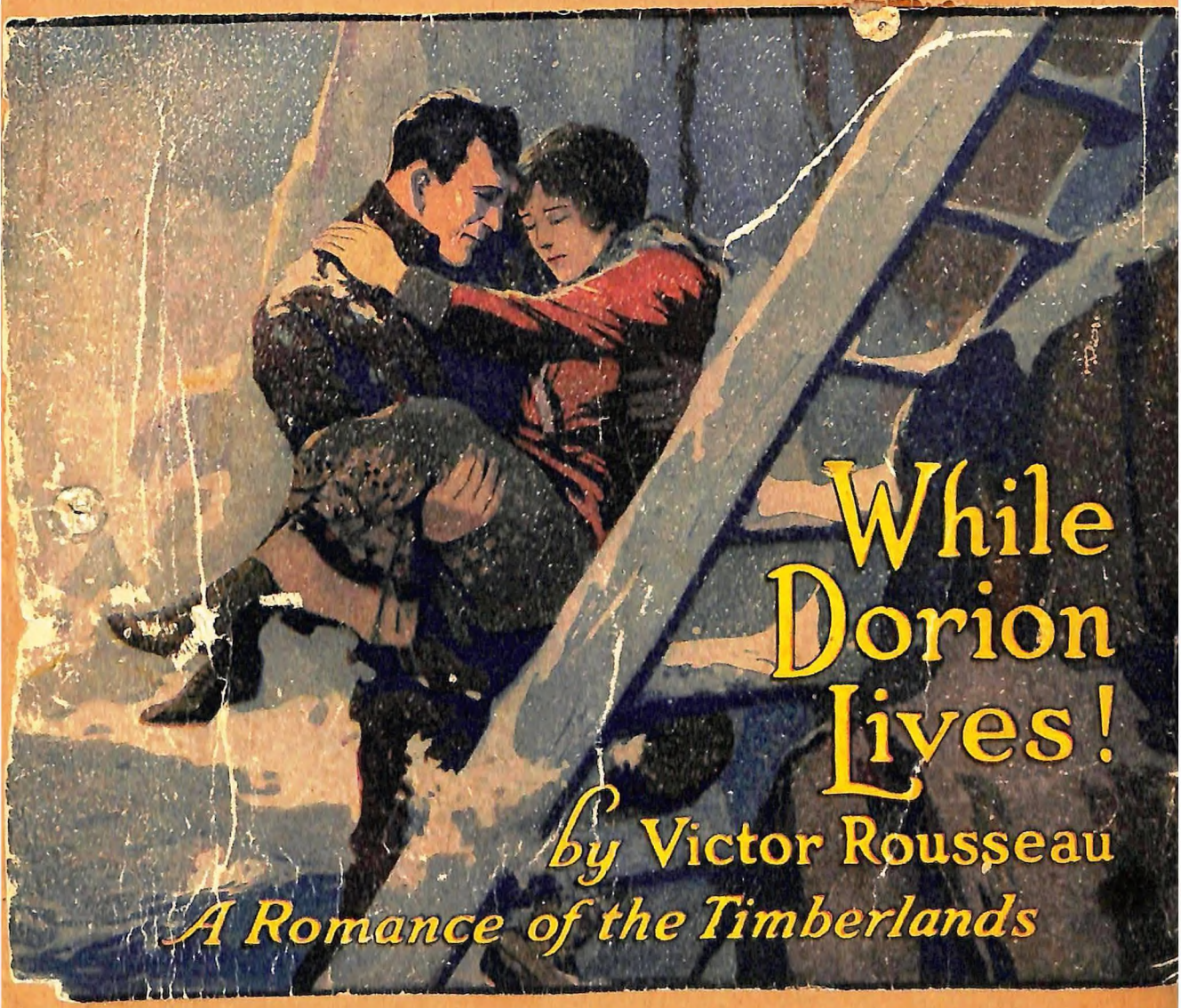

While Dorion Lives!

by Victor Rousseau

A Romance of the Timberlands

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by Victor Rousseau

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CHAPTER I.

TROUBLE BREWS.

ON cloudless days one could see the barren outlines of Anticosti from Bonne Chance as a white tracing against the horizon, but usually the gray mist which overhung sea and land thickened into a fog that merged the gray sky with the gray water a mile or two from shore.

This nearly constant haze of the north coast of the St. Lawrence was broken by wisps of smoke, glimpses of fantom hulls, or a great schooner foresail that would lift itself like the flash of a giant seagull's wing from the obscurity, and vanish. Every movement in this fog curtain, however, had its meaning to the watchers along the shore.

Jean Desmoulins, the half-wit, ran snickering up the single street of Bonne Chance. The street wound along the edge of the cliff for an interminable distance, and all that existed of Bonne Chance, except the cottages of the fishermen below the cliff, was strung out on either side of it: cabins of blackened rafters, with unfenced gardens, where fowls strutted, pigs rooted, calves strayed, and flapping clotheslines disclosed, as the wind lifted them, great cabbage heads and etiolated geraniums.

Outside each cabin along the road, except the very humblest, Jean Desmoulins stopped.

"The Blanche is coming!" he shouted, apostrophizing the owner, visible or invisible. The half-wit's self-constituted duty of town-crier impressed him with a sense of self-importance that the disregard of the Bonne Chance people did nothing to diminish.

He continued where the road ran steeply uphill without diminishing his amble. "Ai, Jacques Poulin, the Blanche is coming!" he called. "Ai, Veuve Bedard, the Blanche is coming!" He stopped a moment longer outside the post-office. "Ai, Mme. Tremblay, the Blanche is coming!" he screamed to the woman in the doorway.

Presently he reached the front of an imposing, ornate frame house, newly built,

the only painted house in Bonne Chance except that occupied by the curé, now on a visit to Europe. "Ai, M. La Rue, the Blanche is coming!" he shrilled.

If M. La Rue was within, and heard him, he let his house-front speak for him. Phillippe La Rue's house-front was eloquent with shingles. The owner was, it appeared, a counselor-at-law and notary; he was also justice of the peace, sheriff, and real-estate agent; likewise he represented a number of companies; finally, he was the manager of the local branch of the Banque Industrielle.

Jean's slackening of speed might have been due to the steepness of the hill; it was more probably an involuntary act of respect to his principal employer, for there was a shade of deference in the apostrophe that he flung to the ugly house with its molded Corinthian pillars that supported nothing. In a moment he was off again, running up toward the stone church, empty during the curé's absence in Europe, which crowned the acclivity.

A little beneath this three or four dilapidated wagons, whose rickety frames exuded straw, were clustered at the side of a small store. Jean galloped in.

"Ai, M. Belley, the Blanche is coming!" he called, his roving eyes wandering from where Belley stood with an unrolled length of cloth against the counter-yard to many coveted things: whole hams, a hand of plantains, blackening green, and candies, such as he craved, and thieved dexterously when the chance offered.

Alphonse Belley glanced at him carelessly. "The revenue men won't catch Hector Galipeault this time, now that he has built that cellar for his brandy," he remarked to one of the three men who lounged in front of the counter. "Eh, Angus?"

Angus McGraeme, a man of about fifty, with sandy hair, green eyes, and protruding fangs, nodded sourly. His son Alexandre—a dark, vindictive-looking man in a green, shiny, slicker, with the ends of the sleeves turned back—uttered a short, sneering laugh. Hector Galipeault, the hotel-keeper, had been fined twice for selling brandy smuggled alongshore by the McGraemes, and a third conviction would mean a jail sentence.

"I think the Blanche is bringing M. Maitland," said the third man, Paul Cawmill, scowling.

Alphonse Belley whistled. "He must be in a great hurry to begin work, if he arrives by the Blanche," he said.

His quick glance stopped the fingers of Jean Desmoulins as they moved toward the candy-case. He winked at Angus.

"I should say the government is in a great hurry to send him here," he continued.

"Why should the government want to send him at all?" demanded Paul Cawmill aggressively.

"Why, don't you see?" explained Belley, with bland condescension. "It's all a trick to make a monopoly out of the sealing and keep it for their friends at Ottawa. That's what's behind this M. Maitland. Holy Family, why should he come here to cut our lumber and ship it all the way back to Quebec?"

"So, that's why the Blanche came through the ice last spring and seized all Jeremiah McGraeme's schooners with their catch, because they had been on the grounds before the season opened, eh, Alphonse?" inquired Paul.

"Certainly!" responded the storekeeper, with a knowing smile. "Anybody might have seen that. And that's why they are worrying us, trying to take our living away and leave us all to starve. That's why the revenue men come here when no one's thinking of them, to jail a man for selling a glass of brandy." He warmed to his theme as he proceeded. "That's why they fine honest merchants because they have been too busy to take out new licenses."

