hand to show him that I understood and appreciated all he said.

"Goot gurl, fer sure," he repeated. "I nevere forgive maself hif henyting happen to you." Again I pressed his hand and whispered that he was in no way to blame.

"But you don' hunderstan' de—wat you call dat—de responsabilitee de guide. You no fin' de right kin' o' half-breed guide hif he not lose hees hown life 'fore he lose hees boss's life. Dats' de law wit' de guide hon de plains. Hif you lose life hin ma charge, Pierre she's not care fer leeve heny longer. He's want fer die wit' he's boss."

It was with difficulty that I could switch his mind from the consideration of what he persisted in regarding as his carelessness; and although I did get him to talk of other matters, he would constantly revert to the old subject.

"You see," he said, "hit's not lak zif you be ole

man, er be used wit' de plains an' de danger. You be honly boy, an' de Doctare who hax me fer go wit' you, he do it 'cause he trus' me an' he know Pierre safe man, an' he b'lieve I tak goot care you sure. W'at he tink w'en he hear Hi leave you git pizen by de scoun'rel dat you call huncle?"

"It was no possible fault of yours," I whispered consolingly again, pressing Pierre's hand, "and besides, I'll never tell Dr. Schultz anyway."

"Well, you no tell de Doctare hit's no' so bad. But hif de Doctare he's tink I negleck you he's nevare forgive me sure."

Pierre was partially satisfied, and then we proceeded to discuss our situation. I told the guide about the conversation I had overheard between Casper and Bushby the previous night, when my uncle appeared anxious to despatch me without delay.

"Dat means dat he lose no tam haffer he's fin' hout dat de pizen she's no work," said Pierre. "He's sure fer commence business hearly. He's know de pizen story she's git hout, an' he want fer settle de matter *tout suite* (without delay); so we mus' be prepare' fer de worse," added Pierre, thoughtfully.

I agreed with the guide, and we talked the situation over for an hour or more, laying our plans for defence.

"With Tannis as an ally," I said to Pierre, "and Manakee either friendly or neutral, I think we can hold our own with Casper and Bushby. They will not suspect that I know of their attempt to poison me. They will assume that I attributed my indisposition

to some natural cause, and so I shall have the advantage if they attempt to come on me by stealth."

"Dat's well," said Pierre, "an' would do beeg credit to de Doctare himself, who's great man fer resource."

"The real danger," I added, "will come when Casper finds that I'm ready to meet him on his own ground, as, of course, I shall be obliged to do. Then he may call in his Indian friends to assist, and if they respond, then, Pierre, perhaps you will be a better judge than I of the result. For myself I greatly fear it."

Pierre was lost in thought for a time. At length he said: "Yes, you'se be right fer sure. De Hindian be de real trouble." Then, brightening with the thought, "I fin' Muggins hin de mornin', an' I git him fer try an' mak de fren' wit' de Hindian."

"Muggins is here," I said, "and I saw him to-day talking with some of the Indians."

"Goot, goot! Den p'raps we git long better dan we hixpect."

"You and Muggins can conceal yourselves in the scrub surrounding the Lodge," I said, "and watch developments. You will then know how to act with intelligence."

With this understanding Pierre and I shook hands. He slipped silently through the window and disappeared in the darkness. I returned to my bed, and being utterly worn out, slept and slept soundly, even though I realized that I was in the midst of grave danger.



## CHAPTER XX.

### *I SURPRISE CASPER.*

It was significant that no one pounded on my door to awaken me as did my uncle the previous morning, and so my sleep was fortunately prolonged into the forenoon. I woke with a start, and though my joints and flesh were at first sore when I stood up, I felt greatly refreshed by my excellent sleep, and after a time even the soreness disappeared from my body. I dressed myself as noiselessly as possible, and before leaving the room I critically examined my revolvers and cartridges. My best revolver I carefully loaded and concealed in an inner pocket of my waistcoat. I also appropriated a great rough-looking dirk knife that I found hanging on the wall. This I also concealed on my person, determined that if I was ambushed and called upon suddenly to defend myself I would not be taken unawares and found defenceless. When I was ready I unbolted the door, and although I felt anything but comfortable or brave, I determined to present a bold front, and so walked firmly down the hall and out on the verandah. Casper was seated there smoking, and I could see by his eyes that he had also been drinking heavily, and that he was still partially under its influence.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, while his face took on a deadly pallor, and he shook so violently that I feared he would topple over. "Is it you, Lachlan?"

It cost me the effort of my life to restrain myself and keep from doing violence to this unnatural monster, who had with such cold-blooded deliberateness planned my death and sat by complacently while his diabolical work was, as he conjectured, being accomplished. But there was too much at stake to permit me to blunder; so, suppressing my feelings with a superhuman effort, I replied, in a tone as indifferent as I could command: "Yes, it's me, or at least all that's left of me. I suppose the women told you I had a rather bad turn after you left yesterday."

Casper was always quick to catch himself and seize an opportunity, and he instantly embraced the opening I gave.

"Well, they did say something about you having a turn at the stomach, but I concluded that it was not serious. I started to visit you in your room last night, but paused at the door, and when I heard your regular breathing I concluded that you were all right and decided that it would be unwise to disturb you."

"You liar and black hypocrite!" I thought, as I recalled his visit to my door the previous evening, and his pause there to satisfy himself that his potion had had its deadly effect upon me.

It did not take Casper long to recover his natural manner. The shock that my appearance gave him had dispelled the effects of the liquor he had been drinking. I noticed, however, that as he filled his pipe his hands trembled. Excusing himself to procure matches, he withdrew to the inner room, where I heard the rattle of glasses, and I knew that he was priming himself with liquor to restore his nerve.

When he returned he tried to talk as friendly as possible, but his manner was forced, and even the liquor did not help him to any extent. I was in no mood to talk, much less to carry on a friendly conversation with a man who but a few hours previously had deliberately endeavored to take my life.

"Guess I'll look Bushby up and go for a ride," said my uncle, after several feeble attempts to talk. "Perhaps you'd like to join us?"

"If you don't mind," I replied, "I should prefer to rest here. I'm not feeling up to the mark after the turn I had yesterday, and besides, I want to write some letters home, as I understand the packet from the Hudson's Bay post is expected to pass any day now."

Casper eyed me closely, as if he thought I suspected his designs, but he said nothing. I doubted not that if I had acquiesced and accompanied him and Bushby on a lonely ride the opportunity would have been seized by them to attempt my life.

During my ramble through the woods in the glen that afternoon (I was afraid to venture far lest I should be ambushed) Pierre managed to get speech of me for a moment. He told me that Muggins was in readiness to do all in his power in case of emergency.

Casper and his companion did not return until late that night. I had retired to my room to prepare for the assault which I believed was almost certain to come. As I lay upon the bed in my clothes, which I had not removed, I could hear the loud voices of the two men proceeding from the sitting-room, where they appeared to be disputing.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### *HOSTILITIES OPENED.*

THE sound of the men's voices had ceased for some time, and I was beginning to think that I was to be reprieved for twenty-four hours, when I heard a slight tapping on my window. Rising hurriedly I hastened to the spot and quickly recognized the face of Tannis pressed against the pane. Raising the sash, I hurriedly asked the cause of the nocturnal visit.

The girl put her finger to her lips in a warning manner. "Sh-sh," she said, looking furtively about. "Danger—grave danger. Your huncle intends fer murder you to-night. Tannis hear de plot. Bushby be here soon. Don' hopen de door fer 'im. Don' be 'fraid fer shoot. Git revolver all ready an' fite fer life. Tannis your fren' an' watch an' help if needed," and she hurriedly slipped from the folds of her waist a long blade that gleamed in the night. Her face wore a look of dark determination. Woe be to Casper if he came within reach of that deadly weapon.

"Now, I mus' go fer sure. Don' be 'fraid. You have fren's, an' no harm come to you," and the girl sped into the darkness.

I let down and fastened the window, and was retiring to the bed when I heard footsteps in the hall. They did not sound like Casper's, and I judged they were Bushby's. As they neared my room door they

increased in rapidity, as if the person was impatient. Then followed a loud and hurried pounding on my door, something like a noise that might be made by the butt end of a revolver. A strange feeling crept over me, for I realized the object of the visit, and could not tell how close I was to death. But there was no time for indulgence of thoughts concerning myself. I was face to face with the crisis, and must act. So putting on a bold front, and speaking in loud, indifferent tones, I said:

"What's the trouble? Who's pounding on my door?"

"Trouble enough," came the reply, in a voice that I instantly recognized as Jack Bushby's. "The house has caught fire in the front and thar's danger o' everyone o' us bein' burned up, so hurry an' git out or it'll be all up with you."

"Have you roused my uncle?" I inquired.

"Yes, and he's sent me to stir you out. He said he wouldn't forgive hisself if his neffy wuz to git burned to death in his house, so hurry up er it'll be too late. The smoke's advancin' up the hall now."

What was I to do?

To open the door and step out meant an instant encounter with a man who was armed for the purpose of taking my life. To remain quiet doubtless involved an attack upon me by both Bushby and Casper, who would soon break through the door. It was true I could open fire, but I did not know that the bullets would penetrate the thick wooden door. I pictured in my mind the very spot where Jack was crouching,

and I thought how easy it would be to fire at that point. The bullet might penetrate through the wood and find a lodgment in Bushby's body. But I had never shot a man, nor had I even shot in the direction of a human being. Murderer and all as I believed Jack Bushby to be, and convinced as I was that he was crouching at my door ready to pounce upon me the instant I ventured out, and take my life, I shrank from firing at him in cold blood. But it was necessary to act and act quickly. For the want of something better to do, and because I felt it incumbent upon me to do something, I resolved to take a random shot at the door, sufficiently wide of the spot where I believed Jack to be crouching, to miss his body; but the moment I felt for my revolver I heard a slight noise at my window. I hastened to it and found Pierre.

"Quick!" he whispered, "let me in; you'll need me here. Casper have de Hindians wit' him an' he's fite fer sure hif he tink he's need dem."

It was a great relief to assist Pierre through the small sash. Hurriedly we put down the window and swung to a small iron grating which I had previously neglected to mention. Hastily I gave Pierre a whispered explanation of the situation.

"You say hit was one haccident," said Pierre, drawing his revolver and firing at the door near the spot where I explained to him that Jack was crouching.

"D—— you, what do you mean by firing at the door?" exclaimed Bushby, in an excited voice.

"It's so dark here that accidents will happen in spite of one," I answered. "If a fellow only knew you

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" Jack Bushby stood revealed with a revolver in one hand and a dirk in the other."



were at the door he would be more careful. I hope you're not hurt."

"No, but I might have been, you're so d—— careless. Why don't you hurry when you know the house is burning?"

Pierre had crept to the door and was drawing the bolt. I followed close on his heels. Suddenly Pierre shot back the bolt and threw open the door swiftly. He stood to one side and I to the other. The room was dark, and as there was a light in the hall, Jack Bushby stood revealed with a revolver in one hand and a dirk in the other, ready to do his murderous work.

"What do you want at my door arr—— to the teeth?" I asked.

The would-be assassin was fairly caught and stood there apparently bereft of speech.

"May I come in?" he said, presently, his presence of mind returning.

"Advance but one foot across the threshold, Jack Bushby," I said, sternly, "and that step is your last."

The sight of the hired assassin, standing there ready to strike me down, provoked me to great indignation, and suddenly aroused within me that savage nature which I believe exists in all members of the human race, although in the majority it is perhaps always latent. With a sudden rush of courage I felt that I was ready to close with Jack Bushby, ruffian and all as I knew him to be.

"Jack Bushby," I said, "I know your mission. You have been hired by a worse scoundrel than yourself

to assassinate me, and you come at midnight in the guise of a friend to rouse me to flee from an imaginary fire, in order that you may strike me down with yon treacherous dirk that you hold in your hand. You black-hearted wretch, you come to me with a lie on your lips. Begone to the baser criminal that sent you and tell him that I defy him to do his worst."

"So ho, my fine nephew! Those be brave words of yours," said my Uncle Casper, coming forward and speaking in his most sarcastic tone. He had been within hearing, and had evidently been quietly waiting in the hall to witness my undoing.

"You had better say your prayers," he added, trying to peer into the room, "for you have but a short time to live."

"I would have been out of your way before this if your damnable poison had worked," I retorted.

Casper gave a slight start, but it was only slight. His hard, sinister face looked harder than seemed possible to a countenance made in God's image. It had upon it the resolve of a man who had abandoned everything but evil and who was ready to resort to any means to accomplish his purpose.

"Well, my young man, you escaped the poison, but you'll not escape me and Jack to-night. Do you think that I, Casper Cameron, who have lived with a purpose these forty odd years, who have never permitted God or man to stand in my way, who have brushed aside obstacles no matter how formidable when I found them in the way of my ambition, will now permit a boy to cross my path and thwart me.

Well would it have been for you, Lachlan Cameron, had you remained in Bruce county and not undertaken to molest me. Do you suppose that I would come to this wilderness and live as I do and then allow a mere stripling to outwit me and rob me of that for which I have sacrificed so much?"

"Casper Cameron," I said, speaking solemnly, "I may be a mere stripling, as you say, but God has ordained it and the stars proclaim it, that I am the instrument created for the purpose of bringing you to justice and compelling restitution. You robbed my father and me of his and that which should now be mine. I have the proof; there is but one link missing and that you possess. But I mean to force it from you. Hear me further, Casper Cameron, you are just as powerless to prevent my success as was that drug that you gave me yesterday to do me injury."

I could see by the pallor that came over Casper's face that I had struck home. He was a superstitious man; I think that was the only vulnerable point about his entire equipment.

"We shall see," he hissed between his teeth.

"Before you begin hostilities against me, Casper," I continued, "I wish to give you fair warning. I came here not to quarrel with you. I came to demand my own. You have robbed me of my father's estate with your damnable machinations. I now make a peaceful demand upon you for restitution. If you refuse, and continue that murderous hand against me that you have already raised, I warn you that your doom is sealed. For you the hour of repentance will

have struck; for you the day of grace will have passed. Casper Cameron," I concluded, "this is the first, last, and only warning I shall ever give you. Shall it be justice and life, or crime and the awful consequences that shall ensue?" I spoke as one inspired. I had never intended to speak so, but the spell was on me and I could not resist uttering the words.

"D—— you," replied Casper, in hissing tones, "it shall be crime and its consequences. What are you and your warnings that Casper should pay heed? To h—— with you," and he took a step forward as if about to rush in, when there was a sharp report and my uncle wrung his left hand, which had been struck by a bullet. Instantly he drew back.

"D—— you, so you dare to fire at me in my own house," he hissed, recoiling a step.

"Twas honly de haxident," said Pierre, stepping forward so that my uncle could see him. "De revolver she's go hoff w'ile I handle him. Ver' sorree she's hit Misser Cameron."

"Pierre Dumont, how did you get in there?" roared Casper. "I thought you were visiting in the tents."

"I came fer waken Master Lachlan when I see de house she's burn hup," said Pierre, with a grin. Then he added, "Did de bullet do much hurt?"

"No," said Casper, savagely. "It cut between two of my fingers and didn't do either much harm, but no thanks to you. Who are you, anyway? You come to me as a fur-trader and now I find you in my nephew's room armed and prepared to fight. I'll settle with you later on." Casper strode off down the hall,

followed by Jack. Their footsteps indicated that they had left the house.

"Dey's gone fer reinforcements," said Pierre, significantly. "Dey'll be back fer sure in leetle w'ile wit' de Hindians, an' den de deadly work she's start fer sure."

I agreed with Pierre, and without delay we set to work to prepare for the inevitable assault. First we barred the door and piled against it some huge boxes that we found in the room. With the aid of a candle that Pierre lighted we carefully examined our revolvers and laid them on the side of the bed. We filled our pockets with all the ammunition we thought necessary. Pierre hauled down an old musket, with a bayonet attached to the muzzle, that was hanging on the wall. I had a dirk knife and so had Pierre, and with this equipment we awaited the enemy. It might be mentioned that both the walls and partitions of the Lodge were made of logs, the latter being carefully dressed. The chinks were filled with plaster, which age and smoke had blackened. Pierre removed a portion of plaster near the door, and through the aperture thus created he was able, by mounting a box, to command a view of the hall.

"De henemy will 'tack us from two points," said Pierre, "from de window an' from de door. You look haffer de window, an' I'll tak care de door."

We did not have long to wait. We heard voices at the front door, and then in the dining-room, where a considerable pause was made. The rascals were evidently discussing the plan of attack. Soon we

heard footsteps in the hall. They advanced to our door and stopped there.

"Lachlan," said my uncle, "we've come to close accounts with you. If you surrender there is some chance of your life being spared, but if you resist your fate will be swift and violent. I have with me a dozen friends and dependents, and I warn you and your friend that resistance will be visited with swift and terrible retribution."

"Casper," I answered, "you may do your worst. We have justice on our side, and if you had four-score Indian braves to assist you in your murderous work my answer would be the same. The sooner you commence the better."

After this there was a brief pause, as if our defiance was unexpected, and as if the gang did not know exactly how to begin. We had this advantage over them, our room was in darkness, save the struggling starlight that filtered through the small grated window. It was, therefore, impossible for the enemy to locate us, whilst we could, by the aid of the light in the hall, through the aperture Pierre had created, distinguish the dusky figures that mingled with Casper and Bushby.

Presently there was a rush in the hall, then a mighty smash against the door, the upper part of which yielded and fell inward. In an instant Jack's sinister face appeared in the opening and he made as if he would spring into the room.

"Take dat, you hired-out murderer," said Pierre, seizing the old musket and making a smash at him

with the butt. The weight of the blow was partially broken by the position of the door, but it sent Jack sprawling and caused him to howl with pain and rage.

"Into the room, you d—— redskins," roared Casper, as the Indians hesitated. "Are you afraid of a boy paleface and an insignificant fur-trader?"

Whether or not they understood his words, they appeared to comprehend their purport, for in an instant two Indians forced their heads through the broken door, and a moment later would have been upon us only Pierre, drawing his revolver, shot them in quick succession. Their bodies tumbled outward at the feet of their comrades and a howl of dismay went up.

Casper swore like a madman.

"To think that I'm defied, and my men shot down in my own house! Come on, men!" he roared, "and follow me." In an instant his great frame was in the doorway. I cocked my revolver and aimed it at him, but my heart failed me; I could not shoot him. I could not pollute myself with his blood. Pierre saw my hesitation, and I think he understood and forgave me.