"Well—but—" began Paul Cawmill, grappling with these sequences.

Belley leaned over the counter and shook a long forefinger. "They're going to make Bonne Chance a sealing station—a monopoly," he responded. "The company will own all the boats, and drive the poor *habitant* out of the field with its steam-vessels. This M. Maitland will spy on us and stop the brandy trade, and rob us of our living, so that we'll have to sell our

schooners and go to work for the company as hands. And that's what's in the wind. Rascals! And some of you voted Conservative at the last elections!"

He turned to Angus and Alexandre. "Didn't the government lease the Dorion lands to this M. Maitland?" he demanded. "Private lands, which Jeremiah's niece, Jeanne, inherited from her husband, the seigneur, when he was lost at sea. Since when can the government take a man's lands away, or a woman's, either, and lease them to another? The government knew that they were private lands. Mark my word, you'll find a monopoly here next summer, and the sealing gone, and the brandy trade gone, and all honest business gone with them!"

"But is it sure that the Dorion lands really belonged to Emile Dorion?" persisted Paul. "We used to think that that was only a boast he made when he had been drinking, that the Romaine Seigniory was granted to the Dorions long before the English came into the land. The McGraemes also claimed them."

"Claimed them! The Dorions stole them from us!" shouted Angus, wheeling upon Paul in a sudden rage.

"*Ben, ben,* I do not dispute that, Angus," answered Paul in conciliatory fashion. "We all know that the Dorions and the McGraemes were once great folk; still, Emile Dorion was no better than any of us *habitants,* and what papers had he to show?"

It was evident that Angus had a bitter answer ready upon his tongue, but before it had leaped into words a fourth man, roughly dressed in corduroys, entered the store.

He was a stocky, swarthy *habitant,* with the high cheek-bones and lank hair that betokened Indian ancestry not far remote; he was of great strength, and he seemed to have a sinister squint, due to the fact that one of his eyes was gray and the other brown. He carried a sack over his shoulder.

Despite the entire dissimilarity in physical type between him and the McGraemes, he was one of the clan—Duncan, a throwback to some maternal ancestor.

"Eh, Duncan, so thou hast seen the Blanche?" called Belley, with false heartiness.

"*Maudit bateche!*" exploded Duncan. "Give me a box of matches. Three times this year they hound me. One would think the seals breed in August!"

"Have no fear this time, Duncan!" said the storekeeper. "It is not for thee that the Blanche has arrived, nor for Angus or Alexandre. She is bringing M. Maitland from Quebec."

"To cut timber," added Angus, with a wink at his cousin which infuriated him, as it was meant to.

"*Verrat!* 'Tis a lie, as thou knowest well, M. Belley! Who would come here to cut timber, when it grows thicker than grass all the way to Quebec? He is a government spy, this M. Maitland. *Ben!* We shall show him what the *habitant* can do when his honest living is stolen from him! And what will Paul here do, if this M. Maitland demands the little lease that he holds from Jeremiah?"

"Holy Name!" exploded Paul. "Let him try to take my lease away from me, that's all! We shall show him!"

Angus grinned in his sour fashion. "Hard luck, Paul!" he said. "But you know what happens to the little frogs when a big one hops into the puddle!"

The three McGraemes exchanged meaning glances, nodded to Belley, and slouched out of the store. Belley turned to Paul, who was still vibrating with indignation.

"It is my opinion," he said, "that Jeremiah McGraeme will go to law with M. Maitland on behalf of his niece over the Dorion lands, and there will be no room for a little man like thee between them. What does Jeremiah care for the *habitant,* now that he has become the big man of Bonne Chance and is called seigneur?"

If he had meant to draw Cawmill out—and the tilt of his sly head indicated it—he had succeeded perfectly.

"Seigneur? *Maudit!*" Paul shouted. "What is Jeremiah McGraeme but a *habitant* like us, born and bred, except that he still retains the Scotch religion that my grandfather had? Cawmill—C-a-m-

b-e-l, my own father spelled it, and his father spelled it differently again, and it is the name of a great prince in Scotland, who was a friend of General Wolfe, and got this land from him and settled here. Was he not as poor as any of us, a few years ago, when he and Emile Dorion owned one sealing schooner together? You served in their boat, Jean, poor imbecile, though you remember nothing about it.

"Emile Dorion and Jeremiah McGraeme, and Jean Desmoulins here, sailing together, and what difference between the man and the two masters? That was just after Jeremiah had persuaded Emile Dorion to marry his niece, Jeanne—you remember, Alphonse. Then Emile Dorion is lost at sea, and so his land passes to the girl Jeanne, and Jeremiah is called seigneur because he is her guardian. And do you suppose he will return it to her when she is of age? Not he!

"Jeremiah takes Dorion's boat, too, and next year he owns two boats. Then he buys the sealing catch, and so prospers, until he loses his schooners last spring, when some rascal betrays them to the revenue men. And *pouf!*"—he filled his cheeks with air and let them collapse—"from a rich man he becomes poor again, and Philippe La Rue seems likely to succeed him. But does all this make Jeremiah McGraeme anything but a *habitant*, like you and me?"

The sly tilt of Belley's head became exaggeration. "Of course not, Paul!" answered the storekeeper. "Still, it is natural to respect position. And it is hard, when Jeremiah schemed all his life to get back the Dorion lands, to have the government lease them to another."

"And the girl Jeanne," mused Paul. "It is sad for her, a widow these four years past, almost as soon as she became a wife. And her uncle lets her run wild with those thieving McGraemes! Well, let this M. Maitland try to take my lease away from me! We'll show him what we *habitants* can do, eh, M. Belley? And I'll take those four yards for my creature with me."

As he went out, Alphonse Belley caught Jean Desmoulins in the very act of pilfering a chocolate. The half-wit's fingers were already groping in the opened case. The storekeeper swiftly stretched out a long arm and slammed down the open lid upon them. The act seemed to match something stealthy and cruel in Belley's nature. The tall, lean merchant, with his bushy red hair and whiskers, looked like a red fox, and his little eyes were foxlike, too.

"Ah, Jean, thieving again!" he said. "'Tis a pity thy father should have had a half-wit like thee for a son. It did not come from him, nor from thy mother."

"Ai! Ai!" shrilled Jean Desmoulins, dancing and sucking his nipped fingers. "Ai, M. Alphonse, why should I not have a few chocolates, when you owe me five hundred dollars?"

Belley's red face went white. The storekeeper took Jean by the shoulders and shook him violently.

"So thou hast not forgotten that nonsense, Jean!" he cried. "When did I ever owe thee five hundred dollars?"

"Ai, M. Alphonse, did we not sail in Emile Dorion's boat together?"

"Well?" demanded Belley, breathing hard. "Well? What more dost thou think thou rememberest? Nothing! I say thou rememberest nothing, Jean Desmoulins!"

A vacant look came over the face of the half-wit. "I am a poor imbecile, M. Alphonse!" he muttered.

Belley laid a great red hand upon his shoulder. "See that thou remain so, then," he answered, "and do not let thy head become confused with nonsense. When it is necessary for thee to remember anything, I shall tell thee. Listen, Jean! Thou knowest that Jeremiah McGraeme schemed all his life to get hold of the Dorion lands, and so become seigneur. But he is not big enough to be seigneur. He wastes his money in little, crooked things that involve great risks, and he has been almost bankrupt since the government seized his sealing schooners in the spring, because he thought that he could take his pick of the herds before the season opened. Thou knowest all this, Jean Desmoulins!"

It was an affirmation, not a question,

and Jean Desmoulins nodded, as he was meant to do.

"Soon, Jeremiah McGraeme will come down, and Philippe La Rue will marry Jeanne Dorion and be the seigneur in turn. I can see what is coming. Therefore we must try to please M. Philippe, and it is his wish that this M. Maitland be driven out of Bonne Chance. And thus there will come more money for thee from M. Philippe, and, it may be, more chocolates here. Eh, Jean?"

"*Ah, oui,* M. Alphonse!" replied Jean, glancing toward the candy-case.

"And it may be that Philippe La Rue will come down in his turn," chuckled the storekeeper maliciously. "Who knows? We are only poor *habitants,* but God permits us to look on and laugh at others who try to rise above us."

"*Ah, oui, oui,* M. Alphonse!" replied the half-wit, nodding his head and smiling.

The storekeeper gave him a handful of chocolates. "See that there is no more of that driveling folly of thine!" he sternly commanded.

Jean Desmoulins crammed the chocolates into his mouth and went ambling down the road, while Belley stood in his doorway, looking after him in thought. Then the storekeeper put on his hat and coat, locked the door, and started down the street to see the Blanche come in.