"Look haffer de redmen, Lachlan, an' Hi'll 'tend to de odders," he said, and with a mighty swing of the old musket, he brought it across Casper's chest. The blow sent my uncle tumbling back to the floor, where he lay like a dead man. The Indians, however, their blood up at the death of their comrades, and sounding their weird warwhoop, were struggling to crowd through the door. I could not leave all the work to Pierre, so, gritting my teeth and shutting my

eyes, I fired my revolver blankly into the crowd. My blood was soon up,—I often think the sight of blood has much the effect on civilized man that it has on the savages,—and so I emptied several chambers in quick succession, while Pierre wielded the bayonet in a manner that would do credit to a member of the King's Life Guards. We had succeeded in beating the enemy off when Pierre, turning his head, saw something that caused him to shout, "Look to de window, Lachlan, an' I'll tak care de door."

He had not spoken a moment too soon. A number of Indians, led by Bushby, were trying to force the window, and had indeed succeeded in loosening the iron grating from its fastenings. They were pushing a big Indian into the room through the window, feet first. I had to act quickly. Perhaps I shall be condemned for doing it, but what else was left to me? Placing my revolver to the sole of one of the Indian's feet, I fired. I could see that the bullet tore its leaden way through the foot and then up through the calf of the leg, coming out near the knee. The Indian howled with pain and baffled rage, but his companions, instead of withdrawing him, as I expected they would, pushed him into the room. Pierre had his hands full at the door, and to save the situation I had to do everything possible to guard the window, so before the Indian had time to raise himself from the floor I clubbed him into insensibility with the musket, which Pierre had dropped. Urged on by Jack, who shouted at and cursed the redskins, two more tried to force their way through the window. At the same time



several rifles cracked, and I heard the whizzing bullets pass close to me.

"Drop on de knee," shouted Pierre, and I instantly obeyed him. It was none too soon, for a small volley of bullets passed over our heads, evidently fired through a chink in the wall. Under cover of this fire the two Indians doubtless expected to gain entrance to the room, but distinguishing their forms from where I knelt, I fired point-blank at their bodies, one after the other. The bullets took effect, for the Indians tumbled one on the outside and the other into the room. The result of my work had an important effect upon the enemy, for they fell back and the window was deserted, so that I was enabled to replace the iron grating. Then I turned to Pierre. He was standing exultant near the doorway. He had vanquished all comers and the result of his deadly work was apparent. The bodies of three or four Indians lay in the doorway, and Pierre told me that one or two had been dragged away by their companions. Peering into the hall, I detected in the dim light Casper's body lying on the floor, not yet recovered from the stunning blow that Pierre had delivered at the outset of the attack.

My resolve was taken instantly, and without a moment's hesitation. Ignoring a warning cry from Pierre, I sprang through the doorway and was upon Casper's body in a twinkling. I think Pierre thought my object was assassination, for I drew my dirk and made for my uncle's chest. Hastily I plunged it through his clothes. The point must have broken the skin, for

Casper twitched uneasily. In a moment I ripped his clothes down below the waist. There I came upon the precious leather belt. This I hastily unbuckled, and tearing it away, sprang back into the room by Pierre's side. I was not an instant too soon, for Bushby, who had entered the house and glanced into the hall, saw me. He fired as I sprang, but his first bullet went wide. His second aim was surer, for the bullet tore away a small portion of the flesh of my right thigh just as I leaped through the doorway.

"Curse you!" he yelled after me, "so you've done for your uncle, have you, with that dirk?"

"Well, I no tink dey'll bodder us heny more to-night," said Pierre, complacently. "I'll tink me dey's have 'nuff fer sure. W'at for you no' keel your huncle w'en you have de chanst?"

"I didn't come with murderous intent, Pierre, and I desire not to be polluted with the blood of such a kinsman."

"Den Pierre she's do de trick," said the guide, levelling his revolver at Casper's prostrate body. But I could not stand by and see my uncle shot thus, so I struck the revolver upward as it flashed and the deadly missile went high and lodged in the partition. The report seemed to arouse Casper, for he sat up and stared about him in dazed fashion. Then his reason slowly returned to him, and he seemed to comprehend the situation. He shouted for Jack Bushby, who refused to approach.

"I'll take no chances with that d—— neffy o' yours and his black half-breed," shouted Jack. "I've

had plenty of your infernal enterprise for one night. Drag yourself along the hall and I'll share this whisky with you."

"W'at for you no' let me kill him," said Pierre, in a tone of reproachful disappointment turning to me. "You be ver' sorree some day. You no' trou' wid dat man."

Pierre's words often came to me later, and there were times when the regret that he spoke of appealed strongly to me, but I had a strange feeling against either executing myself, or sanctioning the execution by another, of the vengeance upon Casper's person that I felt belonged to a higher power.

Presently there came from the direction of the dining-room, where Casper and Jack were drinking, a noise that resembled a riot in a madhouse. My uncle had evidently discovered that his belt was gone, and the discovery drove him to madness. His curses and imprecations reached our ears, and so terrible was their nature that I was awe-stricken. He raved like a maniac, and was only restrained by Jack and other companions from rushing towards us to wreak vengeance and, if possible, recover the belt. He continued to roar, it seemed, for hours. "The belt, the belt! I must get the belt!" After a time there was quietness, and it seemed evident that a council-of-war was being held, for we could see through the window that the Indians were busy and that runners were out.

It was necessary for Pierre and myself to consider our position. We pushed the bloody corpses away from the door, and dragged the body of the Indian

(whom I had clubbed into insensibility, and who was lying under the window) through the door and deposited it with his dead tribesmen. Then we fixed up the door as best we could, and determined to await the daylight.

"I'll tak de firs' watch an' you de nex'," said Pierre. "We mus' git w'at res' we kin, fer dare'll be plantee work ahead."

I lay down, but sleep was not to be thought of. My mind was in a giddy whirl, and the events of the bloody night chased each other through my agitated brain. I had secured the belt and had buckled it about my own waist. How was I to escape with it?

## CHAPTER XXII.

### *IN THE CAVE.*

It must have been three o'clock in the morning, and I was rising to relieve Pierre, when we both were attracted by a slight noise at the window. Pierre was first to reach it.

"It's Muggins," he whispered to me, peering through the grating.

"Find out what he wants," I said.

Pierre conversed with him in the native language for a time and then informed me that a council-of-war had been held between Casper and the Indians, who were thoroughly aroused; that it had been determined to gather in a few hundred redmen, and that runners had already been dispatched for that purpose. The resolution had been taken to fire the Lodge, if necessary, to destroy Casper's nephew and the man who had shot down several Indians in defending him. Casper's rage was beyond all bounds, and he would go to any length to secure revenge and recover the belt, about which he raved incessantly.

"Muggins say we mus' leave here at once hif we save our life," said Pierre.

"But where shall we go?" I answered. "Are we not safer here than in the hands of the Indians, who will surely capture us?"

"Dat look hall right," said Pierre, "but as fer me,

I sooner be shot dan burned alive. I no lik de fire, an' Muggins says she's sure come."

Suddenly I bethought me of Tannis and the cave.

"I have it, Pierre! If we can get the girl Tannis at once, she has a hiding-place in the glen, known to no one here save herself, in which we might lodge with safety for a day or two until some other means of escape presents itself."

Pierre spoke to Muggins and the Indian vanished. He was back in a few minutes and reported that he had found the girl herself looking about for some means to rescue us, as she, too, knew of the plans being matured to destroy us. Hastily gathering what things were indispensable, we crawled noiselessly through the window, reaching the ground in safety. We had to move with extreme caution, for the lights shone through the Indian tents, and we knew that the tribesmen were astir. Muggins led the way, crawling upon all fours, while Pierre and I imitated him. We had not gone fifty yards when we heard the note of a whip-poor-will. Muggins answered it with a call peculiar to himself.

"Dat's de signal," whispered Pierre. Turning suddenly to the right, Muggins left the path and disappeared in the dense scrub. We followed quickly, and were not an instant too soon, for we could detect in the darkness a couple of dusky figures hurrying along the pathway.

"Dat's close shave, fer sure," whispered Pierre, as we lay prone upon the ground, the sound of our beating hearts appearing so loud as to cause danger

of alarm. After a moment Muggins repeated his call, and it was instantly answered by the same low whip-poor-will note. Softly Muggins crawled through the scrub, Pierre and I following on our bellies. Presently we emerged on a small, open space, and in the shadow of the trees we saw a female figure standing erect and still.

"Dat's de girl," Pierre breathed in my ear.

I crept towards her, keeping in the shadow of the scrub.

I touched her hand. She trembled. "Tannis," I whispered, "you have done so much for me. Why should you risk your life in our service?"

"Sh-sh," she answered, pressing her hand over my lips. "You not know Tannis." Then, after a moment, "Dere's not moment be los'. Soon de day she's break, den all be los' fer sure if we found here. Tak dis bundle an' follow me queek."

The next instant we were off. It was still very dark, but the girl seemed to have a marvellous instinct, for she moved in and out through the shrubbery and trees with the swiftness of an antelope. Not a word was spoken and not a sound uttered as we sped hurriedly through the woods, following the agile girl. She seemed familiar with every foot of land in the entire glen.

"Now we mus' sep'rate," whispered Tannis, coming to a sudden standstill after we had gone, as I judged, about half a mile.

"Why so?" I asked.

"'Fraid Lachlan she's not know much 'bout de

ways de Hindian," whispered Tannis. "De Hindian she's track us here fer sure, an' we mus' put him hoff de track."

Pierre understood the necessity for such precaution. He and Tannis arranged the programme. We made for the little stream, and Tannis plunging in first, we followed her and waded it for several hundred yards. Pierre struck off through the woods to the right after arranging signals, while Muggins and I continued to wade the stream for another couple of hundred yards. We left the stream on the left and made a detour. Always when we came to an open space we would walk to the centre, then turn and retrace our steps for a distance, and then strike off at right angles. This we did to destroy all trace and baffle the Indians. Finally, by means of signals, we rejoined Tannis and Pierre.

"Dis ver' near de cave," whispered Tannis, "an' we go ver' careful break no twig an' leave no track."

Silently she led the way, sometimes darting along quickly, sometimes creeping, till at length we reached the gulch described in a former chapter.

"Mus' be ver' careful here," whispered Tannis, descending first. Pierre followed, then I came, and lastly Muggins dropped nimbly down. In a minute we were at the mouth of the cave, and Tannis parting the boughs, we were safely ensconced within. I breathed easily as I felt that even if discovered we could make a bold defence and sell our lives at a pretty dear cost.

After a brief council, it was thought best that Tannis



should return to the Lodge and Muggins to the Indians. The latter was not under suspicion, and might prove of the greatest service to us; and as for Tannis, it was felt that her absence might involve Manakee and lead to worse trouble in the encampment. And besides, she could co-operate with Muggins in warning us and bringing succor if necessary.

I pressed Tannis's hand warmly at parting, and reiterated the gratitude I felt at the sacrifices she had made for me.

She would hear of no thanks. As she was leaving she pointed to the bundle that had been brought along. "You fin' plaintee water hin de far hend of de cave," she said, and the next instant she and the Indian disappeared through the door that Nature had provided for the cave's mouth. Too weary to either eat or drink, I threw myself prone upon the floor of the cave. Pierre did the same, and we slept soundly till daylight.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### *TANNIS IN DANGER.*

WHEN I awoke I saw Pierre sitting on the rocky bench that Tannis and I had occupied on my first visit to the cave. He was smoking complacently. The dampness of the cave had stiffened my limbs, but I was thoroughly refreshed by the rest.

"Dat's good place fer sleep," said Pierre, whose face wore an air of contentment and repose.

"A great deal better than the room we left at Moose Lodge," I replied. "I trust you have had a good rest yourself, Pierre."

"Yes, fer sure me have de good res'. But I dream dat Casper she's git de belt again."

"Dreams go by contraries," I said, smiling.

"Le's hope so," said Pierre, dubiously. Then he added, "But you should have let me keel him sure, den youse safe."

"I'm as hungry as the proverbial hawk," I said, not answering Pierre's suggestion. "Have we anything to eat?"

"Notting, hunless Tannis she's put someting hin de bundle," answered Pierre, pointing to the parcel with the red covering that Tannis had asked me to carry to the cave.

Hastily I undid the parcel and to our mutual satisfaction found that it contained a generous supply of

cooked meat, bread, buns and other substantial viands.

"Tannis said we would find water at the far end of the cave, Pierre," and the guide hastened to explore. With the aid of lighted matches he found the place and soon returned with a hatful (we had no drinking vessel) of clear water that he said trickled from one side of the rocky wall. Scarcely had we finished our humble meal when we heard the sound of voices. Pierre placed his sharp ear to the thick bushes that formed the door and listened.

"Hit's de Hindians," he whispered. "Dey looking fer us. Better git ready hin case dey fin' hus."

With that Pierre and I quickly and noiselessly prepared our firearms and other weapons of defence, and throwing ourselves prone upon the rock at the mouth of the cave, which was not large, we breathlessly awaited results. By parting a small portion of the thick boughs we could see a couple of redskins drop into the gulch and proceed to beat about the thick scrub that covered it.

Once I thought we were discovered, and was about to leap up and fire, when Pierre touched me and shot a warning glance from his keen eyes. One of the searchers, who came to the end of the gulch where the cave's mouth lay, actually pounded with the stick that he carried the brush that concealed us. His stick struck the handle of my revolver. It was then that I was about to spring up had not Pierre warned me. It was the striking of the stick on my revolver that saved us. Had it not met with some resisting force the stick would have penetrated the cave and we

should have been discovered. We both heaved a silent sigh of relief as the Indian passed on.

"Dat was tam close shave fer sure," whispered Pierre, as the searchers clambered out of the gulch. "Me'll tink my heart she's halmos' stop beat w'en dat Hindian poke you wit' hees stick."

The day passed without further incident, although we repeatedly heard the voices of Indians, who, no doubt, were beating every inch of the glen. Night had fallen, and Pierre and I were sitting in the densest darkness (for the cave was dark and gloomy beyond description), afraid to speak above a whisper lest we might be overheard. It was necessary to practise such extreme caution that Pierre would not light a match near the mouth of the cave lest the glow might be seen by some stray Indian.

We must have sat in this way two or three hours when Pierre suddenly started up and said:

"Dare's de signal!"

I listened attentively, and presently there came floating up the glen the cry of the whip-poor-will. Putting one hand to his mouth, and parting the brushwood at the cave's mouth, Pierre gave the answer. In a few minutes we heard a noise as of someone sliding into the gulch, and the next moment the boughs were parted and Muggins appeared. He talked with Pierre for a short time in most earnest tones, and then the latter said to me:

"Dare's be beeg troub' hat de Lodge. Casper she's go crazee wit' drink an' de loss of belt, an' she's want fer kill hevery one she's come near. She's dre'ful

hangry wit' Tannis 'cause she's tink de girl's blame fer your 'scape. She's han' Tannis over to de Hindians fer burn at stake as witch, an' de ceremonee she's tak' place in mornin' w'en de sun she's hup."

"We must save the girl, at any cost," I said, promptly. "She risked her life for me, and I would not care to leave the valley with my own life unless we tried to rescue her."

Pierre talked to Muggins and then said to me:

"De girl she's lock hup in small shack near de Lodge, an' she's guard by two beeg Hindians."

"No matter," I said, "we must make an attempt to save her."

"De Hindians she's hall gadder roun' beeg fire near de mout' of valley, an' she's have beeg dance hin hexpectation de ceremonee in mornin'. Casper he gif dem liquor, and manee she's now dronk."

"Well," I said, "there's not a moment to lose. Let's take our firearms, and you, Pierre, lead the way."

We were soon out of the gulch and by the stream. To hide our tracks we waded down it fully half a mile. Stealthily Pierre and Muggins stole through the scrub and trees, I following. There was not, however, much necessity for caution, for the Indians to the number of six or eight score were gathered about the huge bonfire, the light from which lit up the valley for acres around. We approached as near to the scene as was prudent, and hiding in the darkness of the thick foliage, watched the wierd spectacle.

No description could convey any accurate picture of the scene, for Indian contortions and Indian actions

are unique in themselves. Near the fire stood a huge cauldron, from which the braves were constantly regaling themselves. Muggins subsequently explained to me that the mixture was composed of five or six pails of water, several pounds of tea, a couple of gallons of whiskey, an armful of red willow bark, and several pounds of black tobacco, all boiled together for hours. This decoction the half-crazed Indians drank with eagerness, and every mouthful added to their madness. They danced about the fire in wildest fashion, their arms flying like windmills and their throats emitting the strangest and most wierd sounds. Some of the maddest ones cut and slashed their arms and breasts until the blood flowed freely, while others tore their hair and lacerated their faces. The sight of blood intensified their madness and the orgy grew more disgusting and furious as the deadly potion in the cauldron waxed lower. Stalwart Indians would drink and then dance wildly until, exhausted and sick, they would drop in their tracks and either crawl to shelter under the heavy underbrush or be dragged away by their less helpless companions. I pictured to myself the spectacle that would be enacted if the burning of poor Tannis should take place under such auspices, and as I gazed upon the bestial scene I felt my own stomach sicken, and then I motioned to my companions to move.

Muggins led the way, creeping on all fours silently and swiftly in the direction of Moose Lodge and the Indian tents. Soon we were within a few yards of the Lodge. The doors were open, and I was horrified

to hear the wild ravings of my Uncle Casper as he stamped about the dining-room, uttering such oaths as I believe could only proceed from hell itself. Although I paused but a moment and then hurried away to avoid the pollution of his blasphemous language, I caught a few disjointed sentences, punctuated by the vilest oaths that ever proceeded from a wild semi-intoxicated madman. As I crept away from the spot I could not help pitying the man who had sold himself to Satan, and upon whom the frightful consequences of sin were being visited. Truly my uncle was paying a terrible price as his share of the bargain with the Evil One.

Presently Muggins led us by a roundabout way to the shack where Tannis was imprisoned. The dimmest kind of starlight enabled us to discern two Indians seated near the entrance to the miserable little building, which was in total darkness. Pierre whispered to Muggins, and the latter crept like a snake on his belly up to the rear of the shack, and tried to peer in through a crack in the wall. Evidently he could see nothing, for he moved around to one side, raising himself to a little window, and tapped gently on the pane. Pierre and I were but a few yards away, and we kept our eyes fixed intently on the glass.

The instant that Muggins tapped on the window one of the guards, hearing the noise, sprang up. He saw a figure at the window and went straight for it. Muggins could not see his approaching antagonist. In another instant all would have been over with the poor fellow, for the redskin was armed with a toma-

hawk, which he was about to bring down on Muggins' head, but quick as a flash Pierre was upon him, and before the astonished Indian knew what happened Pierre had struck the tomahawk from his upraised hand and had buried his dirk in the Indian's back. With a frightful scream the brave fell upon his face. The next instant the other Indian guard sprang like a panther upon Pierre, and bore him to the earth. I saw my guide go down and heard his cry of distress. I had been thinking about Tannis and the best way to rescue her from the shack, but I managed to reach the Indian just in time to arrest the uplifted hand that clutched a gleaming knife. I have said that I was a powerful youth. With a mighty wrench I tore the Indian from the prostrate guide, and as I did so I heard his arm snap like a broken stick. I hurled him against an adjoining tree with such force that the impact stunned him so that he dropped in a limp heap upon the ground. There was not an instant to be lost. I made a dash at the door, and my weight thrown heavily against it smashed it inward. A scream from Tannis, who evidently thought her time had come, and that she was to be butchered or burned at once by the infuriated Indians, greeted me.

"Fear not, Tannis," I said, hurriedly, "it's Lachlan come to save you. Where are you? Quick, there's no time to lose."

Pierre and Muggins were by my side in a moment.

Tannis answered from one corner of the room that she was bound and could not move. I lighted a match



and Pierre was instantly by her side and had her thongs cut.

We had scarcely reached the door when Pierre exclaimed: "'Fraid she's be too late. De 'larm he's geeve; hear de warwhoop! Fer God's sake let's hurry!"

We could hear the oncoming Indians, although we judged that their number would be small, owing to the orgy by the bonfire. One brave who had outstripped the others was upon me before we had gone twenty yards.

"Queek!" Pierre said to me. "You an' Tannis mak fer de cave. Muggins an' me we draw de scent an' keep de Hindian hof de right track. We join you at de cave later."

I did not like the idea of leaving my companions to face the danger that I should share, but a moment's reflection convinced me that it would be better to follow Pierre's direction. I did not, however, go until I saw the Indian that had overtaken us laid low, an operation in which I assisted. Then, bidding Tannis lead the way, we struck into the thick scrub and hurried forward.

Pierre's plan worked well so far as we were concerned, for we were not pursued, although we heard the glen resound with wild shoutings and knew that the Indians were giving chase. We adopted precautions similar to those of the previous night to prevent ourselves being tracked to the cave. In less than half an hour we reached the gulch, slid hurriedly down the steep embankment, and were soon hidden

safe in the welcome retreat. We had not exchanged words from the moment we left the shack.

"Dat's de tam fer *me* give de tanks," Tannis whispered, as we sat upon the rocky bench.

"No thanks are necessary, Tannis, for if it had not been for me you would not have got into trouble at all."

"But to tink you save me from dat hawful fire!" and the girl trembled.

I took her hands in mine to reassure her. She had gone through a trying ordeal, lying for many hours in the shack with the terrible conviction that she must soon face death at the stake.

"I was tink to-night dat I soon see ma mudder," said the girl, and I felt her warm tears falling upon my hands. After a pause she said: "De great Spirit she's be ver' good to Tannis. I hexpect be burned at stake, an' den you come an' I be safe again."

I spoke to the girl with all the tenderness I could command.

"We will not part again, Tannis, until you are safe at Fort Garry and in good hands," I said, "unless, of course," I added, recalling our danger, "Casper and the Indians prevent us."

Tannis sat in silence for a time thinking quietly. Then she said:

"I be ver' glad fer go wit' you, Lachlan. I not fin' henybody w'at spik kind to me, an' w'at show me de respeck, till I see you. Pr'aps Tannis wrong fer say dis, but she's willin' go wit' you halways."

I was deeply touched by the girl's trustful simplicity.

Nay, I might add that I was flattered, for a truer, purer soul never illumined a human body. After another period of silence, hallowed by sacred thoughts (I instinctively felt that the girl was thinking of her father and mother), Tannis said, in low tones broken by an occasional sob, which she could not suppress:

"Lachlan (I lik fer call you Lachlan 'stead of Misser Cameron, which is your huncle's name), do you tink I fin' de reever Jordan near Fort Garry?"

"Perhaps," I replied, not wishing to disappoint her.

"Den Tannis she's lak fer go soon."

Our conversation was interrupted by a signal which Tannis understood, but which I could not have recognized. Hastily she gave the answer, and in a minute or two we heard someone scrambling down the bank. A moment later we heard a scuffling and a low sound of distress. I hurried out of the cave. It was Pierre, who spoke in a loud whisper.

"Dat's all right, Lachlan, don' be 'fraid." Then to Muggins, "Mak sure of job, Mug'; dead Hindian she's tell no tales."

"What's the trouble?" I asked, hurriedly.

"Oh, notting," replied Pierre. "One beeg Hindian she's folly us hup de vallee an' we no kin git 'way from him. Den we come near de gulch couple tams, an' de Hindian she's keep on folly. Den we tink she's dangerous, dat Hindian give us away, so I tell Muggins fer hide and let Hindian folly me, an' w'en I come to bank here an' Hindian she's close on track, Muggins she's spring hout and push him into gulch."

"And have you done it?"

"Fer sure. Nottin' else fer do hif we save ourselves. De fall she's break Hindian's neck. We no' kill Hindian, he kill hus, so she's broad she's long."

"But if the body is found it will betray our hiding-place."

"Dat's right fer sure, but we mus' hide bodee in cave."

"It's a gruesome companion, Pierre," I said.

"But she can't be help dis tam." So Pierre, Muggins and myself carried the body of the Indian to the extremity of the cave and there deposited it, covering the face with an old blanket that Tannis found.

The events of the night were too exciting to permit of easy sleep. We sat and talked in low tones till near morning. Then we picked out the best spot we could find for Tannis, and she lay down. Soon her regular breathing indicated that she was asleep.

"I'll keep watch till morning, Pierre," I said. "You and Muggins had better sleep."

It was not long until they were both in a deep slumber. The hours passed on leaden wings, but my thoughts were busy and I still felt quite wakeful when the early morning light struggled through the leafy doorway.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### *FLIGHT FROM THE CAVE.*

PIERRE awoke first, and when he saw me still sitting near the cave's mouth, he reproached himself.

"Fer w'y you no' wake me an' let me share de watch wit' you."

"Because I did not care to sleep, Pierre. I wanted to spend the night in thought, and I don't think I've made any sacrifice."

"But you mus' have some sleep," Pierre insisted. "Dare 'll be plaintee hard work ahead sure, an' you mus' have rest."

So I lay down on the hard floor, nature had her way, and I slept.

It was past mid-day when I awoke, thoroughly refreshed. Pierre, Tannis and the Indian were seated near the mouth of the cave conversing in the Indian tongue, which they all understood. There still remained a portion of the food that Tannis had provided the first night in the cave. My companions had eaten scantily, and Tannis insisted that I should partake.

"Paleface she's be ver' hungry," said the girl, with a twinkle in her eye.

"Yes, Tannis," I replied. "I have a thorough Cameronian appetite, but I should think we must all go on short rations or we may starve later on."

"Dat's so," put in Pierre. We don' know w'en we kin git 'way from 'ere, an' till we kin we mus' live on one meal a day. Muggins him say she's no hungree, dat she's jus' tighten hup belt nudder hole an' den she be quite satisfy."

Muggins must have understood what was said, for he grinned broadly.

We put in five mortal days and nights in that cave. Our last bite was gone, so that the only refreshment that remained was the water supply. The body of the dead Indian in the rear end of the cave was beginning to emit an offensive odor, and our case was becoming desperate. We thought it best to remain absolutely quiet the first two days. On the night of the third it was resolved to send Muggins forth as a scout to see how the land lay. For hours and hours we awaited his return, not one of us caring to sleep, so uneasy were we regarding the fate of the Indian. But he came at last just as dawn was about to break. He reported that the enemy had sentries posted all round the hills that hedged the glen, and other Indians were beating about the place both in the glen and surrounding country. While lying concealed among some underbush at the top of the hill, Muggins was all but discovered by one of the scouts, who wandered right up to the clump and sat down within six feet of him, and there he sat for four hours, compelling Muggins to lie with death-like stillness for that length of time. Muggins said he was several times on the point of rushing on the sentry and braining him, but he was fearful lest the alarm might be given and his

companions kept prisoners until they were either discovered or starved to death. The Indian could venture no opinion as to when it was safe to take our departure without running into the most open danger.

The next night Pierre ventured forth, but he did not remain long, as he found the glen so filled with Indians that he deemed it unsafe to venture any distance from the gulch. Indeed, it was only by keeping the closest watch upon a sentry near at hand, and by crawling through the grass and scrub like a snake, that Pierre managed to elude the eye of the guard and get back to safety. In the deepest gloom, both of situation and spirits, we talked over our plight, which was indeed desperate. Muggins had not tasted food for two days, and Tannis, the heroine that she was, had refused a bite for the same time. She actually feigned sickness as an excuse to avoid eating, so that there would be something for Pierre and me.

"You see, Misser Lachlan," she said, "de cave she's mak Tannis sick. She's not use be shut hup like dis, an' she's can't heat. I tink de smell from de Hindian" (pointing to the corpse, which we could not bury in the rock) "she's mak me sick. It's no use fer force me," she added, with an air of finality, as I tried to insist upon her sharing the last crust, "dat honly mak me sicker, an' I want fer be able run w'en we mak de 'scape."

So Pierre and I finished the last morsel. That was on the morning of the fifth day. It was only an aggravation, as there was little more than was necessary to appease the hunger of an infant. We realized

that unless we ventured out the ensuing night we would soon be too weak to go, and we argued that we might better lose our lives fighting our way to possible escape than perish miserably in the cave. And besides, if we delayed our departure longer we would be too weak to offer resistance in case of attack.

On Pierre's advice we waited till midnight. The Indians, he said, were less wary after that hour. Before we crept from the cave we carefully examined our firearms. Muggins led the way, creeping noiselessly through the grass and scrub, pausing every minute to listen, and, if possible, to penetrate the darkness with his wonderful eyesight. There was just the faintest starlight in the heavens. Tannis followed the Indian, I came next, and Pierre brought up the rear. It was with difficulty that we climbed out of the gulch, so carefully and noiselessly were we obliged to move. When we reached the top Tannis made a sign to the Indian and he fell into second place while she took the lead. We moved with such extreme caution that our progress was as that of the snail. We realized that the breaking of a stick, or indeed the making of any unusual sound, might mean death to us all.

The girl seemed to be familiar with every inch of the glen. She would creep into shelter at one point, then pause an instant as she hastily scanned the surroundings. Then she would spring to her feet and dart swiftly across an open space until she gained some sheltering spot, where she would pause for breath. We followed her in the order above named,



imitating her movements as carefully as possible. We had been going along in this way for over half an hour, when we struck a little winding trail that led up the steep hills. Judging by its tortuous windings, I fancied it was the trail by which I had entered the glen. With good judgment Tannis did not follow the path closely; most of the time she kept away from it, but at frequent intervals we struck it and for a brief time would follow it.

We continued our somewhat laborious climb until I thought we must be near the brow of the hill. But Tannis never waited for an instant, except to reconnoitre. Just as we emerged from the woods on the top of the hill, Tannis paused suddenly and then pointed to the left. There, within fifty yards of us, sat a small party of Indians around a smouldering camp-fire. They had evidently been searching for us, and, growing tired and disgusted at the fruitlessness of their work, had assembled and were putting in the night together. We counted half a dozen braves, four of whom were nodding drowsily. The other two were seated with their faces to the fire and their profiles to us.

Muggins whispered to Pierre.

"He wants fer 'tack dem an' git de grub," said Pierre to me, in a low voice.

"Poor fellow, he must be very hungry," I replied, "but I think it would be most dangerous. Hadn't we better push on and place as many miles as possible between ourselves and the glen before daylight, and trust to luck to get some food?"

"Dat's w'at I tink maself," answered Pierre.

"Where did you leave our outfit the day I parted with you?" I whispered.

"I cache de stuff near de mout' of de creek or river w'at leads into de lak. I tink she's call him de Moose Lak river."

"Exactly," I whispered, "the Moose Lake River," for I had taken the precaution of learning something about the geography of the country before I left on my mission. Then I asked Tannis how far it was to the river.

"'Bout tree, four mile," she whispered.

"Then we'd better push on to that point. Perhaps we can all hold out till then."

Pierre agreed, but Muggins turned his back with reluctance upon what he regarded as a chance for life which, if neglected, might not recur again, even if bloodshed were necessary to make it available. Swiftly and noiselessly we moved away, Tannis still leading in the direction of the river. I noticed after we had gone a mile or so that the girl walked unsteadily. Hastening to her side I asked her, in a low tone, if she were weak or ill.

"No, Misser Lachlan, you be talk nonsense; Tannis never better in her life. She be lil bit hungry, but dat's hall. Hif we go queek now we's soon be dare," and the girl tried to laugh me out of my uneasiness regarding her condition.

We had moved away from the hills, but were keeping as close to the trees as possible, that we might be ready on the instant to break for shelter should we be ambushed. We were going pretty rapidly, as we

felt that we had escaped from the most imminent danger, when Tannis uttered a low cry and fell prone upon the ground. We were by her side in a moment. Tenderly I lifted her head on my arm and spoke to her, but she had swooned. In the dim light her face looked very gray and worn, and that old look of sorrow had come back into it. I would have thought her dead but for the regular beating of her heart. Pierre chafed her hands while I fanned her face with my hat. After a time she opened her large eyes and stared strangely into my face.

"Dat's not mudder," she said, in a low, murmuring tone of disappointment. Then, after a pause: "Tannis t'ought she had cross de rivare an' was in mudder's arms."

"No, Tannis, you are still with your friends on this side of the river," I whispered. Then to Pierre: "Thank God, the girl seems to be reviving."

After a little she opened her eyes again and said, "Ware am I? Have I been sick?"

"You're with Lachlan and Pierre and Muggins," I answered, soothingly; "you're so weak, Tannis, with hunger, that you've swooned."

"Wit' Lachlan," she said, and the gloom was chased away from her face. "I lik fer be wit' Lachlan nex' to ma mudder. He always spik kind an' wit' respect to Tannis."

"You must not talk until you're better," I said.

"Oh, Tannis come all right soon," she answered, cheerfully. "De weakness she's tak de grip uv me an' I can't go further. I'se try fer push hon, but bime-by de head she's go dizzy an' I s'pose I fall."

"You're a brave girl, Tannis," I said. "I should have known how weak you were and not permitted you to exert yourself. You haven't tasted food for three or four days."

"Oh, dat's notting," she answered, cheerfully. "Tannis no mind de sickness de bodee, dat be cure heasy; hit's de sickness de soul dat Tannis fear. P'r'aps you nevare sick dat way, Lachlan, like Tannis, who nevare know notting else since mudder an' fadder dey's gone."

My heart went out to the poor child, and I made a silent pledge to do the best in my power to brighten her life.

With such directions as Tannis gave to Pierre he was satisfied he could easily locate the river and find the cache. Tannis wanted to push on, but I knew she was too weak to go, so I volunteered to remain with her while Pierre and Muggins set forth. To our great joy and satisfaction they returned in less than an hour, bringing the food, which they easily located. Faithful souls, so eager were they to bring succor to Tannis, and no doubt to myself, that they did not take time to appease their own hunger. After we had given Tannis what we thought would best suit her weak condition, we set to ourselves. Poor Muggins unbuttoned his belt, which had been drawn to the last hole. I don't think that any three hungry wild animals ever enjoyed a meal as much as did we three men ours that early June morning. Had not Pierre cautioned us about the danger of over-eating, it is hard to prophesy the consequences.

After a rest Tannis felt distinctly better, and as we were anxious to make the river before sunrise, we pushed on, I taking the girl's arm. We struck the river near the point where it joins the lake, and as it spread out here into a marsh covered with a rank growth of rushes, we felt that we had reached another good hiding-place.

Leaving Tannis and me on the shore, where we could hide, Pierre and the Indian went off in quest of some kind of a craft. They found an old boat which the Indians from the Cedar Lake and Upper Winnipegosis regions used on their annual hunt for muskrats. It was exactly what we wanted. Hastily transferring the arms, tent and other articles in our kit to the boat (our ponies that had been tethered in the vicinity had evidently been captured and carried off by the Indians, for they could not be found), we pushed off and made for the rushes, in which we were soon hidden. We decided, after the most careful deliberation, to remain hidden there for a few days until we judged that Casper and his Indians would grow tired of their quest for us and relinquish it, although I could scarcely conceive of my uncle ever giving up the search. We concluded that, with the country being scoured by a small army of Indians, beating every acre of land in their anxious quest, our escape thus far had been due more to the assistance of Providence than to our own sagacity. It was not unnatural that my thoughts should again revert to that memorable prayer of Simon's for my safe-keeping the morning I left home.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### *TO THE RESCUE OF FRIENDS.*

WE remained in that vicinity an entire week. We were influenced to do so by the knowledge that Casper was as active as upon the first day after we escaped from Moose Lodge. Muggins was an admirable scout, and Pierre was a capital second. Night after night they reconnoitred the glen from the surrounding heights and brought in reports of the activity of my uncle and his Indians. We reasoned that we were much safer where we were than trying to escape over the plains, at least until the vigilance of the enemy had partially abated. Apparently they were baffled entirely up to the present, for we had disappeared as completely and mysteriously as if borne away in Elijah's chariot. Although within a very few miles of the glen, we reasoned that we were comparatively safe among the rushes, which had doubtless been thoroughly searched in the days immediately following our escape. And besides, we were not uncomfortable in our retreat, except for the mosquitoes, which were a worse scourge than ever the Egyptians encountered when Moses was after them. We dare not light a smudge for fear the smoke would discover us, so the one who kept watch by night beat away the pestiferous insects in order that his companions might sleep.

We found a tiny islet with a surface about ten feet by twelve, and to this we anchored. There we raised our tent after night had fallen. Tannis occupied the tent, a fairly comfortable couch of spruce boughs having been provided by Pierre. Two of us slept in the boat, which was drawn up and securely anchored beside the islet. The other kept watch. Fortunately the weather was dry.

In the twilight Pierre sometimes ventured toward the edge of the stream, where he carefully dropped a line and hook. He was invariably rewarded by a good mess of fish, which he would take with him into the densest woods when night came on, and cook them there, in order to avoid the risk of lighting a fire at the tent. Thus we managed to subsist, if not with comfort and variety of viands, at least with sufficient rough food for our wants.

On the night of the second Monday that we had been in hiding we decided to make a start, and on Pierre's advice it was determined to follow the Moose Lake river south-west to its junction with the Saskatchewan, and go up that stream as far as Cumberland House, if necessary, in the hope of falling in with some party on its way to Fort Garry by Lake Winnipeg, an eventuality that Pierre said was most likely. When darkness had fallen thick we folded our little tent, and packing what things we had securely in the stern of the cumbersome craft, we pushed our way through the rushes out into the stream. Utilizing the lumbering oars and paddle, we moved as silently as possible in the direction we wished to go, hugging

the shore closely. We pursued our course diligently, no one speaking above a whisper. Pierre and Muggins wielded the oars. We reckoned that it would take three days to reach the Saskatchewan, and we deemed it imprudent and dangerous to travel except by night. At the first sign of daybreak we landed, concealed our boat under some brushwood, and lay quietly awaiting the night.