From the edge of the cliff the incoming steamship could now be distinguished plainly as she made her way toward the little, decrepit pier that seemed from that height to lie like a little raft on the gray waters.

Beyond the curve of the harbor, where the St. Lawrence fretted about the jagged rocks and shoals, stood the squat, red-capped pillar of the lighthouse, high on a projecting cliff, beyond which, with the partial lifting of the mist, there could be distinguished low, flat-backed islands, lying offshore, extending into the distance. Between them and the lighthouse the gray-black of the gulf was patched with steely white. This was a sunken ridge that had once formed a part of Bout de l'Ile, the peninsula on which the pillar of the lighthouse stood. A line of buoys indicated the narrow fairway that was the sea-channel for deep-draft vessels into Bonne Chance.

Square and substantial near the lighthouse was a massive house of stone, as solid and strong as the old man, its owner, Jeremiah McGraeme, just passing out of the post-office, whom Belley stopped to watch with a malignant smile on his features.

With his slow, heavy gait, the broad build accentuated by the black-broadcloth suit with the gold chain slung straight across the waistcoat, Jeremiah McGraeme looked like a strong tower. It was typical of a man like Belley to be envious of Jeremiah's rise. But his envy was tinged with a malicious mirth as he watched the sturdy figure go down the road.

Philippe La Rue, once a mere sealing hand, then Jeremiah's clerk, then a petty government official in Quebec, but now a financial and political power in the district, was ousting Jeremiah from his position; and every one in Bonne Chance knew that Jeremiah had mortgaged his niece's lands to La Rue after the seizure of his sealing schooners in the preceding April.

Belley was thinking of this, and watching Jeremiah so intently that he was himself surprised by the sudden fall of a hand on his shoulder. He jumped, to look into the face of a man somewhere between forty and forty-five, of the short, stocky *habitant* type, with a red face beneath the new panama, upturned mustache, and bold, staring eyes such as sometimes deceive women, but never men, into admiration. The hands, concealed under gloves of yellow dogskin, were shapeless, coarse, and characteristic of La Rue's whole personality.

"So, M. Belley, you appear interested in our friend Jeremiah?"

"Eh, M. La Rue, you startled me!" faltered the storekeeper.

"It is my way," laughed the other. "Perhaps we shall startle our friend one of these days, too—eh, Belley?"

"I know what you mean, monsieur. Certainly it goes against the grain to say 'seigneur' to a man without brains, like Jeremiah, who was nothing but a *habitant* a few years back."

"Like you and me, Belley," said the other, with a purring laugh.

"Ah, but monsieur, it is the right of all to rise," protested the storekeeper. "But not of blockheads, such as he. For it was not by his own wit, mark you, monsieur," he continued more boldly, "but because he married his daughter Jeanne to the seigneur, Emile Dorion."

"Who died at sea and was buried in a thousand-dollar coffin," purred Philippe La Rue.

Under his amused scrutiny the face of Alphonse Belley went ghastly white. "Why—why, monsieur, there was no coffin!" he stammered.

La Rue laughed the louder. His hand fell upon Belley's shoulder. "Well, my friend, it is good to know that we think the same way," he said.

"Ah, you can count on me," M. La Rue!" protested Belley, looking with fascination into the bold, gleaming eyes.

"I am sure of it," replied La Rue suavely; and, leaving him, he made his way in pursuit of Jeremiah McGraeme.

CHAPTER II.

A HOSTILE SHORE.

THREE-FOURTHS of Bonne Chance had gathered upon the little pier of watch the Blanche come in, and Paul Cawmill had been correct in his surmise that she carried Will Maitland. Paul had learned from a schooner captain that Will was waiting at St. Boniface, a score of miles up the river, for a mail-boat which had been taken off the sailing schedule of the company without announcement.

Will had been picked up by the revenue steamer, which was making one of her periodical trips along the north shore to vindicate the law. Despite his twelve years of reconnaissance work for lumber companies and railroads between Halifax and Calgary, this looked like the end of the world to Will as he stood on the deck and watched the unfolding panorama.

High mountains, clothed with birch and conifer, the same barren foreshore that he had seen all the way east from Quebec, with patches of tilled land half a mile long by twenty or thirty feet in width, extending to some coveted water-frontage; black-raftered cottages, unpainted without and unplastered within, perched on the edges of cliffs; clusters of the same cabins straggling about huge, ornate churches; tiny, decrepit piers at the edge of the gray water; and the same crowd of sullen-browed *habitants*, who had brought to the blending of races which had produced them all the dourness of their Scotch sires—for the settler soldiers of Wolfe had given historic names to half the population of the north St. Lawrence shore.

Will watched it all, without much interest, and wholly without exaltation. He was a hard-bitten Canadian, nearer forty than thirty; a little gray showed in his hair; behind him lay those twelve years of body-racking work for other men. Those years had drawn the salt from the zest of adventure. Now he was in Port Arthur, the next year in Winnipeg, the next in Montreal; it was always the same job under its various guises, and he brought to it no longer anything but the habit of work.

He had gone on his way without enthusiasm, until the inheritance of a legacy enabled him, with his savings, to launch out for himself in a small way. He was with the Baggallay Pulp Company, of Kingston, when he discovered specimens of a certain fir similar to that of British Columbia among the pulpwood shipped from Quebec.

Realizing its commercial possibilities, he had traced it to a small local mill operated by a Paul Cawmill in the Romaine region; and when the Baggallay Company failed, involving him in the loss of a year's contract, he went East to investigate, found that Cawmill was operating on government land, and leased the whole Dorion tract.

He had sunk the greater part of his capital in the enterprise, had negotiated for machinery, and made plans with the wholesalers, and was actually on his way eastward before he learned that the ownership of territory was claimed by another. So locally is gossip confined along the north St. Lawrence, where settlements are often

a score of miles from one another, that his first informant was Captain Lessard of the Blanche.

"There is doubtless nothing to it, M. Maitland," said the captain, "otherwise the deed would be in evidence. It is one of these land claims that all the *habitants* put forward. Still, the McGraemes are a bad set of people to antagonize."

Will's blank look apprised the captain that his guest had never heard of the clan. Captain Lessard became communicative.

"You see, monsieur," he said, "Emile Dorion, the late seigneur, and the McGraemes descend from good people, but they had become impoverished. There was a tradition that the lands which Dorion claimed had once belonged to the McGraemes.

"To gain possession of them was the ambition of Jeremiah McGraeme's whole life. And before Dorion and Jeremiah sailed for the sealing grounds Jeremiah persuaded the seigneur to marry his niece, Jeanne, and she him. A child of seventeen she was—but what did she count for against the ambition of the McGraemes? She married him, and brought back the Dorion lands into the clan. That must be three—four years ago.

"Then Dorion was drowned at sea. He wandered from his fellows upon the ice. A fog came down. A common fate upon the seal-floes; but a fortunate happening for Jeremiah McGraeme! For Jeanne Dorion, the widow, was now the owner of the lands, and through her Jeremiah achieved his ambition, and was called seigneur."

He leaned forward. "You see, M. Maitland, that is what you will encounter—the land-hunger of the poor men, ignorant of the value of the property they claim, and yet tenacious of their claims. When they learn that the land has value, they will make trouble, perhaps. I wish to warn you."

Will nodded. "I'd conciliate any local feeling, so far as possible," he said. "Then, again, I merely lease the lumber rights. That does not affect their claims to ownership. Probably they'll be glad of the money that will come into Bonne Chance."

Captain Lessard reflected. Should he tell his guest that honest labor was the last opportunity that the McGraemes desired? He felt his way cautiously.

"There is plenty of money in Bonne Chance, monsieur," he answered—"at least among the McGraemes. And it is generally known that Jeremiah finances their operations, although he poses as a pillar of sanctity. He is, in fact, the mayor. Yet there is hardly a keg of brandy smuggled along these shores but was distilled by the McGraemes and carried either in their schooners or in those of their agents. And a whole cargo of brandy goes like that"—he snapped his fingers—"since prohibition came to the gulf counties."

"A bad thing for the countryside."

"And for the government. We know where their haunts are, too, M. Maitland, and, if the government would give us the men, and would permit the bloodshed, we would end it all. But it would be almost a campaign, to invade their haunts—look, monsieur!"

He waved his arm along the rocky, tree-grown shore of Bout de l'Ile. Will saw more clearly now the strange formation of this region.

The bay, in whose heart the little settlement was set, was a deep semicircle, along whose diameter lay rocks and shoals, with the sea-passage marked by buoys. Farther out were the islands, strung halfway to Anticosti, some large and wooded, others mere tide-washed banks in the St. Lawrence.