Of course, we took turns at sleeping. Tannis insisted on taking first watch, declaring that she had slept in the boat as we moved silently over the water during the night. We reached the Saskatchewan river the morning of the fourth day. Here we rested for twenty-four hours and then began our ascent the following night.

It was the custom of Pierre and Muggins to spend a portion of each day reconnoitering. On the afternoon of the day after we reached the Saskatchewan, Pierre, who had been reconnoitering to the east of the river, returned breathlessly to the camp with news that both interested and excited us.

"Dat's bad troube fer somebodee," said the guide. "De Hindians (an' I tink me dey be Casper's redskins, fer dey look lak same tribe) have capture partee w'ite people, an' I tink me she's tak dem to Moose Lodge."

"Were you near enough, Pierre, to see the captives?" I asked.

"Yes, fer sure. Well, I no' be ver' near, but I near 'nuff fer see de w'ite mans an' de w'ite girl."

"What did they look like?" I asked, somewhat eagerly, for an idea was passing through my head.



"Well, de mans she's young an' tall an' fair, an' she's wear light moustache an' coat wit' brass buttons."

"And the girl?" I asked, eagerly springing up and catching Pierre by the coat-sleeve?

"Well, I no' see de girl's face," answered Pierre, looking at me with astonishment. "She was bury it in de han' as if weepin', but I see her hair, an' ma Got, such hair! I nevere see de lak of dat. Hit grow clean down b'low de wais' an' dare's plaintee more 'bout de head. Ma Got, she's fine."

I turned pale at Pierre's news. Could it be possible that Captain Rawlings and his sister had fallen into the hands of the Indians that Casper had enlisted for the search, and who, having never seen Pierre or myself, had mistaken the Captain, his sister and attendants for our party, and had seized them and were hurrying them to the glen?

Pierre noticed my perturbation, and so did Tannis, who had risen and was taking a deep interest in the news. I questioned Pierre and obtained from him details of the Captain's appearance that went far to confirm my suspicions. It was not at all unlikely and what could be more natural than that they had gone out of their course, and had come within range of Casper's Indians, who no doubt had searched the country that they took the overland route for Fort à la Corne, for a hundred miles or more in their eager quest. Hastily I communicated my fears to Pierre and Tannis.

"You must lead me to the place at once, Pierre, so that I can judge for myself, and even if it is not my friends, it may be some good people in sad trouble."

"But she's long way," said Pierre.

"How far?"

"Oh, 'bout five, six mile."

"Well, we must go."

Just then Muggins came in from the opposite direction, and Pierre explained the situation to him. Tannis insisted on coming. We brought all our firearms along, and I buckled on the sword that I had brought from Fort Garry. Then, taking with us a quantity of dried meat and other edibles, we set out. It was past six o'clock when we reached the spot indicated by Pierre, but the party had departed. We found the dying embers of the fire they had lighted. I picked up a frail pocket-handkerchief that I found some distance from the dying fire.

"My God!" I said, turning pale, "my worst fears are realized."

"Wat's dat?" said Pierre, coming up to my side.

"Can you read?"

"No."

Then I pointed to the initials in one corner of the delicate cambric. "'R. R.'—that means Ruth Rawlings," I added.

"Is dat de beau'ful gurl w'at you tole me 'bout?" said Tannis, a look of interest mingled with pain overspreading her face.

"The same," I answered, "and to think that she is about to be delivered into the power of my uncle!" I was for a time stunned with the situation, and sitting down on the grass I buried my face in my hands and pressed my temples in an effort to grapple with

the situation. More time passed while I was in this attitude than I realized. I had succeeded after a horrible experience in escaping from my uncle with the precious document that I had risked so much to secure, and now I must return and thrust my head into the lion's mouth again. But it was for her, and my heart beat loudly and my cheeks were aglow at the thought of imperilling my life in her service.

It was Tannis who spoke. She had come up to me, and patting me kindly and soothingly on the head, she said:

"Misser Lachlan, we all go fer help you save your beau'ful fren', fer help save Ruth."

I grasped her outstretched hand and pressed it warmly.

"God bless you, Tannis! You're a brave and a good girl." I could not hide from her the moisture that sprang instinctively to my eyes as I thought of the simple nobility of the girl's character. I knew (and the realization has always been a very dear memory to me, for it is a great thing to be loved by a good and true woman) that Tannis loved me, for, poor child, she was not sufficiently disingenuous to conceal her feelings—indeed, she had made frequent unconscious confessions of her attachment during the days of our retreat from Casper, when we were thrown so much together. I do not think that she meant that I should know the nature of her feelings toward myself, for she always looked into my face with a certain kind of dumb gratitude when I purposely misunderstood her actions and the tenor of

her thoughts, and directed them to some theme that I knew by her nature was sufficiently lofty to interest her. Most women possess a marvellous intuition—something akin to the instinct of a dumb animal, that will travel miles over a burning desert straight to the oasis that affords the cooling draught. Although I purposely exerted myself to speak with all the indifference I could command when I spoke of Miss Rawlings, I think the very first occasion that I mentioned her name Tannis understood, as perfectly as if I had laid my heart open for her to read, the nature of my feelings. Sometimes she would speak of Ruth (she called her Ruth, although I did not) and look at me curiously and inquiringly as if she would read my heart. Although I did not notice it at the time, I now recall that sometimes after we talked of Miss Rawlings for a time, and she had carefully noted every lineament and expression in my face, she would excuse herself abruptly and bound off into the woods or over the prairie. Once I followed her and found her prone upon the ground at the foot of a tree, sobbing as if her heart was breaking. When I sat down by her side and, stroking her curls as I would those of a child, tried to soothe her, she said:

“It’s ma mudder. Tannis ’fraid she’ll never see mudder ’gain. Dat reever she’s so far away.” But she speedily dried her eyes, and as I talked with her, became cheerful again.

And now when she realized that Miss Rawlings, that Ruth, was near at hand, she was the first one to volunteer to help save the girl from the consequences

of falling into Casper's hands. Boy that I was, I failed to mark then, as I have often recalled since, the expression of hopelessness that came into her face, the deep shade of despair that for an instant welled from her eyes as she repeated her words.

"Misser Lachlan, we all go fer help you save your beau'ful fren'—fer help save Ruth."

Pierre and Muggins were ready at my word and at the word of Tannis (for they idolized the girl) to undertake any enterprise, however hazardous, although Pierre shook his head. "Dat be dangerous job, Lachlan," he said. "Hif you fall hinto de han's of Casper, den she's be ver' hangry, an' she's keel us all lak de muskrat, hif she honly catch us."

"Yes, Pierre, I fully realize the danger," I answered, "but I would sooner leave my bones to whiten in the glen than desert my friends under such circumstances."

"De Scotch she's good stuff," said Pierre, partly to himself and partly, I think, for my benefit.

"My action must not be set down as any tribute to my nationality, Pierre," I said, "for there is no real man living who, under the circumstances, would not take the risk. So please do not give me any credit for acting the part of a hero."

I think Pierre understood the situation, for he smiled knowingly and muttered something like: "Hif dat hair she's spik fer henything de res' she's mus' be gran'."

We had no difficulty following the Indians, for the grass was long and the prairie none too hard, so that

a clear trail was left. We knew that the party were not very far in advance, for they could not have had more than two hours' start. In two or three hours it would be too dark to follow the trail, so we decided to make the greatest haste in order to come up with them, if possible, when they were camped for the night. If we decided upon a rescue our chances of success would be much better by surprising the enemy at night than by meeting him in the open day. Even the long twilight was beginning to fade, and it looked as if darkness would be upon us, and yet we saw no trace of the party, beyond their tracks, although we had pushed forward at our most rapid pace.

"'Fraid she's be too late fer catch hup to-night," said Pierre, with an anxious look. "She'll soon be too dark fer see de trail."

"How long can we keep going?" I asked.

"Oh, 'bout fifteen minutes er so," answered the guide.

"Do you think Tannis could go double quick for ten minutes?" I said, looking anxiously at the girl.

"Tannis can keep up wit' you no matter how fas' youse be go," promptly answered the girl.

Then we broke into a moderate running pace, which we kept up for ten or twelve minutes.

Suddenly Pierre, who was leading, stopped and pointing to a clump of trees and scrub about half a mile to the right, said, in a low tone:

"Look dare, Lachlan, dat's de camp-fire. De Hindians she's put in de night dare."

"Then we're just in time," I said, with a feeling of great satisfaction.

"We mus' go kerful now," said Pierre, the caution of the experienced scout returning.

We sat down in the grass and held a whispered conference.

Muggins was sent forward to reconnoitre the camp and report, while Pierre, Tannis and I lay crouched in the thick grass to await his return. It was now pretty dark. In half an hour Muggins was back to tell us that the party consisted of a dozen Indians, and that there were three captives, the Captain and his sister and another, who, although a white man, was probably their guide. The two men were bound securely, but the girl was allowed to walk about, being kept under strict surveillance. The camp-fire was made at the edge of a small bluff of poplar trees and willow scrub.

"Den we mus' git roun' it an' 'proach from de odder side," said Pierre. "W'en we git up clost we kin settle de bes' way fer do de job."

So we made a detour of a mile or two, moving cautiously, but keeping the bluff in view all the time. When we had got behind it we moved carefully till we were within fifty or seventy-five yards. We could see the glow from the embers of the camp-fire shining through the trees, and we could hear the voices of the Indians as they smoked and jabbered.

"Dey's not suspicious," whispered Pierre, "fer I don' see any guards, an' everyone's she's tak it heasy."

We crept up another twenty-five yards, when, through a little opening in the scrub, we could see

exactly the position of the camp. I recognized Captain Rawlings at once. He was seated beside the other white man about ten yards from the camp-fire. Both had their hands and feet bound with rope, and I had no doubt from their position that the thongs must be hurting them. Naturally my eyes swept the camp in search of a figure that was dearer to me than life itself, but I failed to discern the darling object.

I think Pierre was turning the searchlight of his wonderful eyes on the camp for the same purpose, for he pressed my arm gently and whispered: "You see dat blanket hangin' over someting to de right, dare. Well, I watch hit carefully, an' I see him move. I tink me de girl he's onder dat. P'r'aps he's jus' t'row it 'bout her fer hide de face."

Pierre's shrewd explanation solved the problem. Undoubtedly Miss Rawlings had shrouded herself in the blanket so that she might shut out the rough savages from her sight.

Pierre thought it possible that the Captain and his companion might be reached and warned without arousing the camp, and to Muggins was assigned the delicate task. We gave him a couple of loaded revolvers which he was to place in the hands of the Captain and his guide, if he succeeded in reaching them.

Then Pierre, Tannis and I (for Tannis was an expert with firearms), after examining our rifles carefully, lay prone upon the ground, covering Muggins as he crawled through the grass toward the camp-fire. If Muggins were discovered and set upon before he reached the captives, we resolved to fire at his assail-



ants, then rush in and do the best we could, although we were greatly overmatched in numbers.

It was a breathless time as we lay in the grass with cocked rifles awaiting the result of our Indian's daring venture. Slowly, silently, inch by inch, he wriggled his lithe body toward the captives. I think a snake could not have wound his way less noiselessly than Muggins. He followed the opening through the bluff, stretching out his hand at every pause to feel if there were any impediment in his way, anything that he might break when he made his next advance. It was a time of deep suspense and of suppressed excitement for us all. I could hear my own heart thumping against the walls that enclosed it, and I noticed that even the phlegmatic Pierre breathed more quickly. I glanced at Tannis only once. Her eyes—but there are not words to describe them. Slower than the snail Muggins' body wriggled through the grass. Occasionally we caught the gleam of the bright blade which he carried in his right hand for the purpose of slashing the thongs that bound the captives. Muggins was within fifteen yards of the fire, around which sat the savages, all unconscious of their proximity to danger, and jabbering away with a contentment born of the great expectations which they cherished of delivering the prize into the hands of their patron.

One great hazard of Muggins' enterprise was the danger of surprising the Captain and his companion, and causing them to alarm the camp. Approaching, as Muggins was, toward the light, it was impossible that he could be seen by the captives, and he was therefore

debarred from making signs to them. He must make his way right up to their side before they could see him. He recognized the difficulty himself, for he paused for quite a long time when he was within a few yards of them, as if to consider the best means of proceeding. To our surprise he turned to the right, as if he had changed his mind about releasing the captives, and we saw him wriggle his body a few yards straight in the direction of the camp-fire. He paused when he had reached a point parallel with the captives, and we saw him gaze earnestly in their direction as if trying to force their attention to himself by the sheer strength of his will.

"Ah," whispered Pierre, "I see w'at Muggins hafter. He want fer 'tract dare 'tention 'fore he crawl hup to dem."

"What has he done with his knife?" I whispered.

"Don' you see?" answered Pierre, quickly. "Hif he crawl hup to pris'ner wit' knife, dey tink she's come fer keel dem an' so give de 'larm, but hif she's go wit'-out arms, den de pris'ners tink she's fren', an' so Muggins she's put de knife hin belt."

I nodded my satisfaction with Pierre's explanation, and then we concentrated our attention on the scene before us, for it was evident that the crisis was at hand.

Disappointed at failing to attract the attention of the captives, Muggins determined to risk a further slight advance, even though the danger to himself was very great. He propelled his body through the grass a couple of yards; then he stopped again and raised his head as if to survey the scene. My eyes were upon

the Captain. Suddenly I saw him start, but, to our intense relief, he uttered no cry. He had noticed Muggins, and leaning over toward his companion, he made a movement that attracted the latter. We saw that he, too, had noticed Muggins. Fortunately the increasing darkness was favorable to our enterprise, as it lessened the chances of discovery by the enemy.

The moment Muggins found that he had made his presence known to the captives he slowly retreated, going, if possible, with even greater caution than he had advanced. We could see that the captives watched him intently. When he had retreated about four or five yards he turned toward them, and the glow from the fire enabled us to see his body wriggling through the grass. With a deep sigh of relief we saw Muggins, as he came within a yard of the captives, reach for his knife. The extended blade gleamed in the light as the Indian reached forward to cut the thongs that bound the Captain.

Suddenly there was a wild scream of terror and distress, and we saw the blanket hurled from the recumbent figure of the Captain's sister as she started up in alarm, and although her hands were tied, made a dash towards her brother. She had seen Muggins' knife—in the hands, as she thought, of a murderous Indian—and she rushed wildly to the rescue. Muggins took in the situation as quickly as we did. The Captain's bonds were severed and a revolver thrust into his hand. The next moment the ropes that bound his companion were cut and he, too, was armed. But the camp was

aroused, and the Indians made a wild rush for their firearms.

Muggins sprang toward us, and the Captain, seizing his sister by the arm, followed.

I had leaped to my feet when I saw the turn affairs had taken. I intended to fly to Miss Rawlings' side, but the cool-headed Pierre restrained me.

"Hold, Lachlan! don' be too queek."

In a moment Muggins with the Captain and his sister were by our side.

"You're in the hands of friends, Miss Rawlings," I said, as I hastily severed the cord that bound her hands. She recognized my voice instantly, and threw herself into my arms as a child pursued by a wild animal would do on reaching its father.

"Oh, Lachlan, is it you? Then we're saved!"

My heart leaped at the sound of my name from her lips, but it was no time for the exchange of greetings or for thoughts of sentiment.. There was serious work before us.

The fellow-captive whose bonds Muggins had cut, and who was, as we suspected, a guide—Salter by name—employed by the Captain to pilot him and his sister north, did not follow quickly, and missed the spot where we were. He was seen by one of the Indians, who rushed wildly upon him, carrying an uplifted knife. A sharp report rang out on the stillness of the night. The Indian fell headlong, and Pierre, who was lowering his rifle from his shoulder, observed calmly, as he dropped another cartridge into

his weapon, "Guess dat Hindian she'll be good de res' of she's life."

As in the encounter in Moose Lodge, we had the advantage; we could see the enemy, but he could not see us. The report of Pierre's rifle enabled the Indians to locate our whereabouts, and several of them moved toward us, while others spread themselves in different directions.

Pierre saw the danger and moved off hurriedly into the scrub, calling on us to follow, which we did. But the Indian is a wonderful being, and we did not have it all our own way. We had not proceeded more than twenty-five yards when three stalwart savages rushed upon us with a wild war-whoop. The first sprang upon the Captain, who was borne to the earth, and a moment later I was engaged in a deadly tussle with a brawny fellow who had come upon me from behind and knocked the rifle out of my hands. The Camerons have always been noted wrestlers, and at college I had cultivated that art to such an extent that few of my mates cared to try a fall with me. Pierre had turned in to help the Captain, Muggins and Salter were engaged elsewhere, and I was left to close accounts with my antagonist. He had the best grip, but by a slight manoeuvre I got him by the head with both hands. Then, twisting him slightly, so that I got my back under him, I gave a mighty heave forward, and, holding him by the head, I threw him clear over my shoulders and sent him smashing against a tree. I think his back was broken by the impact. However, he gave no further trouble.

A scream from Tannis now attracted my attention,

and wheeling about I saw an Indian within a few feet of me bearing down on Miss Rawlings with uplifted knife. I flew at him, throwing my body against his with mighty force, as we used to do in the football games at college. He reeled, but, recovering himself, was coming at me with his knife, when I drew my sword, which up to the present I had not been able to use, and, standing on the defensive by Miss Rawlings' side, awaited the onset. I knew that I could kill him easily if I were so minded, but I had a horror of shedding human blood, and when he raised his arm to strike, I swung my sword about with such force that I cleft the hand that held the knife clear from the arm. With a yell of pain and terror, the savage turned and fled into the trees.

The Indians had evidently surrounded us, and as we were quite a distance from the fire there was no advantage on either side. Pierre had succeeded in saving the Captain's life, and Muggins was doing prodigies in beating back the attack in his direction, keeping up a constant fire with his revolver. We thought we had finally settled with the savages, and that they had left us, but after a cessation of hostilities for about twenty minutes, during which time we were able to confer, we heard a signal that Muggins said meant another attack.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### *TANNIS CROSSES THE RIVER.*

TANNIS and Miss Rawlings lay concealed in a little scrub bluff, while the Captain, Pierre, Muggins, Salter and I surrounded it. The delay gave us time to reload our arms, but scarcely had we completed our task when the Indians were again upon us. Their peculiar instinct seemed to guide them to our whereabouts.

"Don' give no quarter dis tam," was Pierre's direction to us. "Shoot w'erever you git de chanst. Hif you no keel de Hindian he's keel you sure, den dat's your hown fault."

But the Indians came at us warily. They had tasted our mettle, and they respected us.

"Dey's crawlin' hup hon us dis tam," whispered Pierre, who was near to me.

I peered intently into the darkness, and fancied I could discern a couple of forms making their way towards us.

"Better give dem de salute," said Pierre, as he emptied his rifle in the direction of the crawling forms. Suddenly there was a wild yell and a rush, and, as nearly as I could judge, seven or eight Indians were upon us. Three of us fired at the same time, and I noticed a couple of forms drop. Then we had to close with the others. They seemed to be out of ammunition, judging by their failure to use their guns, and

now they evidently relied upon the use of their knives. Drawing our revolvers, we used them with such good effect that when the time came to close with the Indians in a hand-to-hand encounter, there was no great disparity in numbers. The Captain, who had received a pretty severe shock in his first adventure, was not in condition to do much fighting. Pierre was in splendid form, and with the musket and bayonet which he had brought with him he kept a couple of redskins pretty busy, whilst I with my revolver and sword did my best to second his efforts. It was bloody work that we had on hand, but there was nothing for it but to fight it out. We were struggling in self-defence, and if we failed to fight our lives would certainly be forfeited. A cry from Salter, the guide, attracted our attention from the work we were doing. The Captain had leaped forward to the rescue, but was immediately struck down by a dusky savage who sprang out of the darkness. I was too late to save Salter. One Indian had him down and was executing his deadly work with the dagger, while I was held at bay by the savage that had struck Captain Rawlings to the earth.

The girls must have been able to witness some of the proceedings, although it appeared almost too dark to do so, for I heard a cry of distress from Miss Rawlings as she emerged from her retreat to the side of her prostrate brother. When I heard her cry I turned quickly towards her, and my antagonist, finding me off guard for an instant, rushed in, and dropping on his knees, seized me by the legs. I was down in a moment, and in falling dropped my sword. The fall, too, partially



stunned me. In a twinkling the savage was upon me, and as I saw the gleam of the knife in his uplifted hand I realized that all was over with me. I lived my life over again in that brief moment. Every event of importance seemed to be placed before me as if by flashlight. The figures of Simon, Sanders, Casper, and others who occupied conspicuous positions in the gallery of my life flitted before me. Then I glanced up at Miss Rawlings—at Ruth—and I could see the dim outline of her figure, and view for the last time the glory of her eyes. It was something to die in her service and for her. All these thoughts occupied but an instant. I closed my eyes to meet my fate. But my time had not come. The great Hand that holds firm the helm of our lives, and unerringly guides the human craft, no matter what scoffers and unbelievers say or think, gave the wheel a swift turn, and my life was spared—but at what cost none but myself can ever realize. When Ruth saw the alarming situation in which I was she gave a wild scream and threw herself with full force upon the bloodthirsty savage. But even that would not have saved me. The knife was descending in spite of her frantic efforts to restrain the savage hand. Suddenly I felt a shock as if a great weight had fallen upon me. I had closed my eyes to meet my doom. When I felt the impact I reopened them. The uplifted hand of the savage had fallen, but the knife was not buried in my breast. The murderous face of the Indian, wild with baffled rage, met my gaze, and the form of Ruth lay to my right.

There was a sharp report, and the Indian keeled over

as Pierre sprang upon the scene. He was too much shocked to speak. Tenderly he lifted the form of Tannis from my breast, where she had lain silent after receiving the blow that was aimed at my heart.

I was stunned too deeply to either speak or think. I sat there silent and dazed. If I could only think, if I could only speak, if I could but weep, if I could but act! But I seemed incapable of action.

The Indians evidently had taken themselves off, for Pierre and Muggins and the Captain stood about us. I do not know how long I sat there in my dazed condition. The first words I recall were from Ruth, who had recovered from the deep swoon into which she had lapsed when the blow of the savage had been struck.

"Alas, poor girl, she gave her life to save Lachlan. Would to God I had received the blow instead of her. And to think it was all on my account!" and I heard the girl sob as if her heart would break. But I could not speak yet, although I was beginning to think—slowly at first, but a trifle more rapidly now. I noticed that the clouds had lifted and that a waning moon shed a dim light upon the scene. I could read sorrow and despair in the pale, blanched faces of my companions. The Captain was holding his sister's head on his arm, trying to soothe and comfort her. Pierre was seated by Tannis, stroking her curls and speaking softly to her, sometimes in the Indian tongue and sometimes in his broken English.

"Won' you no' come back to us, Tannis?" he was saying. "Jus' spik to Pierre once, we can' let you

go. Lachlan he's feel so bad. Please open your eyes an' spik."

The cruel knife of the murderous savage, that had been intended for me, lay a foot or two away dripping with blood. Pierre had extracted it from the back of the poor victim, and had pressed a handkerchief into the ghastly wound to staunch the flow of life-blood. Muggins stood before us, mute and motionless as a statue, and with an expression of deep despair upon his fine face, as if an irreparable calamity had fallen upon him. All this I saw at a glance. Then speech came to me and I turned my eyes, which for a long time had been vacant, upon my companions.

"Alas, alas!" I said, "and to think she did it to save me! A thousand times better that I had received the blow myself. It is rarely that a soul greater and truer than hers is found. If I were ten thousand times a better man than I am I would not be worthy of such a sacrifice!"

My words aroused the attention of Ruth, whose grief was bitter.

"It was I," she said, "who should have received the blow, and I would gladly take it now if it would restore this poor girl." As she spoke she knelt beside the dying girl, and gazed with infinite tenderness on the wan, white face.

"Is there absolutely no hope?" I said, turning to Pierre, who had risen to his feet and was now bending over Tannis with a look of unutterable grief on his face.

"I fear me none," answered the guide. "De dagger

she's henter de back near de centre, an' she's pass almos' trou'. She may leeve few hour, but I tink dare no chance fer recover."

"If she would but speak to us," I said, bending over poor Tannis and stroking back the curls from her forehead.

Her face was very pale and deathlike in the dim moonlight, but to me it was dear beyond words.

"If we only had a little water," I said.

Muggins understood and bounded off like a deer, anxious to break the spell that seemed to fetter him. He found water by the smouldering camp-fire, and was back in a moment. Ruth bathed the brow of the girl with it, while I chafed her hands.

After a time Tannis uttered a low moan and turned her head a little to one side. We continued our efforts and were presently rewarded by seeing her open her eyes. She saw Ruth first, but no light of recognition crossed her orbs. Then she turned her eyes upon me, and I saw a faint smile play about her lips.

"Oh, Tannis," I said, speaking so earnestly that I felt my whole being quiver. "Speak to me, Tannis. Do you know Lachlan?"

Again she smiled faintly, and I could catch the word as she whispered faintly, "Lachlan."

"My God, she speaks!" I said, in a tone of great agitation, as I turned to my companions.

Pierre poured a drop of some stimulant that he produced from his breast pocket between her lips, and after a moment she revived. Her eyes became brighter and took on a look of intelligence. I held her hand and,



"Her face was very pale and death-like in the dim moonlight."



bending over till my lips almost touched her ear, I whispered: "Tannis, why did you do it? I am not worthy of this sacrifice."

Her eyes brightened and the smile played about her lips again. She tried to speak, but it was difficult. Bending low to catch any words she might utter, I caught these: "I do it fer Lachlan. I love Lachlan, but Lachlan love Ruth. Better fer Tannis die now; don' wear away wit' broken heart," and she closed her eyes, while her face shone with satisfaction because she had been able to speak what was in her heart.

It was more than I could stand. I was never emotional,—indeed, I had often boasted that I had never wept since childhood,—but the great scalding tears forced their way from my eyes and, rolling down my cheeks, fell upon the white face of that brave and pure half-breed girl.

It was a long time before the storm of grief that was shaking my very soul subsided and I could trust myself to speak to the girl again. Her breathing was distinctly faster, so that we knew the end was not far off. It was hard to give her up; hard to let this half-breed girl, who had only come into our lives a few weeks before, pass from us. She had taken a strange hold upon me, and had even inspired my guide and the Indian with a profound affection for her. The pathos of her story, the nobility and simplicity of her character, her entire unselfishness, and her beautiful spirituality, would attract and inspire men much less susceptible than we.

"Give her a little more stimulant, Pierre," I whis-

pered. "I should like to speak a word more to her if she is not too far gone."

Pierre complied, and Tannis opened her eyes again. When they met mine she smiled.

"You're not far from the river now, Tannis—dear Tannis," I whispered.

Again she smiled, and noticing that her lips were moving, I bent close to catch any words.

"Den I see ma mudder an' fadder ver' soon," she whispered, faintly.

"Yes, your father and mother are watching for you on the shore," I whispered into her ear.

"Den I plunge hinto de reever now," and the dying girl's frame gave a tremor as if she had actually come in contact with the cold water. A look of pain and distress crossed her face. Her lips were moving again, and I bent down.

"De water she's ver' cold," came in faint words.

"But you'll soon be across, my brave little Tannis," I said, while I felt that my heart would burst with emotion. I had to go through the ordeal, so I crushed my feelings and added, speaking into her ear: "There now, Tannis, there's your mother, and there's your father standing on the shore with arms stretched out to receive you."

The face of the girl brightened, and I caught these words, "Yes, I'm comin', mudder. I see you an' fadder now, an' I'll soon be 'cross de reever."

Her breathing was now very rapid, and the glassy stare that comes into the eyes of the dying was dim-



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ming Tannis's glorious orbs. I bent down and whispered:

"Now, Tannis, you're just over. Stretch out your hands and your mother will take you in her arms and sing to you."

Instantly her face shone as the faces of the angels shine, and we all distinctly heard the words: "Mudder—fadder—I'm safe now. You'll never leave your Tannis again."

Tannis was with the angels, and it was little wonder that her face should shine as radiantly as theirs. There must have been a great shout of welcome as she entered Paradise, for rarely purer, nobler soul had crossed the river and entered the celestial gates than poor Tannis, the simple half-breed girl.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### *TWO LONELY GRAVES.*

WE all knew that Tannis had gone from us, and yet no one seemed inclined to break the spell. We must have sat there in absolute silence for nearly an hour. The moon had continued to wane and it was growing darker. It was a strange, weird situation that we occupied, but nobody seemed to possess the heart or disposition to move. Pierre knelt with face bowed low over the head of the dead girl. The Captain sat on the ground to the right, holding his sister's hand, while Muggins and I were seated to the left. Deep as our grief was, and stricken in soul as we all were, it was necessary to act. I thought the initiative rested with me, so I rose.

"My friends," I said, "a sad calamity has indeed come upon us, but we must not let it overwhelm us completely. Our own lives, our own interests, and the interests of others are at stake, so we must act."

Captain Rawlings came to my side and, taking my hand, said, "Mr. Cameron, my sister and I are once more placed under an obligation to you that can never be repaid—an obligation which, as we have witnessed to-night, has cost you and your friends much. In rescuing us from the Indians you have very likely saved our lives."

"You greatly overrate our poor services, Captain,"

I answered, returning the warm pressure of his hand. "You were, perhaps, in no great danger, but I was fearful of allowing your sister to fall into the hands of my unnatural uncle. We have succeeded in temporarily rescuing you, but at a terrible cost. However, we are in God's hands, and if we but do our duty we have no need to reproach ourselves. What we must now do is the duty that lies nearest us, and if we follow that maxim from day to day we cannot get far off the track."

By this time Pierre and Muggins were bestirring themselves, and at once set about examining the bodies they found near by. There were four or five dead Indians, and Pierre reported that the man Salter was also killed. The Captain and his sister both deplored his death, as he was a kindly man, although an indifferent guide. We reckoned that the disappearance of the Indians did not imply that we were by any means safe from their vengeance. They would doubtless send runners to the glen, which was probably not more than twenty-five miles away, and procure reinforcements, or they might fall in with another band of Indians, for the country was being scoured by parties hired by Casper to search for us.

What were we to do with our dead? That was the question that gave us deep and immediate concern. We could not leave them exposed to the elements, for I had formed the plan of having Tannis's remains properly cared for, and a suitable memorial erected. I appealed to Pierre, as I always did when in difficulty.

"We kin scrape hup shallow grave an' cover dem so's be safe frum wild hanimals," said the guide, "'an' come back some tam an' mak de good burial."

With the aid of sharp sticks procured from the Indian campfire, Pierre and the Indian loosened the soft earth beside a little gully near by, and scraping the soil out with their hands, prepared two graves. We carried Salter out first, and, wrapping him in some blankets that we procured from the bodies of the dead Indians, we laid him in the lonely grave where he sleeps to this day.

Ruth took charge of Tannis and made what little preparations she could for the interment. She had on her the skirt and the fantastic waist she wore the day I first saw her. Her face looked very beautiful in death. There was not a trace of the old sorrow in it—God had rubbed it out. Ruth made a rough bouquet of leaves and arranged them as tastefully as circumstances would permit. This she placed upon the dead girl's bosom, and then she wrapped her body in her own cloak and placed garments about her face to protect it from the earth. After that we wound the body firmly with blankets, which we tied securely.

When all was ready, Pierre and the Indian carried forth the remains, while Miss Rawlings, the Captain and I followed sorrowfully. When the body was placed in the hastily prepared grave, I stepped forward, and raising my hand reverently, repeated the Lord's Prayer. It was a weird service, under weird circumstances, and in a weird region, but simple though the service was, it made no difference to Tannis, for she was already in

the land from which the good and the pure cannot be excluded. Pierre and the Indian covered the body with rude clods, and afterwards piled brushwood and limbs upon it as a further protection. There were no dry eyes as we turned sorrowfully from the low mound and realized that we had seen the last of poor Tannis.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### *CASPER ON OUR TRAIL.*

It must have been about four o'clock in the morning when we started back to find our boat. There was no necessity to follow any trail. Pierre paused for a moment; took his bearings, found the direction of the wind, and then struck boldly across the prairie. I was too much broken in spirit by the sad dispensation through which we had passed to do any talking. Indeed we were all sorely depressed, and walked swiftly and in silence after Pierre. The Captain and I each took an arm of his sister to help her along, as the excitement of the night was sure to have told heavily upon her. But she protested that she was not over-exerting herself, and so we hurried forward in silence. We judged that we had been six miles or so from the river, and it could not have been less than five miles from the point where Pierre first saw the Captain and Miss Rawlings with the Indians, to the spot where we had left our boat. By angling across the prairie Pierre hoped to shorten the distance. In this calculation he was right, for after a vigorous walk of an hour and a quarter we reached the river.

"De boat she's can't be far frum here," said the guide, with unerring prescience, and before we had gone half a mile he announced that we had reached the spot. We decided on a brief rest, but first we partook of some much-needed refreshment.

Miss Rawlings occupied the tent and the rest of us lay upon the grass. I think the Captain was the only one who slept, although the rest was welcome to us all after the excitement and distress of the night. Pierre was astir first and had some water boiling by the time the rest of us roused ourselves. After a hasty breakfast, which included a cup of tea, we entered the boat and travelled as rapidly as possible, anxious to place the greatest distance we could between ourselves and our enemies, who we felt certain would soon be, if indeed they were not already, in pursuit. While we pushed our way up the Saskatchewan, lugging the shore and finding it impossible to make much speed with the quality of craft we had, Miss Rawlings explained to me how it was that she and her brother and the guide came to be captured.

"We reached Fort Garry," she said, "two days after you had set forth, so Dr. Schultz informed us. This we especially regretted, as we learned from the Bishop of Rupert's Land that my sick brother had been sent by boat from Fort à la Corne down the river to Cumberland House, where there was a better opportunity for getting some necessary attention, a missionary in that region having some medical knowledge. We knew that your destination lay in somewhat the same direction, and we made an effort to overtake you, but alas, our buckboard came to grief, and we lost two days at Portage la Prairie. In addition to this, our guide, Salter, was not familiar with the best trails, and much time was lost in this way. However, we made pretty fair headway until we passed Red Deer Lake,

and then Salter seemed to lose his bearings, for he went much too far east. He assured us that it made but little difference, as we would be all right when we reached the Saskatchewan river, which we could follow until we arrived at Cumberland House. We must have gone much farther out of our course than Salter supposed, for your man Pierre says we are fifty or sixty miles too far east. We were just preparing camp-fire the night before last when the band of Indians from whom you rescued us bore down and, greatly to our surprise and alarm, demanded that we should accompany them."

"And you went without resistance?"

"Well, my brother wanted to resist, but the Indians were thoroughly armed, and as they outnumbered us five or more to one, Salter, who understood sufficient of their language to make them out, advised us to surrender."

"Most likely they mistook you for our party?"

"Salter said the Indians declared we were a party that had escaped some weeks ago from Moose Lake. All protestations to the contrary on the part of our guide were of no avail; the Indians insisted upon carrying us away as captives. I think Salter's advice to offer no resistance was based upon the belief that the mistake would be discovered and we would be released. You know the rest," added Miss Rawlings, with a sigh, as she finished speaking.

I bowed in silence.

"Perhaps," I said, after a pause, "it would have been better had we refrained from interfering, but we



acted for the best, and it is both idle and unwise to indulge in vain regrets."

Then I told her and the Captain the story of my own adventures since I had left them after the accident to the stage-coach. I gave as light a turn as I truthfully could to the stirring experiences at Moose Lodge, so that I might not unnecessarily excite my companions, whose nerves, especially those of Miss Rawlings, must have been already overwrought. I told them the story of Tannis as she had related it to me in the cave in the glen, and I did not fail to emphasize her loyalty and assistance in times of grave danger.

Miss Rawlings wept as I told of Tannis waiting on the lonely shore of the Saskatchewan for her mother, and then plunging into the cold waters to reach the arms of her parents.

"I'm so glad you told me this," said Ruth, amid her tears. "I understand now what she meant by her last words. How you must have loved the girl."

"Love is scarcely the word that represented my sentiment towards Tannis," I answered. "I conceived a deep reverence for the brave, pure soul. Her simplicity and earnestness, her confiding nature and purity of character, appealed very strongly to me. I felt humbled in her presence. A rarer or sweeter flower never bloomed in the great wilderness, and I trust the aroma of her life will always dwell with me."

"Lachlan," said Miss Rawlings, very tenderly, speaking so low that I, alone, caught her words, while I saw the teardrop in her eye, "I think you are both noble and good. It takes goodness to recognize and

appreciate virtue in others, and I do so like to hear your praise of Tannis."

"Please do not speak words of praise to me, Miss Rawlings, for my life has, I fear, been a cold and selfish one; but contact with such unselfish innocence as that poor half-breed girl possessed ought to make a better man of even the worst of us."

"We haven't known each other long," said Miss Rawlings, in the same low tone, and gazing far out over the waters, "but don't you think the nature of our acquaintance has been such that you might call me Ruth?"

Even in my sad state I experienced a thrill of quiet joy.