East of the settlement appeared the lighthouse on a tall cliff, approached from the seaside by means of long flights of steps, which rose nearly perpendicularly to the foghorn station and the keeper's cottage, situated on a small plateau behind it. It lit the main track for vessels that took Belle Isle Strait, north of Newfoundland.

The land on which the lighthouse stood was Presqu' Ile—an island or a peninsula, as one might choose to regard it. Bout de l'Ile was the cliff itself, Presqu' Ile some four miles by two of almost inaccessible ravine and peak behind it, covered with dense forest; behind this were shoals,

rocks, and quicksands, muskeg and marsh, through which arms of salt water dribbled from sea to bay; and on the bay side the breakers, which beat incessantly, even on calm days, had raised barriers of brush-grown sand, in which land and sea mingled with no clear demarcation.

"Last spring," said Lessard, "we captured Jeremiah's schooners, loaded down with skins taken out of season. Since then the McGraemes have not been friendly toward strangers. And now that you go to take the lands which are claimed for Jeanne Dorion, there may be—unpleasantness. It is perhaps well to be prepared."

Will nodded again. He was used to such troubles, and did not attach any especial weight to Lessard's warning. A little tact usually sufficed to avert unpleasantness, if mixed with the correct proportion of firmness. Leaning over the rail, he watched the Blanche traverse her dubious path among the dancing buoys, past needle fangs that showered her with foam of the racing tides, until she came to the pier's end, where straining ropes bound her against the warping-chocks.

The revenue officers acknowledged the half-sullen, half-respectful salutations of the loiterers gathered upon the pier, many of whom had had reason in the past to be acquainted with them. Captain Lessard, who had no immediate business in Bonne Chance, grasped Will's hand.

"*Au revoir,* monsieur!" he said. "I hope everything will go well. I shall be returning"—he smiled a little grimly as he saw the strained attention of the little audience that had gathered about them—"soon, but not upon schedule, like your last boat, monsieur."

The steamer cast off and made her way down-stream, to the relief of not a few. The crowd collected in a wide circle about Will as he stepped up the gangway, staring in silent unfriendliness. Will sensed the feeling.

A little man, with a pale face, lackluster eyes, and a wisp of hanging, blond mustache, came forward.

"I am Hector Galipeault, monsieur," he said, taking Will's grip. "I have the hotel. It is the only one. Permit me!"

He shouldered it, and made a way through the crowd along the pier, across a stretch of shingle, through a tangle of raspberry briers, and up some tumbledown wooden steps into a long, two-story shanty that housed the occasional *commis voyageur* whose appearance in those parts was usually a forerunner of new stoves or sewing-machines.

The loafers, following at some distance, watched Will enter the hotel, and slowly dispersed, muttering.

Turning at the door, Will saw the Blanche steaming away alongshore into the mist.

After a meal of stringy omelet, damp bread, raspberries, and tea, served by Mme. Galipeault, a slatternly shrew in a soiled apron and torn dress, Will deposited his grip in one of the cavities of the wooden interior up-stairs, called bedrooms, and strolled down toward the flume and the mill, which he had seen from the deck of the Blanche, and correctly surmised to be the property of Paul Cawmill.

He crossed a meadow, blue with lupine and chicory, and traversed the shaky bridge that spanned the rapids of the stream. Above his head Bonne Chance seemed poised upon the edge of the overhanging cliffs, which fell away beyond the river, disclosing a flat oval of land between the foreshore and the wooded gorge through which the torrent made its way down to the gulf. On this was the small settlement that had grown up about Paul Cawmill's lumber mill.

The mill employed no more than a dozen hands in summer, when there was little work in the woods. In winter there were perhaps two or three jobbers' gangs, engaged in felling and dragging lumber to the skids. The place was even untidier and more disreputable in aspect than the usual *habitant* camp.

Most of the shacks were empty, and the black-framed cabins that stood at all angles to the dusty, chip-strewn road which ran through the settlement and lost itself over the heights beyond seemed about to tumble under the weight of their own ill-construction.

Large dogs rolled in the dust and

snapped viciously at the flies. Three or four children were playing about one of the cabins, and paused in their game to survey Will with a hostile stare. Tin cans disintegrated by the wayside, in garbage heaps from which coarse sea-grass was springing.

Set into the middle part of this disorder were the store and a small, unpainted wooden structure used by Paul Cawmill as an office, so far as he could be said to conduct one. Behind these were three cottages with curtains strung across the windows. Through each of the open doors, might have been seen a woman bending over a large stove, resplendent with polished metal.

Near by was the *rossing mill, through which passed the shaky flume, discharging cataracts of water, terminating at the edge of the shoals in a chute, beneath which, and for a space of fifty yards about, were skeleton logs, stripped bare of bark, and half buried in layers of tide-scoured chips; and derelict logs lay everywhere, like stragglers behind an army.

Nobody was on this terrain. Will went up the steps that led into the mill, toward which a few logs, caught at the dam by the cogged gear, were drifting. Paul Cawmill was standing inside the structure, watching the two men who fed the logs to the saw. At the sight of Will he looked up and scowled. He had been among the watchers upon the pier, and, having satisfied his curiosity, had gone on to the mill.

"You are M. Cawmill?" Will inquired.

"*Oui,* monsieur," Paul muttered.

"I am Mr. Maitland. I don't know whether you have heard of me. I arrived by the Blanche this afternoon."

The way Paul glared at his supplanter showed plainly enough that he had heard of him. He had been brave enough in Belley's store, but now his heart and speech alike failed him as he looked about him at the mill, the steam-engine and machinery, the dam, the boom, the flume, and the construction work, whose purchase had absorbed the savings of a lifetime and run him into debt besides.

He operated only in a very small way, and La Rue had advanced him the balance needed for the purchase of all this material, and for the construction work, for which latter his creature Belley had taken the contract at an exorbitant rate. Paul had been struggling on the lee shore of debts and difficulties for months, just meeting the notes as they fell due, and sinking deeper and deeper into the mire. When the first note was unpaid, La Rue would probably foreclose; and now, on top of this, the Englishman had come to take his land away!

Will, taking in the second-hand rossing plant, operated by the straining engine, the ill-constructed flume, terminating where no schooner ever built could draw water for loading, understood something of Paul's feelings. He had not intended to oust him without compensation because, like other small operators in remote parts, he conducted his business on dubious land. In fact, he had had it in mind to offer him a price for his plant. But it was clear that this plant would hardly do, even for a stopgap, until his machinery arrived.

"*Oui,* I have heard of you, M. Maitland!" he snarled suddenly. "You have come here to take my land away, that I have leased from M. McGraeme. Just let me see you try!" he continued in a shout, flinging himself into a posture of defense.

"Come outside and talk it over," answered Will.

Paul hesitated, and then followed him out sullenly, and stood glowering at him with defiance. Inside the mill Will saw the eyes of the workmen turned upon him in vicious resentment.

"How much of the hundred square miles that comprises the territory is leased by you?" asked Will.

Paul snarled and stuttered: "That is my business, M. Maitland. I lease from M. McGraeme. It is his niece's land. This part is mine. You don't put me off it! Ask M. McGraeme what you want to know."

"You don't have to answer me, of course, unless you wish to. It is in your own interest to do so."

*Peeling, or stripping.

"I know my interests, and they are not yours. I lease eight thousand *arpents*, if you want to know. I am not afraid to answer you. It is no secret. I am not telling you anything that you could not find out for yourself. *Maudit*, no! It is not me they come to ask questions of. I am only the poor *habitant*, who is cheated by everybody, and tossed from one to another, like playing at ball!"

Will ignored Paul's clear desire for a violent ending of the altercation; equally, he resolved to hold him. "When I leased this tract," he said, "I knew that you were operating here on government land."

"*Ah, oui, oui,* monsieur, we know all that!" sneered Paul. "It is private land when M. McGraeme makes me my lease, and it is still private land when M. Belley makes me my contract, and it becomes government land when you want to take it to put money in your pocket, because you rich men can always go to Quebec and pay money to the lawyers, in their nice white shirts with the stiff cuffs and collars, to prey on the poor *habitant*.

"It is nothing to you rich men to steal the bread out of the *habitant's* mouth. Holy Name, doesn't the timber grow everywhere like grass, from here to Quebec, that you should come up here to steal my land away! Well, you'll find out your mistake!"

He thrust his face forward, scowling venomously, while his fingers twitched and worked at his sides.

"You try to put me off!" he stormed. "You'll see! And if you bring down the officers from Quebec, you don't get the flume or the machinery. Holy Name, no! When I go, they go with me, and I dynamite the dam. Understand? I'll smash the mill to pieces and set fire to them, before you steal it away from me!"

The little man, purple in the face, and quite distraught, was shouting at the top of his voice. The two mill hands stood by the door and grinned.