"I'd like so much to call you Ruth," I said. "It is a beautiful name. I know Tannis would have loved you. She told me so. When I used to talk to her of you, and tell her of your wonderful eyes and of your glorious tresses, she would look with deep mysterious wonder at me and say: 'Tannis like fer see de grande ladee. S'pose Tannis ever see her? Tell me more 'bout her.'"

Ruth bowed her head for a time. Then she spoke:

"Yes, yes, I remember now, when I was hidden in the trees with the girl, just before the last attack of the Indians, she put a hand on each of my cheeks and, gazing intently into my eyes, said: 'Lachlan he's be right fer sure, I never see such eyes and hair. Poor Tannis she's be ver' plain.' Then she turned away for a short time and refused to answer me when I spoke. I feared that I had offended her in some way, and told

her so. Presently she turned impulsively towards me and great tears were in her eyes. 'Ruth will forgive Tannis?' (I wondered how she knew my name.) 'I not worthy spik so beau'ful girl.' Then she asked if she might kiss me. Instead, I placed my arm about her waist and kissed her fondly, for even in the brief moments we were together I discovered that attraction which appealed so strongly to you. 'I love Ruth fer Lachlan's sake, an' fer her own,' added Tannis. Just then the Indians came, and you know the rest."

My heart was full and I could say nothing. I think Ruth preferred to remain silent also. Slowly we made our way up the stream. By nightfall we had travelled nearly fifteen miles. We drew up on the beach and camped for the night. Tired nature overcame me, and I slept too soundly to dream. I think my companions rested equally well.

We were early astir next morning, and soon were in our boat rowing up stream. Toward noon I noticed Pierre, who always kept an eye on the shores, move uneasily as he gazed fixedly in one direction. Presently he said: "I no' lak de 'pearance dare," nodding in the direction of the northern shore; "we be follied sure. I mak sure I see some Hindian, an' one tam I tink I see w'ite man."

Muggins gazed in the direction indicated, as indeed we all did. Presently the Indian nodded as if agreeing with Pierre. Neither the Captain nor I could discover anything. We rowed on in silence.

"De figures she's folly 'long de shore in de woods," said Pierre, after a time.

We noticed that the river was growing narrower, and this we regarded with apprehension, for we suspected that the silent pursuers were Casper's Indians, and that they would await an advantageous opportunity to attack. This chance might be afforded if the stream narrowed sufficiently. Pierre therefore advised that we keep out amid stream, so that we might be as far as possible out of rifle range. This we did. We looked to our arms in order to be ready for any attack that might come. Soon we reached a point where the woods ended and the country was open prairie.

"Now we fin' hout whose folly," said Pierre. "De Hindians mus' show demselves sure, an' we know 'zactly de size of de enemeec."

Pierre was right. We had not gone more than a mile when we could all distinctly see a band of a dozen or more tribesmen gallop out of cover and make a detour as if they intended to head us off.

"I tink de leader she's Casper," said Pierre, who had eyes that served him almost as well as a field-glass.

I looked, but could detect no difference in the company. The stream had now grown very narrow, and there were rapids ahead, around which we were bound to make a portage. Providentially the way around the rapids was on the south shore of the river, and to the landing-place we hastened, for we could see that the troop of mounted pursuers was coming swiftly towards us, having probably reckoned upon attacking us at the rapids.

There was a wild shout from the Indians, who had ridden to the top of the steep bank on the north shore

just as we landed on the south bank. To our great relief there was a small hut, built by some trapper, standing up the bank a hundred yards and partially sheltered by trees. To this we hastened, carrying our firearms, ammunition, and all other possessions. Several bullets fired from across the river whizzed dangerously near us, showing the nature of the attack that we might expect. I was deeply sorry for Miss Rawlings, and expressed my profound regret to her and the Captain that they had become involved in my quarrel.

"How can you mention it, Cameron?" said the Captain. "Involved in your quarrel! Why, where would we be to-day but for you? Please do not refer to the subject again. We have a long score to settle before we can even matters with you. But this is not the time for such discussion," he added; "it looks as if we have some ugly business ahead of us here."

Hastily we explored the little log shanty. It was only about twelve feet by eight, and so low in the roof that we could stand upright only at certain points. It had but one door, made of rough boards, and a small aperture in one wall which served as a window. The logs were not chinked, and the place had a tumble-down appearance, but it was a welcome shelter in view of the attack we expected.

There was a small excavation in the centre of the hut, where the trapper, before abandoning the place, had probably cached his furs.

"I would suggest that your sister should hide there,

as she would be safe from the bullets," I said to the Captain.

"But I am not really afraid," said Ruth. "After our experiences the night before last nothing can be much worse, and perhaps I can be of some help to you."

"If so we will lift you from your place of shelter," I said, "but you had better take a position of safety in the meantime."

"Well, if you insist," said Ruth, "I'll drop into the cavity when the real danger comes and watch developments from that point."

"Look," said Pierre, in excitement, "look at de band! Dey's swimmin' dare horses 'cross de stream. We'll be in fer hit now."

"What's the matter with giving them a taste of the medicine they gave us a moment ago?" said the Captain, reaching for his rifle.

"Dat's de kreck ting to do," said Pierre, following his example.

"Shoot their ponies first," I said, "and see what comes of it."

But Pierre did not follow my suggestion. I noticed the Indian that he aimed at topple over in the turbulent waters. The Captain, however, fired at a pony, and the next moment its rider was struggling in the river. Muggins, like Pierre, shot an Indian. I did not fire. Searchingly I gazed upon the approaching party in quest of my uncle, but I failed to find him. All the party appeared to be Indians, and there must have been fully eighteen of them. Two had been settled

with, and a third was riderless and struggling in the water.

"Load again," said Pierre, taking command, as he noticed the advancing Indians preparing to fire from their position in the river. Before the expected volley was discharged three more savages dropped from their saddles, and I shot a pony, leaving its rider helpless in the stream. Then the volley from the Indians was fired at our shanty. Several bullets pierced the wooden door; but did no harm. A couple came through the chinks, and one carried off a portion of my hat, while a second grazed the Captain's leg, causing a slight flesh wound.

"Dey's stop in de reever," said Pierre, looking through a crevice. Then we heard a great oath and shout from a voice we recognized as Casper's.

"D—— the cursed creatures! Let's get back to the shore. Why were we such fools as to attempt to cross in the face of the fire? Before we could land all our souls would be in hell. Bushby, that was your fault; you should have known better, d—— you!"

"S'ol right to damn me," we heard Bushby answer, "but ye're on an expedition, Casper, where heaven is agin yeh, an' yeh can't succeed. Yeh might jist as well t'row up de job, fer yer neffy's not fitin' alone. He's took keer of, he is, be a higher power wot you know nottin' uv. Yer pizen didn't work, yer lie about the burnin' didn't work, an' yer a-goin' t' git it here sure."

"D—— ye, Jack Bushby," I heard the rasping voice of Casper cry out in rage, "if ye don't shut your head

I'll blow it off your shoulders. I didn't bring ye here to crawfish; I brought ye here to fight, and see that ye do it, or it'll be the worse for you."

By this time the party had retreated to the bank they had recently left, and although we could hear some loud cursing we could not catch any conversation.

"W'at you tink, Lachlan, uv your huncle dress hup like de Hindian an' wearin' de fedders an' paint?"

"I could not make it out at first," I said, "until I heard him speak, then I recognized his great frame. Did you notice that he had Bushby the outlaw also arrayed as an Indian?"

Pierre nodded. "I tink you safe bring Miss Rawlings hout de pit," he said, with a smile. "Casper no 'tack hus before nite."

"I'm not so sure," I said. "He may ride away down the river bank, swim his horses across, and then make a flank movement upon our rear."

Muggins understood and nodded his approval of my suggestion.

"It's well to take no chances," said the Captain; "we must be prepared for any emergency."

So we set the place in order, made a number of port-holes in the rear of the shanty through which we might fire, and set Muggins upon the roof to keep a lookout. It was well we did this, for in less than two hours the Indian reported that he descried the band a couple of miles to our rear, closing in upon us. As I had surmised, they had swam the river with the intention of surprising us.



## CHAPTER XXIX.

### *IN MORTAL COMBAT.*

DEDUCTING the half-dozen odd that had been put out of business while attempting the river, Casper's company far outnumbered ours still, but we had the great advantage of position and shelter.

Advancing, the enemy kept a bluff between themselves and us, so that we might not observe their movements, but the wary Muggins reported to us every few minutes. The bluff was within a hundred yards of our shanty, and we made no sign that we suspected their proximity. We surmised that they would creep through the bluff and then make a rush upon us, in the hope of completely surprising us. Even though we knew that we could work havoc among them in the volley or two that we would greet them with during their charge, we reasoned that it would be wiser to give them a chance to refrain from the charge by firing upon them as they were emerging from the woods. This point settled, we waited with not a little trepidation the first appearance of the savages. Ruth insisted upon arming herself in case of dire necessity, and we allowed her to have her own way.

"Dare dey is," said Pierre, as nearly a dozen painted faces appeared at the edge of the bluff. Our rifles cracked, and there was sudden dismay among the band, as the aim had been unerring. For an instant

the party was stunned and nonplussed, and before they could pull themselves together and take proper shelter we poured another volley in upon them. I have always felt that this action upon our part saved the day for us. But we never expected for a moment that Casper would desist from his purpose. I knew him too well for that. We could hear his coarse voice and catch disjointed words from the terrible volleys of oaths that he was discharging. As I surmised, we did not have very long to wait the renewal of the attack, but it came in a slightly different manner from what we expected. The party, whose fighting strength had been reduced to eight or nine, divided into two sections and emerged from the bluff simultaneously, but from different points. There was no pause. With a wild whoop the attackers rushed from their shelter and bore down upon us. Taken partly by surprise, our fire was not so effective as formerly, but we saw two drop. The others reached the shanty. They made straight for the door, and with a mighty smash it was broken in. Instantly we brought our revolvers into play with deadly effect, but three savages succeeded in crossing the threshold. Muggins closed with one, Pierre with the other, while I drew my sword on the third.

The Captain with two revolvers held the doorway to keep the others out. Pierre had dispatched his man, and I had so severely maimed mine that he was *hors de combat*, but Muggins did not fare so well. The rascal that attacked him had with a fierce onset borne him to the ground, and it would soon have been all over with him if Ruth, who up to the present moment had

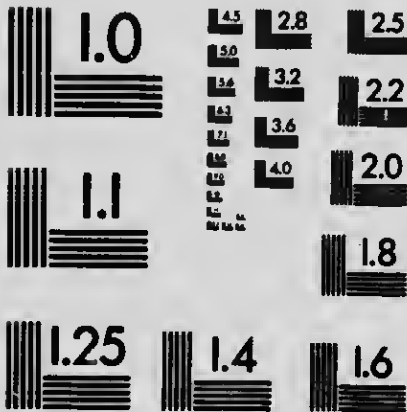
been an awe-stricken if not a trembling spectator, had not intervened. Seizing a rifle that lay on the ground, she swung it round with all her force and struck Muggins' antagonist a blow that sent him reeling from the position he occupied over Muggins. Instantly our Indian was upon his man, but it was not ordained that he should dispatch him. His hand was uplifted, but the blow never fell, for a bullet fired by Casper, who saw me through the doorway and aimed at me, missed its mark and struck poor Muggins in the head. Pierre caught him as he fell, but there was no time for sentiment then; there was more bloody work ahead. Jack Bushby, whom I recognized despite his war-paint, sprang into the shanty. The Captain closed with him. Bushby had a knife in one hand, but the Captain gripped the uplifted arm and with a dexterous twist he broke it.

"D—— you and your low-down trick," roared Jack, in pain. "I'll teach yeh to tackle a man of my experience." With that he snatched a revolver from the Captain's belt and would have emptied its contents into his body, but that the latter, who was an athlete, sprang suddenly into the air and gave his would-be assassin a vicious kick in the stomach with both feet. This sent Jack sprawling. The Captain would have followed up his advantage, but it was at this moment that Casper, his face the picture of a demon incarnate, sprang into the room. He had evidently been willing to leave the fighting to the savages and to Jack, and to take as little chance as possible himself, but he realized, when he saw his hired mur-



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derer, the desperate Jack Bushby, go down, that it was necessary for him to act quickly and with a desperate courage if he was to succeed. His rage knew no bounds.

"Curse you, Lachlan Cameron," he said, as he made straight at me. "Your time has at last come."

Even the three or four Indians who were about the door stood overawed as they saw their savage master spring into the arena and heard his awful curses.

Leaping back, I drew my sword and stood on the defensive.

My uncle, too, was armed with a sword, for the old habit of our Highland ancestors remained strong with us in the New World.

"I suppose you know that I shall kill you now," hissed Casper, "for I have a much longer score to settle with you than with any other mortal man who has ever dared to thwart me," and he glared at me with murderous hate.

"Casper," I said, "you are powerless to do me any injury. All your machinations against me have failed, and failed utterly, and now the hour of retribution is upon you. I thought after your murderous treatment of me in your glen, that when I spared your life when you lay unconscious in the hall you would repent and allow me to depart in peace. I have sought nothing but my rights. I preferred to have them peaceably, but at whatever cost I was bound to have them."

"D—— you!" roared Casper, his rage increasing, "you have no rights. How dare you, a stripling, defy

me and even attack me? Know you not that I have never brooked interference?"

"I care not for your mightiness. I, too, am a Cameron, and I have vowed a vow—indeed, it is for this I have lived—that I would compel you to do justice. But we waste words, sir; what you propose to attempt upon me proceed with."

"We can't fight in this pig-sty," said Casper, as he realized that I was ready to meet him. "Come forth into the open so that I may flay you as you deserve."

In a moment we were facing each other in front of the shanty and within twenty yards of the turbulent waters of the great Saskatchewan. It must have impressed my friends as well as the Indians, who stood silent witnesses of the strange scene that was being enacted. How could they understand what it meant for the descendants of a great Highland clan, that had sometimes nursed feuds for centuries, to draw swords and settle in mortal combat a quarrel such as I had with Casper. I think Pierre would have intervened, but I raised my hand and said:

"No, Pierre, leave this to me. I have a righteous cause, and God has ordained that I shall triumph."

Casper glared at me, and, testing his sword, advanced a step or two. He was nearly a half heavier than I, and was an abnormally powerful man. But what I lacked in weight and strength (and I was certainly no weakling) I made up, at least partially, in agility and nimbleness. I had practised so much with singlestick at college that I was handy with the sword, and I felt my uncle must be somewhat rusty in its use.

My uncle's temper had much to do with his manner of attack. He came at me in great vigor, and although he kept me busy dodging, I determined that this was the best tactics, as the pace he had set would soon tire even a stronger man than he.

"Why don't you stand up to it," roared Casper, angrily, as I kept him moving after me, "and then I'd soon make short work of you."

"You look to yourself," I answered.

Once I thought it was all over with me. His mighty strength seemed never to flag. He fought like a man possessed of the devil, as indeed he was. He had smashed right and left with his heavy weapon, many of his blows striking with such force as to send a pain to my wrist. It was a miracle that he did not break my blade. He had pushed me pretty hard, raining his mighty blows all the while.

"Ah," said he, thinking he had the best of me, "you'll not last much longer, and when you're done I'll run you through as I would a badger."

Elated by his apparent advantage, he made a wild rush at me, but his foot caught in a root, and he stumbled and fell. I was upon him in the twinkling of an eye, and had my sword pointed at his breast.

"Run him trou! run him trou!" shouted Pierre, and then, vexed at my delay, "Fer w'y you no' finish de monster? He keel you sure hif he git de chanst."

But I could not do the deed. Perhaps if I had received a legitimate advantage and beaten him down myself it would have been different. I drew back my



sword and said: "Casper, I once more give you your life."

He sprang to his feet and rushed upon me like a maniac, while he swore oaths that would blacken the page if recorded. He fought with a recklessness and abandon that I knew if I but remained cool would soon deliver him into my hands.

"To think that I should accept my life from you," he said. "The humiliation and insult are too great, and must be wiped out now."

It took but a few minutes for the terrible pace to tell upon my uncle. His face grew white, and I knew that his strength was going. The force of his blows rapidly grew lighter. Then I assumed the offensive. I was quite fresh and strong, and I drove my uncle about the ground, slashing at him upon every opening he gave me, and the openings were very numerous. I think he knew that it was all over with him, and that he was a beaten man. An awful look of despair came into his face, just such a look as I imagine must dwell upon the face of the condemned criminal when the hangman is adjusting the fatal noose. That look of despair deepened as I drove him about the ground, punishing him until I felt sorry for the man. At last I saw that the moment had come, and swinging my sword aloft to get the necessary momentum, I brought it down with crushing force. Feebly his guard went up, but the weight of my blow sent the weapon spinning to the ground and drove him to his knees. I knew that he expected instant death, for he held his

head down as if awaiting the blow, while he cursed me viciously.

For the third time I had my uncle's life in my hand, but could not strike. My arm, until that moment so pregnant with force, dropped powerless by my side, and my sword fell helplessly to the ground.

"Casper, I can't kill you," I said, shutting my eyes.

"But Pierre can!" rang out the voice of my guide, and there followed instantly a sharp report. The bullet passed through Casper's body, and he rolled over on the embankment.

"Why did you do it, Pierre?" I said, turning to the guide, stricken with awe at seeing the mighty Casper prostrate before me on the ground.

"Dat was two, t'ree tams you spare him, an' hif you do it 'gain she's onlucky, an' youse be kill' yourse'f fer sure. An' den p'raps you don' know dat Casper she's keel Muggins."

"Surely not," I said, with genuine agitation. "It can't be that our faithful Muggins is done for. I saw Casper shoot, and I saw Muggins fall, but I hoped he was only wounded."

"Pierre is right," said the Captain; "the Indian is dead."

The announcement increased my resentment against my uncle. I could have wept for the loss of our good, faithful Muggins. A better and more loyal Indian never trod the plains. But my brain was in such a whirl that it was difficult to collect my thoughts.

The moment that Casper rolled over from the bullet

of Pierre the remaining Indians fled. They did not even wait to attend to their dead companions. Their master being slain, they were leaderless and had no further object to fight for. So we were done for good with them.

"Dat's de las' of de Hindian," said Pierre, as they disappeared in the direction of the ponies, which they had left behind the bluff.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### *CASPER MAKES CONFESSION.*

AFTER a time the paralysis which naturally follows such a period of excitement passed away, and we proceeded to look about us. The place resembled a shambles. Three of the Indians and our faithful Muggins lay dead inside the shack, while in a corner lay Jack Bushby, still unconscious from the blow delivered by Ruth with the butt end of the rifle. I think Pierre would have been glad to take my sword and run him through and so relieve the world of an evil character, but I restrained him.

"In God's name," I said, "we have surely had a surfeit of bloodshed to-day. We will let the wretch live."