"When you're ready to talk business, Cawmill, you can come and see me," answered Will, turning away.

Looking back when he reached the bridge, he saw Paul and the two workmen, with a man from the store, all standing before the mill and looking after him.

CHAPTER III.

THE RAVENING PACK.

WILL pondered as he took the cliff road back to the hotel. He had expected trouble with Cawmill, of course, but hardly this fierce enmity. He had calculated that Paul, conscious that he was operating on government land, would first bluster and then ask for an adjustment. But Paul's rage had been volcanic and his bluster genuine.

Paul's challenge, that he leased the land from Jeremiah McGraeme, explained the situation in the light of Will's conversation with Lessard, but of course Will knew nothing of Paul's transactions with La Rue and Belley.

As he walked back along the single street of the village Will noted that the hostility of his reception at the mill seemed to be echoed by the entire visible community of Bonne Chance. Black looks were cast on him from the groups upon the porches of the cabins. A child jeered at him, and a woman called it sharply indoors, but not because of the epithet that it had used.

Will troubled little about these manifestations, for which Lessard's story had in a way prepared him. His life was lived in action, which destroys introspection. If he had to meet the hostility of Bonne Chance, he would accept it as a part of the game, but he would never reason about it with a view to overcoming it.

He returned to the hotel and went up to his room. Finding that there was an upper balcony, he drew out the broken chair, filled and lit his pipe, and studied the scene before him through his marine glasses.

He swept Presqu' Ile and Bout de l'Ile, from the neck to the lighthouse. Somewhere in that tangle of every earthly element many a keg of brandy was doubtless hidden away. Bonne Chance could hardly have been more definite on this subject than Lessard, for the McGraemes knew how to

keep their secrets and their lawless boundaries.

Will watched the schooners lying offshore. A barge was loading logs that fell into it from the end of the flume, and, when it was filled, it began to move slowly into the bay, to where three men were piling chords upon the deck of one of the vessels. That was Paul's way of lumbering: the flume terminated in the shallows instead of running out to deep water. Will suspected that lack of capital and stupidity were contributing causes.

It was beginning to grow dark. The sun had dipped into the haze of the west, and a white fog was creeping out of the sea and coiling into the hollows of the hills. The foghorn had begun to blow. The light from Bout de l'Ile began to flash in double rhythm. Lights sprang out along the shore. It was growing chill, as the nights of late August are. In the north the arch of a luminous aurora quivered against the clouds.

A crowd was shouting in Bonne Chance. From where he sat Will could see nothing of it. He turned his head for a moment, and then continued scanning the scene through his glasses. A gray shadow, creeping along the shore, resolved itself into the Blanche, speeding up the river.

The sound of shouting drew nearer and became menacing. Some one came running up the stairs. There was a hammering at the door of the bedroom. Will turned and saw Hector Galipeault's wife there.

"*Ah, mon Dieu,* monsieur!" she gasped. "They are coming for you!"

Will went in from the balcony. "For me, madame?" he asked, without at first understanding her.

"Run, or they'll kill you!" cried the woman. "Run, monsieur! The four McGraeme men are there, and half the village. They're mad when they have been drinking. Run through this back room and jump from the window. The ground is high, and you won't hurt yourself. You can hide among the trees. Quick, monsieur! *Ah, mon Dieu,* he does not understand!"

Will, who understood French passably well, though not the *patois* of old Norman, which develops surprising obsolescences under the influence of excitement, began to gather that the hostile demonstration had reference to himself. The mob, which was now nearing the hotel, was shouting at the top of its lungs.

He went quietly down the rickety stairs, the landlord's wife clawing at him the while, and screaming frantically enough to have apprised all Bonne Chance of his presence upon the premises.

Will had just reached the room below, which served both as a living-room and as an entrance-hall, when a score of yelling, hooting *habitants,* followed by a trailing fringe of as many more, came rushing toward the wooden steps outside. At Will's appearance against the illumination cast by the swinging lamp, a sudden silence followed, and then came a renewed storm of yells and a shower of stones.

Hector Galipeault's wife began to screech invective. Jeers answered her. From some indeterminable region at the back of the building rose the wails of the Galipeault brood, frightened out of their first slumber.

Galipeault himself, who had been sampling the brandy beneath his stable in honor of the departure of the Blanche, slept there in blissful ignorance of what was befalling.

Will stood quietly on the top step, amid a second shower of stones, one of which drew blood from his forehead. He was quickly sizing up his assailants. Foremost among them, brandishing a huge knife, which appeared more theatrical than effective, was a dark, stocky man, apparently the principal leader of the crowd. He was reeling drunk, and the vileness and ferocity of his curses showed that he had no immediate ardor for the attack. Will's massive figure and his placid unconcern had daunted even the most reckless of the Bonne Chance daredevils.

The reeling man was Duncan McGraeme. Beside him stood his cousin, Eudore, his understudy and sycophant. Eudore was a puffy-faced youth, with broad, muscular shoulders, and a body sunken in fat; he was clean-shaven, and, with his hat on the back of his head and

the fag of a cigarette in one corner of his mouth, he looked strikingly like the typical street loafer of a large city.

Behind them, not far away, stood Angus and Alexandre. Angus, as the eldest of the clan, was wary, calculating ahead how the affair would develop; Alexandre was not yet drunk enough to be rash, and contented himself with backing up Duncan's abuse.

Will had faced infuriated Polak and Hunkie laborers more than once in his time, unarmed, as now, and he knew that all mobs were very much alike: gun-play might be all very well across the boundary, where laws were lax, but a revolver was a dangerous weapon to use in Canada, and, moreover, of little use in a determined rush of knives.

In such a case, a pair of fists was the best weapon. He knew himself to be physically a match for the best of his assailants, and the knowledge, and a remembrance of former conflicts, gave him a complacency that maddened the crowd beneath him.

It stopped in its premeditated rush, and hooted vigorously, swaying to and fro uncertainly. The yells died away into mutterings. Then, out of the tail of it, a woman pushed her way toward the front: a girl of hardly more than twenty, wearing a short skirt and high boots, a guernsey open at the throat, and a flat cap over the brown hair, cut short about her shoulders. Her slight, erect figure was almost boyish, and the thrusts of her arms, as she pushed the reeling Duncan McGraeme aside without ceremony, were made with a boy's easy movements of the shoulders.

"Get back, you men!" she cried angrily. "I'll speak to him. I'll tell him what we've come for!"

She strove out in front of the muttering crowd, and her speech became pure English with the Scot Doric intonation. "You're Mr. Maitland!" she cried. "I'm Jeanne Dorion. I'm speaking for these people. They're all right when they are left alone. They never harm any one who doesn't try to harm them. While you were attracting the crowd toward this hotel, the revenue men landed along the bay and took away Georges Savard and Alfred Drouin for selling a little brandy."

The fury of her address was indescribable; she stopped to catch her breath, still fighting him with the will that had outstripped the power of speech, and then went on, still more infuriated by his silence:

"We know who sent you here to lease my lands, so that you could have a pretense of working here and prepare the way for your friends next spring! We don't want you here, Mr. Maitland, and we won't have you!

"These men are fighting for their living and for their families. It is not that I care for the Dorion lands. That's my battle. This is theirs. We'll have no revenue and sealing agents in Bonne Chance, to take our livelihood away from us, as you took my uncle's ships last spring!"

She swung upon her hips toward the crowd behind her, repeating her last words in French, and an ominous, deep-throated growl came in response.

"If you'll go back, nobody will harm you. If you don't go, nobody will be responsible for your life. Will you go? Well, why don't you answer me?"

She stamped in her vexatious fury, standing before him with head thrust forward and her hands tightly clenched at her sides. Will did not answer a word. It was all incomprehensible and confused: let his acts answer for themselves. Contempt for this stupidity was less arrogance in him than a part of the defensive armor which a man acquires as a result of the knocks of life. He shrugged his shoulders and turned back into the room.

He had miscalculated the crowd's mood, despised it too soon, or just an atom too much. As he turned his back it unleashed itself in murderous hate and surged up the steps. Will had a glimpse of the girl caught in that human torrent; he thought that she was trying to hold it back—and then it was upon him, and he was fighting with bare fists against the knives that were unsheathed against him.

All the anger that lies latent in a man of cool-blooded temperament rose up in him to meet the assault. Snatching up a

little table that stood at the bottom of the interior stairs, Will swung it about him. He saw Angus, his yellow fangs protruding in a grin of murderous malice, duck and run as he drove the howling mob pell-mell to the steps by the mighty swings of his arms, knocking half a dozen reeling lumbermen in a heap to the bottom. Duncan, caught in the jam, was swearing more vilely than ever. Somewhere in the hotel Mme. Galipeault was screaming without cessation.

And suddenly all grew still. An elderly man was coming into the hotel, up the steps, deliberately: a great man dressed in black broadcloth, with great, heavy, square-toed shoes, newly blacked and shining. A heavy chain of gold was swung across the front of his waistcoat. A heavy beard of white hung almost to his waist. The *habitants* shrank away before him.

The old man stopped on the top step, towering above them. "What's this?" he cried angrily in French. "Have you men all gone mad to disgrace our community like this?"

"Put the damned spy aboard the Blanche, where he belongs!" shouted Eudore thickly. "*Maudit*, he's come here to take Jeanne's lands away, and Paul Cawmill's lease, and he betrayed Georges Savard and Alfred Drouin to the revenue men this afternoon!"

The crowd, which had recovered its courage, growled in answer. It began to draw warily toward where Will stood in the middle of the room, holding the table over his shoulder. But Jeremiah McGraeme shot out a huge arm unexpectedly and dealt Eudore a heavy box on the ear that sent him spinning into its midst. Eudore picked himself up, scowling, not at his uncle, but at Will.

"Be off, all of you!" shouted Jeremiah. "M. Maitland is here on his own business, and, whatever that business is, he shall see that Bonne Chance is a godly and law-abiding community. Angus, take your brood home! Jeanne, wait for me outside. I shall have something to say to M. Maitland!"

The threatening, rolling purr in his voice warned Will that he had a subtler danger to meet than the violence of the *habitants*.

He composed himself and waited. He saw Jeanne cast a look of intense hatred and scorn at him as she passed out of the hotel.

It was quite clear that Jeremiah McGraeme controlled his clan, if not Bonne Chance; for Angus, Alexandre, and Eudore filed sullenly out of the hotel, and Duncan, who had been hovering uncertainly on the top step, knife in hand, joined them.

When the room was clear Jeremiah turned to Will and stood looking at him, a scowl on his heavy face and a glower in his eyes that had beaten down the gaze of many a man before him.

The old man stood like a pillar, and almost as straight, despite the immense development of his shoulders, which gave him the effect of a stoop. Will, big as he was, lacked three or four inches of Jeremiah's height, but his eyes were just as steady and his temper now under control. Jeremiah, slow-witted as he was, realized that this was an opponent who could not be browbeaten.

"So you're the Mr. Maitland who has come to Bonne Chance to take away my niece's lands!" he purred, in a Scotch intonation curiously blended with the Frenchman's palatal pronunciation. "Ye'll find the job harder than ye've been looking for, I'm thinking, Mr. Maitland!"

"I understand that Mme. Dorion claims certain government lands," answered Will. "I know nothing about that. I have leased them from the government, and I intend to lumber them. But inasmuch as I hold merely the lumber rights, there should be no conflict."

Jeremiah snorted derisively. He fancied Will was weakening. "I warn ye not to cut one tree upon the Dorion limits, Mr. Maitland!" he cried. "Fair warning, man to man. Understand me well! The government can't take our lands away and lease them to others. We're not so ignorant a folk as you suppose. Aye, I've downed mony a better man than you who tried to cross me!"

Will laughed so frankly that Jeremiah's glower went out in astonishment. He had

always dominated Bonne Chance by power of personality; he was slow, and he could not understand what lay behind the laugh of a man who did not care.

"Come, Mr. McGraeme, let's look at this from a common-sense point of view!" said Will. "I've leased these lands. I don't know anything of Mme. Dorion's claims. I never heard of them until to-day. Your niece's title is evidently not recorded in Quebec, or the lands would not be marked as government property upon the maps. Your complaint is against the department, not against me."

"Aye, aye, fair speech!" sneered Jeremiah. "But ye think I dinna ken what lies behind ye, eh, Mr. Maitland?"

"There's no one backing me, Mr. McGraeme. I wish there were," answered Will, smiling.

He had realized that his advantage lay in goading this slow ox of a man to fury, and his apparent complacency was succeeding fast.

"The revenue's behind ye!" shouted Jeremiah furiously. "It was your people took my schooners last spring, because they wanted to ruin me. They said I'd broke the sealing laws. Lies! Lies! And it's you they've sent here to stop the sealing, Mr. Spy, while you're pretending to be lumbering! Rascals! Rascals!" he shouted, thumping his heavy stick upon the floor. "I'll spend my last penny before those lands pass from my niece! Set up your mill, Mr. Maitland! Ye will, eh?" He thrust his face venomously into Will's. "I'm the mayor here, and ye'll find that I'm not so helpless as ye suppose."

"So you're the mayor?" demanded Will, apparently astonished.

The old man took the bait. "Aye, ye're beginning to see the light now, eh, Mr. Maitland?" he purred.

"I certainly am," said Will. "I wish you'd told me that before. In future, I shall hold you personally responsible, sir, for any repetition of to-night's offense. If there is any further attempt to molest me, or to hinder my work, the responsibility falls upon you. And, if necessary, I'll take you to Quebec to answer for it."

Jeremiah lost all self-control. He began thumping his huge fist on the table. "Ye'll take me to Quebec?" he roared. He shook his fist in Will's face, and, as in his moments of violent outburst, power of coherent speech abandoned him. He spluttered and stuttered, and his great shoulders went up and down.

The hotel door opened, and Jeanne Dorion came in. She put her hand through her uncle's arm. "Come!" she said quietly.

He hesitated, and then permitted her to lead him away, a mountain that had suddenly turned into a volcano. Her face was composed and white, and she looked at Will as if she did not know that he was there.

CHAPTER IV.

PAUL COMES—AND IS CONQUERED.

RATHER satisfied than otherwise that he had unwittingly brought all his difficulties to a head so soon after his arrival, Will went to bed. Characteristically, he did not trouble himself about them, but left each problem to unravel itself in the course of events.

At breakfast Galipeault came to him, lackluster, surly, and yet obsequious, and plainly recovering from a drinking spree. "M. Maitland, I am not a hotel—only a boarding-house," he explained. "It is only for the night that I accommodate guests sometimes. There are other hotels in Bonne Chance, and I have no help, and the well is going dry. And my creature won't cook for you, and the stove needs to be repaired, and Simeon is getting the measles. Myself, I am not afraid of the McGraemes or anybody else, you understand, and if I had not been called away on business last night they would have found out what sort of man I am. But women are peculiar—you understand, monsieur!"

"I'll get out as soon as I can make arrangements," Will answered. "I can't promise to go to-day."

Hector Galipeault retired immediately to convey this information to his creature behind the kitchen door. A shrewish outburst, which followed, led Will to con-

clude that his promise was considered to be altogether too conditional in nature. There ensued an animated chatter behind the panels, punctuated by the screams of the Galipeault brood from the regions in which they seemed to be confined. Presently, with joyous whoops, they scattered —eleven of them—to circle the hotel and flatten noses at every window which commanded a view of the dining-room and its daredevil stranger.

Will imagined that he would have a visit from Paul Cawmill before a long period had elapsed. Despite his outburst, Paul seemed the weakest link in the chain of resentment that Bonne Chance had forged. And Paul had most to lose immediately. Will decided to take no steps until he found out whether this was going to eventuate or not.

It happened earlier than Will had anticipated. About ten o'clock that morning, while he was smoking on the porch, he saw Cawmill coming along the beach toward the hotel.

It was a very different man from the volcano of the day before. Paul came forward in a hesitant way, smiled sheepishly, stopped for a moment at the bottom of the wooden steps, and then ascended, taking off his hat, and stood before Will, stubbornness and humiliation struggling in his now meek-looking face.

"Monsieur!" he began, with downcast eyes. "Ah, monsieur—"

"Sit down," said Will, thrusting forward a chair.

Paul seated himself on the extreme edge, placed his hat on his knees, and twined his feet round the legs. When he looked up, Will saw tears in his eyes.

"I am sorry, M. Maitland," he stammered, and then broke into the pent-up speech that he had evidently rehearsed. "I am very sorry, monsieur, for what I said. If you take my lease away, I am ruined. I am already heavily in debt, monsieur, and I do not know what to do. Monsieur, you are a very rich man, and I have nothing. You want the lease—*ben!* Then it must be. But a little money for the lumber on hand—there is not much of it—I can then buy a share in a schooner—you said that you would be willing to talk business with me—"

There Paul broke down. Will placed his hand on his shoulder.

"Listen to me, Cawmill," he said. "Of course you have no rights that I am legally bound to recognize. You know that much yourself. But I came up here with the idea of dealing fairly with you. I'm willing to talk things over. I did think of offering you a price for the rossing mill and the lumber in your dam."

"Monsieur?" stammered Paul, looking up with a gleam of hope in his eyes. Then his face fell. "But you do not understand, monsieur," he said sadly. "The mill is M. La Rue's, and the flume also, till they are paid for.