Then outside the shanty, lying about the door, there were three more dead Indians, and one still bleeding from a mortal wound that he had received in his breast. Casper lay about ten or twelve yards from the doorway. He was the last one that we examined, and we found that although the bullet had passed clear through his body in such fashion as to create a mortal wound, still he was not dead. While we were examining him he suddenly sat up. We were as greatly startled as we would be if someone had appeared to us from the dead. He gazed blankly around as if his mind had gone from him. We stood mutely by, no one caring to speak. After a little he rubbed his brow

as if he were trying to think. Presently he said, in a strangely sepulchral voice, as his eyes rested upon me:

"Am I still here, Lachlan? I thought you had done for me. I've just been dreaming that I was in hell."

Evil and all as I knew him to be, my heart went out in a certain kind of sympathy for him. Here he was with retribution overtaking him, and with the inexorable monster at hand to claim him. The finger of fate had at last touched him and he was brought very low. It was not an hour for exultation.

"You are still in the land of the living and the place of hope," I answered, "but my duty compels me to warn you that you have not long to live. You are mortally wounded."

"Yes, I feel it," answered Casper. "The sands of my life are nearly run out. I have played a desperate game and lost."

"You know, uncle," I said, bending over him and speaking in as kindly a voice as possible, "it is never too late to repent."

He looked at me blankly for awhile, and then burst out into the laugh of a maniac.

"Not too late! not too late! Why, man, you don't know what you're talking about. Do you think there could be mercy for me—for me, who sold myself to the devil twenty or thirty years ago, and who have served him ever since? Mercy for me! Why, I would pollute heaven—heaven!" He repeated the word while he laughed ironically. "Man, I wouldn't go to heaven if I could. I'd be out of place there."

The only spot for me is hell, where I expect to be in a brief space."

He paused for a time as if exhausted. Then he resumed: "As the tree has fallen so must it lie. Whatever else I am I'm not mean enough to go back on the devil in my last hour after serving him for all these years. No, I took my course deliberately, I have followed it deliberately, and I'll be man enough to see it through and take the consequences."

"Have you no one to forgive or to seek forgiveness from?" I asked, thinking he might soften towards myself.

He thought a moment, then said slowly and deliberately, as he looked me in the face, "No one. If I were to say that there was I would be disgracing the master I have served so long. If I said so it would only be because I am weak and dying. If it were not for this wound I would be at your throat, Lachlan, eager to kill you, and so place myself in security. I am not going to allow the weakness of body to produce weakness of spirit. I shall not play the hypocrite in my last moments. I want that it shall be known that I took my course and that I cheerfully abided the consequences. If anybody asks how Casper died, tell him he died like a man—or like an unrepentant brute, if you will—that he declared that he had voluntarily entered the service of the devil, and that he cheerfully abided by the issue and went to hell to keep company with his master. That's what I want you to tell them."

I was too greatly shocked to speak, and I knew it would be useless to attempt to reason with him. Sin

had worked its awful consequences; the door of mercy did indeed seem to be closed against him.

"Is there any message, Casper Cameron," I asked, "that you would like to send East?"

At mention of his name he gave an ironical laugh, and repeated it slowly, "Casper Cameron." Then he added: "I suppose I may as well tell you, for you're better stuff than I at first took you for. My name is not Cameron at all. I have no right to that name."

It came instinctively from me, and I could not refrain from the expression, "Thank God for that."

"Ah! so you're grateful. Well, I don't wonder," he answered. "I guess I'm not much credit, now that I'm done for, to any one."

"Would you please tell me the story," I said, eagerly, for I was most anxious to learn it.

He paused for quite a time as if uncertain whether or not he should comply with my request. "Well," he said, speaking slowly, "what's the odds? I suppose I might as well tell you, but I do it on one condition."

"What is that?"

"That you do not interpret it as any sign of weakness on my part, or any desire to do a decent act or make any amends before I die. As I have already told you, I want to die as I have lived."

I readily gave the promise.

"I would like to lie down," said Casper. "I grow weaker, and the pain is very great when I talk."

Placing my arm about his waist I laid him on the green sward, using my coat as a pillow. The sun was slowly dropping into the west. It was a peaceful scene

that the dying man looked out upon, a vivid contrast to the tumult of soul that he was enduring. After a time he opened his eyes, and looking to see that I was paying attention, he told, amid frequent pauses for breath and rest, the following story:

"I was reared in your grandfather's home with your father, and did not know till I was eighteen years old that I was not his brother. One day I was rummaging amongst some papers in the library when I came upon two certificates. One was of a marriage performed in Scotland, and the other, which was pinned to it, was of the birth of a child bearing my Christian name. In my curiosity I showed the certificates to an old servant who had been in the family for forty years, and questioned her about them. She told me that the certificate was that of the marriage of my mother to a man who proved to be a villain and who deserted her. The birth certificate recorded my own advent into the world. The discovery wrought a remarkable change in me, and from that day I hated your father, who until that hour I had regarded as my brother. I construed every act, no matter how trivial, as a slight upon me, and my resentment continued to grow—indeed, I nursed it sedulously. I conceived the idea that your father as the lawful heir would utterly overshadow me, and I formed the purpose of thwarting him in every way possible. As you doubtless know, I robbed him of his sweetheart, and, after I married her, broke her heart, for I did not care for her. I knew she always liked your father better than me. I do not think I could have seduced her from



your father only that I represented to her that he occupied the family relation to Colonel Cameron that I actually did, and I dwelt upon his perfidy in concealing the fact from her. When your grandfather died my jealousy knew no bounds, for I felt that the great estate would go to your father. I therefore conspired with Solomon Pinch, the lawyer, to substitute another will and conceal the real one, under which the landed estate went to your father. The old Colonel trusted Pinch implicitly, and one day during the last illness the latter took advantage of his great wealth to procure his signature to a bogus will making me the heir, representing the document to be the discharge of a mortgage. As the law then existed, the will had to be witnessed by two persons, and these we hired for a consideration, and subsequently sent them out of the country. The genuineness of the signature, which because of its peculiarity could scarcely be forged, disarmed your father's suspicions at first. Pinch's complicity with the crime so worked upon his conscience that he became a perpetual nuisance, if not menace, to me, and I had finally to send him out of the country. I believe he subsequently died in a lunatic asylum."

At this point Casper paused for a long time, and I thought he had concluded, but he presently opened his eyes and went on, a slight evidence of warmth appearing in his spent voice:

"Where I made the fool of myself was in not destroying the genuine will; had I done so I would be triumphant to-day, instead of dying miserably, as I now am, thwarted and beaten by a boy. I suppose,

however, that fate, whom I always defied and laughed at, was upon my track. The one weak point in my armor was my superstition, and when warned by a gypsy fortune-teller, whom I consulted, like the moth that hovers about the candle, I kept the will upon my person until you ripped it off in the glen while I lay prostrate in the hall that fateful night. It was the evil fate pursuing me, but I curse you for it, Lachlan, just the same."

I felt sore at heart for him and whispered in his ear:

"Don't let your soul go to Him who created it, Casper, with a curse upon your lips."

He looked strangely and wildly at me, and then murmured to himself, "It's too late—too late. I would not repent if I could."

The Captain and his sister had remained seated near by while the story was being told. Ruth trembled at the terrible spectacle of the dying man's defiant attitude, while the Captain seemed awe-stricken.

It was with some difficulty that Casper completed his tale, and when he had finished he was very weak. His breathing indicated that life was nearly spent. We sat by his side and waited to see if he would speak further. When he opened his eyes again they appeared dim. I asked if I could serve him in any way with regard to his property in the glen.

"The Indians will tell of my death, and Manakee will rejoice; so will the brats. There is plenty for them. They are better without me. I was and am no use to anyone but myself. Nobody loved me. Why

should they? I wasn't fit to be loved. I lived for and to myself, and now I am dying to myself." Then he lapsed into silence for a considerable time. The pallor on his face increased and there was a peculiar rattling noise in his throat. When he opened his eyes again he looked very strangely about and whispered, "Water."

We gave him drink. He swallowed it with great difficulty, and then remained quiet for a time, breathing heavily and irregularly. We heard him whisper in a strange, unearthly tone:

"I've served the devil, and I'm going to stay with him. I'm no turncoat and no hypocrite. I'm going to hell. I wouldn't go to any other place if I could."

Those terrible words were the last my uncle spoke on earth. He lapsed into unconsciousness and remained in that state for a time, and soon we noticed that he had ceased breathing.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### *THE LAST OF CASPER AND JACK.*

WE remained for several days at that point. We felt that with Casper dead our days of peril had passed. There was no enemy to pursue us now. With the aid of an old spade that we found in the shack we dug a trench and buried the Indians out of our sight. Then we prepared poor Muggins' body for interment and laid him away, Miss Rawlings repeating from memory a part of the beautiful Anglican burial service. Rarely did mortal deserve the rites of Christian burial better than the faithful Indian.

We attended to Casper's body last. I found a fine old oak near the river bank, and under its spreading branches we dug his grave and laid him in it. He looked very quiet and restful. What a difference does death make to us all, I thought, as I looked on the dead man's form and face, so recently pregnant with life and activity.

I cut Casper's name deep in a slab which I found, and shaving off a portion of the bark and wood of the old oak, I nailed the slab to the tree. We also drove a palisade of sharp sticks about the mound. Unless the hand of the native vandal has been at work, the grave of this cruel and daring man, with the palisade and rude inscription nailed to the oak, can doubtless be found at the present day. I am confident that even

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after the lapse of all these years, if I were ascending the Saskatchewan, I could locate the spot.

With regard to Jack Bushby, the desperado, when he recovered consciousness, which he did shortly after Casper's death, we allowed him to depart after binding up his injured arm. He appeared greatly broken down at the sight of his dead master, and, hardened criminal though he was, he shed bitter tears over the body.

"I always warned Casper," he said to me, "to give up his wild enterprise agin yeh. After the attempt to pizen yeh failed (he wanted me to 'sassinate yeh the first night yeh wuz in the Lodge) I growed superstitious an' told Casper to give yeh a wide berth, as somethin' tol' me he would not succeed agin yeh, fer ef yeh hed right on yer side ye'd be sure to triumph. I think Casper allus thought so hisself, fer arter yeh captured the belt he wuz never the same man. He wunst confessed to me his superstitious presentiment, er w'ativer yeh calls it, thet he thort ye'd be the death uv him, but he sed he'd sooner die nor hev yeh defeat him. He sed he'd hang on to the Cameron estates in Bruce if he'd to go t' hell fer it, w'ich I s'pose he hez, poor fellow."

"Why did you join him in such a murderous enterprise against me?" I asked.

"Well, fack is he hed a grip on me uv w'ich I can't tell yeh the facks. He'd seen me through an' helped me in bygone days w'en I was liable to be strung up, an' I hed promised him to stan' by him if he iver needed mc. Then you cum along, an' he sent fer me. It's not as I want anything from yeh, as yeh hev al-

ready given me my liberty, but truth to tell, I hed no heart in raisin' my hand agin yeh. I hed the idee thet yeh wuz in the right, an' I hed no sympathy fer Casper, but I couldn't help myself. I'm sorry fer Casper," he added, gazing earnestly at the dead man's face, "an' I'll be lonesome without him, fer I'm a bad man, like him, only I don' like raisin' my han' in cold blood agin eny man."

"Don't you think you could give up your wild life and reform?" I said, speaking kindly to him and shaking his hand as he was about to go.

He cast his eyes on the ground and returned my pressure, as he said, "No, I don't think so. Yeh see, it's like this, I started wrong an' hev follied along the broad road so long thet I don't think I could find my way in any other path. I've been a very wicked man fer many years, an' they's quite a big collum uv crimes chalked up agin me, an' I could never hope ter git 'em rubbed out. Besides, I'd be awful lonesome ef I tried to be good. Come to think on it," added Jack, after musing for a time, "I don' know as I'd care to be religious, anyhow. I wunst knowed a missionary, an' he wuz the cussedest hypocrite an' sneak yeh iver seed. He allus looked es solemn es a church, an' his long prayers 'd turn eny man's stomick, pa'ticularly 'f yeh knowed he didn't mean it."

"But he may have been a poor sample," I said, "and I'm not suggesting that you turn missionary, but that you give up your present kind of wild, wicked life. Believe me, Jack," I added earnestly, "there is something far better than the life you are leading."

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"Wall, I'll think it all over," said the desperado, moving away, "an' meantime I take it es a kindness that yeh hev took enough interest in me to suggest that I should folly a better path. Ef I wa'n't so infernal bad, an' hedn't been at it so blame long, I believe I'd give the new game a whirl, fer I'm heartsick o' this."

I watched Jack's retreating form as he strode away over the prairie in the direction of the ponies. He never turned to look back, but mounting the first animal he came to, rode off southward. I never saw him again, and never heard of him.

"Poor fellow," I thought, "it may be that he will come under the category of the man in scripture unto whom little was given. Perhaps he was not taught to do the right, and so will be beaten with few stripes."

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### *IN THE MOONLIGHT WITH RUTH.*

I SHALL pass hurriedly over the events of the next few weeks, for the reader must be satiated with the exciting and gory experiences of the last few chapters, the relation of which was essential to the record.

We captured the ponies that belonged to the Indians who had been slain, and, abandoning the river route, struck out in a westerly direction, travelling the country lying between Lake Saskeram and Carrot River. Pierre, who was a superb guide, seemed to know as by instinct the direction to follow, and was confident that he could find his way without any serious delay. The country was rough, and we were often compelled to lose time making detours to avoid swamps and to secure decent crossings over streams. Game was plentiful, the weather fine (the only serious drawback being mosquitoes, from which Miss Rawlings suffered more than she would admit), and with minds free from fear the journey was enjoyable. The only cloud that rested upon us was the fate of poor Tannis, and to that sad event our minds constantly reverted, and upon it conversation frequently and involuntarily turned. However, as the days passed the shadow slowly lifted, as indeed it must, no matter what the loss is that we sustain, else life would be unbearable and reason would become dethroned.



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It is a sacred memory to me now to look back to those long evenings as we sat about the camp-fire after a hard day's journey and talked of our adventures. I recall how our faces would sadden at the mention of Tannis's name, and how Pierre would smoke vigorously to obscure his face in great clouds, that I might not detect the moisture in his glittering eyes. Then Ruth and I would wander off over the prairie picking wild flowers and enjoying the glory of the Western twilight, while Pierre and the Captain continued their smoke by the camp-fire. One evening Ruth and I were seated by a little stream of crystal pureness, while the aroma from the great natural flower-beds with which the prairie abounded blew softly in our faces, and filled our nostrils so that we were constrained to breathe deeply at times to enjoy the fragrance to the full.

Ruth spoke first. "I was just thinking," she said, "how very beautiful everything is that God has anything to do with, everything that is just as He created it. It is only when the blighting hand of sin intervenes that God's beautiful creations are marred. How grand it would be if we were all just as God must have intended us to be, just as are His works of nature which at the present moment fill our minds and lives as we look upon all around us.

"Ruth, your mind and life appear to be as pure as this crystal stream that meanders past our feet," I said, taking her by the hand.

"Oh, it is not so," she replied, gazing far out over the wild sweep of prairie, "but how glorious it would

be if we could pattern our minds and lives after God's great works of nature."

"Is there something inherently wrong about us that we appear to fail so lamentably?" I asked.

"No, I do not think so," she answered. "The trouble with the human race, as I see it, is that they live an entirely unnatural life. They live in artificial houses, on artificial streets, cultivate artificial friends, have artificial amusements, think artificial thoughts, and indulge in artificial aspirations, until finally they grow by process of evolution into artificial beings. They have never allowed themselves for one moment to commune with God or nature. Saying over their prayers degenerates into a mere artificial form of worship and ceases to be a religious exercise. Just as an organ unexercised becomes atrophied and useless, so all veneration, all sense of real worship, all divinity, disappear, and the race becomes artificial. By and by that stage is reached when the heart is incapable of discerning between the real and the counterfeit, and I often think the majority of mortals seem to have already arrived at that point."

"You mean that the process you describe would preclude people from enjoying or appreciating the beauty and glory of the things that are all about them?"

"Exactly. Such a grip upon the race has the artificial life that is being lived at present that perhaps not more than one per cent., if all were seated by this stream to-night, would exclaim, 'Thank God for that sunset, for that prairie outlook, for those flowers, for this crystal stream.' And yet it is all theirs if they but

knew and would appropriate it; if they had the taste and soul to understand and appreciate it, they would rejoice in the fact that the firmament is of more value than the dingy blocks of the city, the landscape of greater worth than the soil that helps create it, and the trees than the mud that God employs to produce them. And yet how sad it is to see the mad race for the blocks, for the soil and for the mud. Hopes and aspirations are trampled upon, ambitions destroyed, hearts broken and lives crushed out, and all to gratify the most sordid ambitions. This would not be the case if the race had right conceptions of life. What is needed is an ethical revival. There are landscapes, there are trees and streams and sunsets, there are flowers, and there are bright blue skies enough to warm the hearts of all, to brighten the lives of all, if the race could be brought to understand it. All these beautiful things that are about us are pregnant with life and filled with the glory of God. If selfishness could only be eradicated from the universe, and honor and justice be allowed to prevail, there would be a chance for the millennium; but the race is blinded, the scales seem to be fastened tightly, and the sad part of it all is that it appears as if generations were doomed to go through the world under the present distressful conditions."

"Perhaps, after all," I ventured, "it may be heaven's own plan."

"Sometimes I think so. They say the world is improving, but it often appears to me as if the evidences were the other way. True there is more polish, more

so-called 'culture,' but is it not true that the burdens which humanity is carrying to-day are greater than ever? Is it not true that more people are unhappy and that more hearts are breaking?"

Ruth paused at this stage, and I could detect the moisture, in her earnest, sympathetic eyes as she looked out on the peaceful scene about her. Then she murmured low, as if speaking to herself, "How happy we ought to be, and how happy we might all be, if the Universal Love that Christ taught were enthroned."

"But surely," she added, after a pause, "God is working out His own plan in His own way. He doubtless knows the reason for all the sorrow, for all the turmoil and sin. He must have a good reason for allowing the faces of the race which He created in His own image to be disfigured and misshapen with sin. This Man of Sorrows, whose heart was ever with the suffering ones, must have some good purpose in allowing the myriad hearts of his brothers and sisters to be broken, some all-wise motive for permitting the sorrow, sin and crime that fill the earth. Let us not question His inscrutable wisdom, Lachlan, but have faith," and the eyes of this sweet girl, who had drunk so deeply at the fountain of nature's philosophy, gazed into mine, while faith and trustfulness beamed from them.