"I lied when I spoke of destroying them. After I had leased the tract from M. McGraeme, M. La Rue advanced me the money to build and buy the machinery, and hire the men, on condition that I employed M. Belley as the contractor. And if I cannot pay, the flume and mill and machinery—everything except the lumber —become the property of M. La Rue, and the rest of the money I owe him—twelve thousand dollars. At twelve per cent, M. Maitland, and three thousand dollars to repay each year, and one thousand on the first of September. I have only a little wood which I can dispose of before the note must be met."

"You have to find one thousand dollars by the first of next month?" asked Will.

"And three hundred and eighty dollars for three months' interest, M. Maitland. And this is summer, and nearly all the wood cut has passed through the mill, and what is in the woods I cannot pay the men to put through the dam. They know I have no money, and they will not work without money.

"See, monsieur! If you will lend me enough money to put my wood through the mill before September first, I can ship it to Quebec and repay you. M. La Rue cannot touch the wood. Four hundred dollars, M. Maitland, and I can repay five hundred, which is three hundred per cent a year, and"—he caught his breath—"then I can buy a share in a sealing schooner."

The magnitude of his financial scheme, the audacity with which he had disclosed it, left Paul breathless. He fixed Will with his eyes, hopeless, yet ready to leap into hope at the least sign.

"Who is this M. La Rue?" asked Will.

"The notary and banker, monsieur. A rich man—richer than M. McGraeme now."

"He ought to be. He must be charging you ten per cent."

"Twelve per cent, monsieur."

"And he has the actual ownership of the machinery and the flume?"

"Everything is mortgaged to him, monsieur. And the work was not well done. M. Belley constructed it. That was M. La Rue's requirement. I did not wish it."

Will threw back his head and laughed heartily, with that latent sense of humor that came to his relief in perplexing situations. In such laughter the sardonic spirit of America came to sustain and fortify him. This man La Rue certainly seemed to have a strangle-hold on Paul.

He plunged more deeply into that solvent of all embarrassments, lying back in his chair, while Paul, thinking that Will was laughing at him, clenched his fists and half rose, to sit down again as Will's hand fell on his arm.

"We'll fix you up, Paul," said Will. "But I can't buy your lumber. I'm not out for that kind."

"Ah, monsieur, it is very excellent lumber—the best in the whole Province for making fine paper pulp," protested Paul unhappily. "M. Baggallay, of Kingston, wrote to me to send him all of my cutting."

"Yes, I know, Paul. I wrote that letter. At least, I dictated it. I meant to let Baggallay into the game, only he broke his contract and treated me shabbily. I came up here because yours is the one tract in all the Province of Quebec that I particularly wanted to get hold of."

"Well—then—then?" demanded Paul, leaning forward and breathing quickly.

"Did you ever see an airplane, Paul.

"No, monsieur, but I have heard of them. Great wings that one straps on one's feet and hands and—"

"Airplanes are no longer used that way. An airplane is too big to attach to oneself now. It is as long as from here to the sea. They're getting longer. Also, they're getting commoner. In five years' time they'll be nearly as common as automobiles.

"And they have to be built out of a special kind of wood, which is very hard to obtain. It has to be light, and it has to be tough, and it has to be resilient. Above all, it must be free from knots. That means big trees. We get it from British Columbia, and it costs a good deal to freight it.

"This district is about the last place in the Province of Quebec where one looks for big timber. That is why I was surprised that you were sending that sort of fir to Baggallay. By the way, Paul, you know that fir isn't accepted for paper pulp?"

"Ah, monsieur, but one or two trees will always be cut in error—"

"That's the point, Paul. At first I thought you were trying to ship us fir for spruce. Then I saw it was a mistake—and I wished you had repeated it. Because, you see, you shipped us specimens of as good an airplane timber as ever came out of British Columbia. It's going to become one of the most valuable woods in the world. And it won't take a whole cord of it to bring six dollars."

Paul sat staring with wide-open eyes.

"And this—this wood grows on the Dorion lands, monsieur?" he stammered.

"Unless that shipment of yours to the Baggallay Pulp Mills was a dream, Paul."

"But—where is it to be found?" asked Paul, looking as if he had received news that a gold-mine had been located under his house.

"That I don't know—yet. I'm going to find out where you have been cutting. I'm going to see how much there is of it, and why it grows in this corner of the Province. It may be that Bonne Chance grew just a few freak trees. I took a chance that it didn't. But I've got a market for every board foot that I can put over. I'm going to cut all the winter, Paul. I'll have my gang sawmill up in a few days, and if

I win my bet that this fir does exist here in quantity, there'll be more than enough money in it to pay this M. La Rue of yours."

Will's face grew radiant at the thought of success. The springs of his enthusiasm had broken through the crust of stoicism formed in twelve years of toiling to enrich other men. Any one who had been watching him at that moment might have come to the conclusion that he had formed a totally incorrect estimate of him before. There was something charming and boyish in the whole personality of the man, suddenly revealed, as if by some interior illumination.

But Paul Cawmill was not looking at Will. He seemed to be engaged in an interior struggle. He glanced up with a singular expression on his face.

"Then, monsieur — my lumber?" he asked desperately.

"I don't need it. But I need you. That's why I've told you this. What would you say to— Well, I can't offer you what I'd like to, Paul, until the spring, nor what I think you're probably worth. But if a hundred and twenty dollars a month till spring means anything to you, you can start on your job from to-day. And I'll take over your obligations to La Rue, because we can use that flume, and the old mill may come in handy for rossing."

Paul fell on his knees and pressed Will's hand to his lips. "Ah, monsieur!" he wept.

"That's all right, then," answered Will. "You accept. I suppose you know how to keep information to yourself?"

Paul rose dramatically, winked away a tear, and winked again with an air of complete understanding.

"Monsieur," he said with dignity, "I have a wife and family. For their sakes I will do this. M. Maitland, you can rely upon my discretion. I know how to deal with men, and how to hoodwink them when it is necessary. But, monsieur, consider this: suppose that M. McGraeme and M. La Rue will not permit what you have promised.

Will laughed. "Don't worry about that," he answered. "The Provincial government counts for something, even in Bonne Chance."

"But, monsieur, suppose that Mme. Dorion—"

Will had a mental vision of Jeanne Dorion at the head of the mob, confronting him with blazing eyes. He had neither liked nor hated her for that; it was his way to dismiss these inexplicable hostilities, especially on the part of women, as of the nature of life—things not worth pondering over or reasoning about; and yet he seemed to see Jeanne Dorion quite vividly now, with a visual reconstruction so unusual to him that it almost startled him, as if his eyes were playing some uncanny trick.

"Don't worry about her, either, Paul," he said.

He reflected a moment. "Who started that story about my being a revenue spy?" he asked. "Perhaps, if that is the cause of our difficulties, it might be worth contradicting."

Paul stammered and stared, and then, to Will's surprise, winked again. "Why, monsieur—I do not know," he answered. "It has been told everywhere that you represent the government, and that next year a sealing company will come to Bonne Chance and own all the schooners. But you can depend on me that Bonne Chance shall believe it no more, for I know now what is expected of me."

Will clapped him on the shoulder. "All right!" he said. "I'll take you at your word for the present. And now I'm going to ask you where I can find lodgings, since Mme. Galipeault is afraid to harbor me, for fear the Bonne Chance people may come back and wreck the hotel some night."

Paul thought for a moment. "Monsieur," he said, "I can make you comfortable in my house. It is not what you are accustomed to, but it is not bad, as Bonne Chance goes, and my creature was saying to me only yesterday that we must get a lodger to help pay the grocery bills this winter. And as for the people," he continued, "I assure you that there shall be no more trouble from them. I shall

explain that you have come here to lumber, and—"

"And, for the present, nothing about the airplanes," answered Will.

Paul's answering wink was indescribable.

CHAPTER V.

A BRIBE REFUSED.

IT was perhaps characteristic of Will that he had leased the Dorion lands without first surveying them, in order to discover how much of the fir was to be found on them.

Yet this would have been difficult, without the use of some discreditable subterfuge, in a place as remote as Bonne Chance. Will had been convinced, from the appearance of the fir in several shipments, that there were more than a few freak trees—"sports" or "mutants," as they would be termed—and he had been desperately anxious to secure his lease before the lands were snapped up, at a time when the rising price of lumber was driving the companies further and further afield. It was in the same way characteristic of him that he had confided his plans to Paul. He took men upon trust, and was prone to hammer his way through life in just that fashion, tackling the big risks with a rush, and not concerning himself with the little ones.