I could have taken her in my arms and rapturously poured out the sentiments toward her that filled my being, but as she was speaking there came to me the idea that I was inferior to this sweet soul, the feeling that to love in any other sense than spiritual would be

sacrilege. How could a girl with a mind like hers, with a soul that felt the burdens of the race, bring herself to care in the way I desired for a poor commonplace mortal like me, with all the weaknesses of his sex and race? I began to think that she must even look upon the mission that brought me to the West with repulsion, if not with horror.

No wonder I was silent. I loved the girl deeply—nay, I do not think it would be an exaggeration to say, wildly. I thought if it could just be given me to look into her heart and read her feelings after the deed, I would rejoice to sacrifice my life for her. Here I was, with what I had regarded as the important mission of my life accomplished, and yet I was not happy. I did not now care if the great family estates were lost to me for ever. I did not even mind the vindication of the name of the family. I was heedless as to what Simon would say or think if I failed. Here I was, madly in love with Ruth. Life without Ruth would be a sad blank to me. What wonder, therefore, that even with the glories of nature shining about me, I should be silent and despondent.

Ruth touched me lightly on the arm. It was like the touch of a magician.

"You appear sad," she said.

"Yes," I replied, because I had nothing else to say.

"How can you be sad in the midst of such glorious surroundings?"

"Ah," I replied, with a sigh, "you love the sunshine, the landscapes, the grass, the trees, the flowers; so do I. But there is a sun that is more to me than

all these, and I live in perpetual fear lest it will not shine for me. Without this sunshine life will be a dreary pilgrimage. I can but look forward to a journey along a sombre, sunless and cheerless pathway."

Ruth looked genuinely puzzled, for of course she could not understand the feelings that had been agitating my breast.

"You are thinking of Tannis?" she said.

"No," I answered, "poor Tannis is beyond the bourne, and for her the sun will not shine on earth again."

"Then of what sunshine are you deprived?"

She was looking into my eyes with all the sweet and innocent simplicity of girlish youth. Her hair had broken loose from its fastenings and streamed over her shoulders and neck in glorious wealth.

"Why, can't you guess, Ruth?" I said, taking her right hand in mine and stroking it gently. My soul was on fire at the touch, and I could have gathered her in my arms and smothered her with caresses.

The magnetic current established by that touch, the contact of soul with soul, for we were looking into each other's eyes, soon did its subtle work. The girl's face was suffused with blushes and her eyes fell.

"Why, you don't mean it, Lachlan; surely you don't mean it?"

"Ruth," I said, earnestly, and there was a tremor in my voice, but my speech came to me like a wild current, "mean it! mean it! Why, have you not observed it in my every glance, in my every action, in my every

pulse-beat? Mean it! How could I help meaning it? How could any one with a soul help meaning it?"

"But, Lachlan, Lachlan, think of what you are saying." The voice was tender, and there was no note of objection.

"Oh, Ruth," I went on, "I do not need to think of what I am saying. I love you fondly, madly wildly, and I've loved you from the moment I looked into your glorious eyes. I tried to fight it off. I wrestled with myself, but it was all to no purpose. It came on me like an avalanche, and I was just as powerless to resist as I now am to refrain from speaking."

A strange, sweet smile came into her face, and a light as from the other world broke in her eyes.

I went on, for I was filled with love. The feelings which had been restrained and pent up for a time were overflowing—nay, the dam had burst, and I was being swept helplessly and resistlessly upon the impetuous flow. I took her both hands in mine, and she offered no resistance.

"Ruth," I said, "I've lain awake many a night just repeating your sweet name, so dear has it become to me. Often and often have I spent the hours under heaven's canopy gazing up into the matchless vault thinking of you, and so real did your presence become to me that I would have regarded it as quite natural had you issued from amongst the stars and come to me. I have looked upon you as of the angels, and I feared to speak to you of my love lest the gods, offended at my sacrilege, should take you from me. I know that you are too good, too beautiful, too angelic

for me, but without you life will be a blank. Don't turn me away, Ruth," I said, although she made no sign that occasioned alarm. "Unworthy and all as I am, tell me that you love me."

By this time I had stolen my arm about her waist. She did not resist.

"Make me the happiest boy on the planet, Ruth, dear," I whispered, putting my lips to her ear, and I could feel them burn with the contact.

She paused a little, then placing a hand on each of my bronzed cheeks, she gazed into my eyes for some moments. Then she said: "You know what the love of a woman is?"

"I believe God has given me the soul and intelligence to realize the value of yours," I replied.

"It is her world, her life—her all," she said, speaking low and earnestly, and continuing to gaze into my eyes. "When a woman bestows this priceless gift she can give no more. She has drained the treasure-house of her heart to the last extremity."

"Yes, I think I understand," I whispered.

Suddenly she flung both her arms about my neck.

"Lachlan," she said, "you dear boy, how could I love any one but you? Have you not known since the night we walked on the prairie when Alfred was hurt that I was all yours?"

I took her in my arms and kissed her fondly while I whispered, "Oh, Ruth, Ruth, my Ruth! Just to think that you are all mine! I wouldn't change places with the angels."

She smiled at my impetuosity and earnestness, and



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though she placed one hand over my lips and whispered, "Hush, hush, you must not talk about the angels," I knew that she did not dislike my words, for my eyes attested their sincerity.

That experience, that epoch in life comes but once. It can never be repeated. There is but one first, fresh, pure, unselfish, holy love, the love of youth, the love of two hearts that beat as one. The real force of the poet's expression never broke upon me till I came to set these words down. Some may imagine that they can repeat the experience, but it is surely a fanciful dream. There is a lofty, unselfish elevation in the first wild, incomprehensible rush of love; there is something romantic, sublime, seraphic, when the words are exchanged, and each feels the tender delicacy of the bond that exists. How the boy, or it may be the man, guards with jealous eye his sweetheart. How he construes every attention to his love by another as an occasion of deep resentment; how apt to misconstrue or misunderstand a look, and how sweet to hear the explanation and enjoy the reconciliation. How could it be that such a feeling, that almost borders on the celestial, could come to mortal more than once? I have set my conviction down with the confident expectation that no soul will attempt to controvert it.

I was in Paradise, and Ruth—dear Ruth!—was with me; and there we sat by the little rippling, crystal stream till long after the sun dropped out of sight, till the birds went to sleep in the waving branches, and even the frogs ceased to "sing." We needed no music, for our souls were ringing with rarer and sweeter

notes than those of seraph song; our hearts were attuned to love, and it was little wonder that we should forget all about the Captain and Pierre, and sit there with hands clasped and hearts overflowing with happiness. Why should those sacred, rapturous moments be shortened? If they could only be prolonged into years, what glory! if to eternity, what bliss! Everything about us seemed responsive to our love; the water rippled as if for joy; the soft wind fanned our faces so gently that we fancied it meant to lull us into the belief that our happy estate would be perpetual; the stars blinked as if they wished to let us know that they were happy because we were; and I noticed that the old moon occasionally disappeared behind a cloud-let to allow me to kiss my modest Ruth. But there is an end to all bliss on earth; if it is different in heaven, let us look with fond expectancy for the change.

"Lachlan! Lachlan! Ruth! Ruth!" we heard the anxious voice of the Captain calling, and we were brought down again to earth from the clouds in which we had been soaring for hours. Hastily I answered the call, and in a moment the Captain and the guide were by our side.

"Why, where on earth have you been all this time?" said the Captain, reproachfully. "We feared you had met foul play and came in search of you."

Every one knows how impossible it is to refrain from telling of one's happiness. I believed the whole world must be interested in mine, and I could, figuratively speaking, have opened my window and proclaimed my happiness to the earth.

"Congratulate me, Captain!" I said, springing forward and seizing both his hands to shake them vigorously, quite ignoring the inquiry about our absence.

I fancy he thought that something had gone wrong with my head, for he glanced significantly at Pierre and then at his sister.

"It's quite true, Alfred," said Ruth, as if her brother ought instinctively to know all about it.

"What's quite true?" said the Captain, looking puzzled.

"Why, about Lachlan and me," answered Ruth.

"Tut, tut! speak plainly. How can I understand riddles?" said the Captain. "What's true about Lachlan and you?"

"Why, you great big silly, can't you guess?" said Ruth, going up to her brother and kissing him on the cheek.

Pierre was quicker than the Captain, but he was more accustomed to read faces.

"Can you no' see?" he said, nudging the Captain. "You never see fellow look happy lak Lachlan but once in he's life. W'y, dey's bot' happy, an' you'd better give de blessing."

The Captain understood in an instant, and shaking my hand warmly, said, "Cameron, I congratulate you. Ruth is my sister, but a nobler girl you'll not find if you search all Quebec. She's a bit inclined to preach, and has ideas and all that kind of thing, but have patience, you'll find her quite like an ordinary woman. As for yourself, you know that I love you and am

proud of you. I'd sooner confide my sister's happiness to you than to any man I know."

I thanked the Captain for his words, and then Ruth and I shook hands with Pierre, whose bright eyes glistened in the moonlight as his mind probably went back to that period in his life when he proclaimed his first love to some dusky maiden.

"Dat's all right, Lachlan," he whispered to me, as we reached the camp, "you be marry one hangel sure. Pierre be mighty glad."

I kissed Ruth at her tent door. When I finally slept I dreamed of Paradise, of the angels—and of Ruth.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### *CUMBERLAND HOUSE.*

It will require no stretch of the reader's imagination to conceive that the remainder of the journey to Cumberland House, which was without exciting incident, was to me a time of rare happiness. The Captain and Pierre developed into the best of chums, and apparently conspired to allow Ruth and me to spend our time together. We would ride over the prairie all day in the rear of Pierre and the Captain, who led the way. There was nothing to disturb our love, no one to criticize, and no one to please save ourselves. Day after day my beautiful Ruth unfolded her mind to me, and I learned something of the loftiness of soul and purity of heart of this sweet girl. I should like to set down for the benefit of the reader some of the ideals and aspirations that inspired her, but I must refrain. I well know that I would not be deemed an impartial judge. I was so happy and enthusiastic that when I found the Captain yawn after I had talked long to him about his sister and about my own blissful state, I used to fall back upon Pierre and pour the story of my bliss into his willing ear. Poor Pierre, he never seemed to tire of it. I think if there had been no Captain and no Pierre I should have told the story of my happiness to the pony, or to the trees, or the stars when

the night fell. I certainly could not keep it to myself; there would be grave danger of an explosion. Those two blissful weeks, as we journeyed, none too hurriedly, toward our destination, are still to me the most glorious period of my existence; they shine as if with the reflected glory of Paradise. In view of my experience I boldly challenge the accuracy of the aphorism that "the course of true love never did run smooth." I can testify, and I believe Ruth also would add her corroboration, that nothing occurred to cause even the faintest ripple upon the placid, deep-flowing current of our love. Not a cloud as big as the proverbial man's hand appeared upon the sky of our blissful outlook as we journeyed over the wild stretches of country.

We reached Cumberland House in safety and found the brother that the Captain and Ruth had come so far to see greatly improved. The man with medical experience who had attended him thought he had passed the crisis, and that he might ultimately recover, although he never expected that he would regain his former strength and vigor. Not all the medicines of a hundred physicians could have had the effect upon the patient that the arrival of Ruth and the Captain produced. These brothers and sister were deeply attached to, and exceedingly proud of, each other. It was beautiful to witness their quiet, unostentatious display of affection, as they would sit for hours together. Of course, I was received and welcomed, more especially as my status with Ruth was announced and the little service that I had rendered during the journey presented in colors infinitely too flattering.

The Chief Factor of the House—a splendid specimen of that body of officers of the Hudson's Bay Company who for centuries have manned the posts throughout the vast territory described on early maps of the North American continent as Rupert's Land, and whose names have become the synonym for hospitality—was most gracious, and bestowed upon us such entertainment as one would scarcely expect to find in that far-off region.

Pierre had met him in years gone by, and they spent hours exchanging stories and recalling reminiscences of early days. The Factor expected a flotilla of York boats along any day on their way to Lake Winnipeg and Fort Garry, and he advised us to wait and go down the river in company with them, as it was a quicker and safer passage than the one overland. And so we passed several weeks at Cumberland House. We were not idle, finding agreeable occupation in fishing the waters of the Saskatchewan and tributary streams and adjacent lakes, and making excursions over the surrounding country to replenish the larder of the Fort with the fruits of the chase. Ruth usually formed one of our party, so expert a rider had she become, and so fond of the chase.

At last the flotilla arrived, and twenty-five days after we had reached the Fort, we bade goodbye to the hospitable Factor and his family and sailed away in the big red boats manned by sturdy voyageurs. A comfortable compartment was fitted up in one of the boats for the invalid, who by this time was able to walk. I had had prepared at the Fort a rude and strong casket, which we brought with us, and when we reached the

Big Lake River we camped for a day, while Pierre, the Captain, Ruth and I, with four stalwart voyageurs, who carried the casket, set out to locate the spot where we had laid poor Tannis in her temporary grave. It was an easy matter for Pierre to find the place; indeed, he walked straight to it as if by instinct. The grave had not been disturbed. Hastily the voyageurs removed the shallow covering of earth and deposited the body in the casket. Then we sealed it thoroughly with pitch, and the four sturdy fellows, hoisting it on their shoulders, bore it without a single pause to the point where the flotilla was anchored. There we selected a little sandy hillock within a hundred yards of the junction of the two rivers, partially surrounded with spruce and willow. Here we dug the grave and laid away the body of our loved dead. While at the Fort I had hewn out an oaken tablet, upon which I had with my own hand carved the name "TANNIS" in large letters, while underneath I had cut the inscription,

*"Crossed the River, June 28th, 18—."*

The tablet was nailed to a stout oaken post, and this we drove deeply and firmly into the gravel at the head of the mound. Curious travellers can no doubt find the grave at the present day, for I arranged to have it visited at intervals by officials of the Hudson's Bay Company, who were to renew the inscription and erect a rustic fence to enclose the tomb.

And so we left Tannis in her solitary and distant



sepulchre, with no companion save the mighty Saskatchewan that she loved so well. There was a rude grandeur about the tomb of this heroic girl that any of us might envy. The pall of silence fell upon us as we pushed from the shore, and for hours we moved down the stream in a silence unbroken save by the regular plash of the oars as in unison they were dropped into the water.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### HOME.

WE reached Fort Garry after a journey of eighteen days, which passed without accident or special incident. I sought Dr. Schultz, who extended to myself and party a true Western welcome. How his eyes glowed with pleasure as I told him of faithful Pierre and expressed to him my deep gratitude for having secured so invaluable a guide for us.

"Why, Doctor," I said, "had it not been for Pierre I should never have returned to tell the story of my adventures."

Pierre actually blushed as I sounded his praises, and protested that he "had done nottings dat heny fait'ful guide would not do."

"Do you know, Doctor, that I am thinking of taking Pierre to Eastern Canada with me. You don't need him here, and he has grown indispensable to me. Besides, Ruth—Miss Rawlings—would like to have him go."

The Doctor looked keenly at me, as if he suspected something; then he said, laconically, "Yes, I s'pose when you're taking one you might just as well have the other also."

The idea of accompanying our party to Ontario pleased Pierre greatly. He had heard of the great cities of the East, and with that spirit of adventure

and curiosity ever present with him he longed to see them for himself.

"You see, Lachlan," he said to me after I had persuaded him to come, "dat be fine hixperience fer Pierre. He's have no femme, an' he's be glad fer go wit' you sure. Den w'en she's come back an' have nottings helse fer do, she can give de boys one beeg whirl in Cheecag' an' udder big citees w'en dey's go fer see w'at you call de helephant."

We had arranged to start east the Thursday after we reached the Fort, but on the advice of Dr. Schultz we remained over four days longer, so that we might travel by a new stage route that was being inaugurated, and which we found to be a great improvement upon the old coach in which we had ridden when crossing the plains on our entry into the country.

And now I seem to have reached a point where I must soon take leave of the reader, for I have told the story arising out of my mission to the Northwest, and I cannot hope that beyond a few sentences the reader would be interested in a further chronicle embracing only my personal or domestic affairs. I was wont, as a boy reader, to wonder why writers did not prolong the concluding events of their stories, or carry their readers along for years after the climax. I now see why it is not done. When a story is told, the prudent writer recognizes the necessity of taking the earliest opportunity to make a graceful bow to his readers and take an early leave. I shall, however, humor the readers who may happen to be constituted as I was in boyhood days by adding the following facts.

We reached Toronto in safety, and I persuaded my friends to visit my ancestral home in Bruce. Some tidings of my adventures in the far West, of my triumph over Casper, and the success of my mission, had preceded me, and as "a conquering hero" returning from the field I was accorded a warm reception by the old friends and neighbors. My exploits had earned for me much greater fame than was deserved, and for a time my popularity was out of all proportion to my deserts.

Tears of joy stood in my eyes as I grasped the hand of dear old Simon, who knew I was coming and who stood in the doorway to receive and welcome me home, while the deaf old housekeeper, with fresh apron and embroidered cap, gazed at me with real pride from the open window.

"Simon, Simon," was all I could say for a moment, so full was my heart.

The old man brushed the moisture from his eyes as he placed a hand on each shoulder, as was his wont in the old days, and said in broken tones:

"God bless you, Lachy lad. Man, I'm blithe tae see ye hame again, an' gey prood o' ye intil the bargain. It warms my auld hairt tae look upo' ye aince mair. An' sae ye hae keppit the promise I made tae yer faither, an' which ye made tae me in the Falkland woods yonder, an' yer title tae the estates is noo vindicated. An' wha's the bonnie lassie ye hae brocht wi' ye?" he added, looking at Ruth.

I introduced him to my sweetheart and her brothers without explaining our relations.

"An' it's welcome tae auld Bruce is ony frien' o' my Lachy's," he said, shaking Ruth's and her brothers' hands warmly.

When Pierre arrived later he, too, was given a hearty welcome, and when Simon learned what the guide had been to me he was especially drawn towards him, and exhibited his admiration and gratitude by presenting his well-loved meerschaum pipe and a generous portion of his special brand of tobacco to the delighted half-breed.

The Captain and Ruth remained for a few days, during which we drove over the extensive estates which, under the will that I had torn from the body of Casper, had been restored to me. When they departed I accompanied them to Toronto, where we said good-bye.

Many years have gone over our heads since I came into possession of my own. Simon is still living, but he is so aged and infirm that I lift him into the carriage when he takes his daily drive. He usually insists upon taking "Lachy junior," as he calls the lad, with him. Pierre has returned to the great West, where he still acts as guide. A half-yearly allowance, which is paid him regularly by my banker, lightens his burdens. Upon the 28th of June, as the years go, Ruth and I call the children to our side and tell them the story of Tannis, the half-breed girl. In this we have a two-fold object: first, to set forth to them the grace, purity and simple beauty of the girl's life; and, for ourselves, to keep her in affectionate remembrance.