During the three following days he busied himself in studying the situation. Whatever Jeremiah meant to do, he was holding his hand, and Will took advantage of the breathing space to move into a room in Paul Cawmill's house at the settlement.

It was a fairly respectable cottage, a two-story structure, of course unplastered, but weather-tight, heated by a huge stove below, and an immensely long pipe above, and reputed warm after the snows, plastering it on the outside, had converted it into an *igloo*, or Eskimo ice-house.

Will decided not to take charge until the first of September, which was only four days away. At first he thought of paying a visit to La Rue, concerning whom he had been further enlightened by Paul. But La Rue was in St. Boniface, where he had some of his many interests. To Paul's extreme delight, he told him that he could put his lumber through the mill, ship it, and take the proceeds, provided he settled up with his hands.

Paul set to work immediately to pick up a gang, and put the men to floating lumber down the river. They seemed glad of their wages; soon the boom began to fill, the logs traveled ceaselessly up the cogged gear and into the flume, and the mill worked busily.

Among the laborers Will recognized Eudore and Alexandre McGraeme. It was clear that they were more interested in keeping watch on him than in earning their wages.

Will said nothing to Cawmill, however, and dismissed the matter from his mind in view of weightier ones.

One thing soon became clear: the flume would have to be extended across the neck of Presqu' Ile to deep water, so that the logs, leaving the mill, could be dropped from the end of the flume directly into the hold of the waiting lumber schooner. Paul, owing to lack of capital, had been compelled to run the flume down to the shallows, load on flat barges, and then have them towed out to the schooners and the logs transferred—a considerable waste of labor, time, and money.

Paul had contracted for six schooners to take his load to Quebec, and these were lying off Presqu' Ile in deep water. Two of them were Jeremiah's, the only ones that had survived the raid of the preceding spring. The remainder seemed to be owned in common by his kinsmen, the McGraemes. They were vessels of great size, with two masts, broad in the beam, and having high, flaring flanks, each capable of carrying forty to fifty cords of pulpwood when fully laden.

The sight of the transference of the logs from flume to barge, and from barge to schooner, with the rehandling, was a constant irritation to Will. He spoke to Paul of his plans.

"But, monsieur, the McGraemes would never permit the flume to be extended to

Presqu' Ile!" protested Paul. "They do not allow any one to go there."

Will sent the little man away with a sharp answer. But he realized the seriousness of the threat. When he took charge, the issue would have to be faced; and he resolved that it should be fought out to a finish.

On the third morning, leaving Paul at the mill, Will started out to survey some of the timber on the limits. He learned that Paul had been doing some cutting, chiefly spruce, about a mile up the river, and again along a confluent creek, half a mile east of that, at the end of a corduroy laid down for the transportation of some pine of a fair size.

He spent the day investigating, and questioning the men, but saw nothing that in any way resembled the airplane fir which had been shipped to Baggallay's. However, the limits were extensive, Paul had doubtless cut elsewhere, and it was certain that the fir existed, even if only in small quantity. Will returned not much discouraged.

"Where else have you been cutting, Paul?" he said.

"Nowhere else, monsieur," answered Paul. "Only last winter I began to cut. Nowhere else except on Presqu' Ile. For one month I cut there, near the neck. Then the McGraemes forbade it."

"Well, I'm going to have a look there tomorrow," answered Will.

Shortly before noon he started along the beach toward Presqu' Ile. He had skirted the bay, and was approaching the swamps at the neck of the peninsula, when he heard the gallop of hoofs behind him. Out of the haze which had begun to veil the shore emerged the horse and its rider—Jeanne Dorion, saddleless, one hand clapping the mane, the other on the rein, while her heels drummed the beast's flanks as she swayed to its movements.

She came within an ace of riding Will down, and she might have meant to, for the horse's hoofs flung sand all over him. As she passed she half checked the animal, swung toward him, and made as if to rein in. Then she was gone like the wind into the white haze about them, leaving only the blurred impression of her face, hot with haste and anger, of youth and impulse, of eagerness and of disdain.

The sound of the horse-hoofs died away into the distance, and the fog, drifting in, concealed both beast and rider.

Will flushed at the insult. He meant to give the young woman a homily upon good manners on the next occasion, and he went on, fuming. The fog began to thin as he reached the first thread of sea-water that dribbled through Presqu' Ile neck. He leaped it, waded a wider channel, knee-deep, and made his way across the sand dunes, pushing aside a tangle of raspberry-briers and fireweed, until he came upon a road running, apparently, from Bonne Chance along the Presqu' Ile shore. This was evidently the road that the rider had taken.

He followed it for a mile and more, until he saw before him, near the edge of the rising cliff, the stone house of Jeremiah McGraeme, set in a small garden where phlox and yellow lilies were blooming. There were a stable and outhouses, and the road terminated at the front gate. Beyond the house were jagged cliffs, lashed by a foaming sea, and there was no road from there toward the lighthouse.

Will retraced his steps, crossed a stream fed by a cascade tumbling from a cliff above, and plunged into the wilderness of birch saplings, through which ran innumerable fox-trails, damp with trickling water. He pressed upward.

Pine and swamp spruce now supplanted the birch shrub. At last, breathless, he reached the summit. He had thought it was the summit of Presqu' Ile, but now he discovered loftier elevations, almost vertically precipitous, in front of him, and cut off by an apparently impassable ravine. As he stopped to catch his breath he saw the horse and its rider flash into view for a moment among the evergreens on the other side.

There must be, then, some road across the cleft from Jeremiah's house. But from the neck of Presqu' Ile the gap seemed impassable. Looking about him on three sides, Will could see nothing except the trees and the tangled underbrush, inter-

spersed with patches of white sand, and sudden flashes of water, where the sea-channels wound through the scrub. He began to make his way back through the pines, looking about him for evidences of airplane timber.

And suddenly his heart leaped. It was all about him! Tall, straight-grained firs, of incredible size, such as it must have required centuries of growth to develop!

Acres upon acres, extending as far as he could see! It was evident that this was the remainder of an original growth which had once covered the entire region. These trees had developed during something like two centuries, since Presqu' Ile, being, as its name indicated, all but an island, had not been swept by the forest fires which periodically devastated the rest of the timber lands.

Pushing his way through the trees, presently Will emerged into a small clearing, containing a few abandoned shacks and other evidences of Paul's abortive month of cutting. From here an overgrown trail led out to the dunes. The bay came into sight again, with the cottages and the camp beyond. Will stopped at the water's edge, and took in the location with careful scrutiny. Across that neck the flume must run; he would set up his mill there, construct his dam at the mouth of the stream where it broadened into the shallows, load directly on his own schooners.

For ten minutes he remained absorbed. At last he shook the day-dream from him and moved toward the dunes. He had just crossed the channels, into which the tide was beginning to run, when he heard the galloping of the horse behind him, and, turning, saw Jeanne Dorion appear from among the trees.

She set her horse at the channel in a bound that carried her to Will's side. She reined in.

"Mr. Maitland, I wish to speak to you," she said, leaning across the animal's neck.

Will stopped and waited in silence.

"Why do you never answer me?" she cried angrily. "Do you dare to despise me, you who come here with such wicked designs?"

Will spoke for the first time. "Mme. Dorion, I do not want either your abuse or your presence," he said. "On the very night of my arrival you led a mob to attack me in the hotel where I was staying. This morning you nearly rode me down." His face began to flame. "I am going to teach you and yours that there is law in Bonne Chance," he said. "Tell your people that. Tell them that I've been up against better men and bigger men and braver men than your *habitants*, and I've won out. I've seen my business through. Tell them I'll do it again. As for yourself, Mme. Dorion, women of your type are new to me, but—"

"You are brutal, like all your kind," answered the girl furiously, while the red crept up beneath her skin, until it dyed her face and throat a vivid scarlet. "But will you swear that you have neither come here as a spy, to trap the poor man who has a bottle of brandy in his cellar, nor as an agent of the government, to pave the way for the sealing steamships next spring?"

"I'll swear to nothing!"

"Because you can't! What are we to think? Didn't you come by the Blanche? Hasn't all Bonne Chance known for weeks that the government was sending an agent here? Perhaps you don't understand why I make these people's cause my own. That doesn't matter—to you. But I want to avoid bloodshed, and these people are in the mood for it.

"I want to avoid having more government agents here, more schooners seized, more prison sentences, more women and children starving in Bonne Chance because their fathers and husbands are in the government jails. If you had really come here to work my lands, your quarrel would be with us, not with Bonne Chance!"

She hesitated; she seemed resentful of his silence, as ever. She studied his face closely.

"You can't deny that the lumbering is a pretext, a clever trick," she went on. "And I don't want you to. I'm glad you don't. Because I have not been talking to you for any pleasure it gives me, or for the sake of abusing you, as you imagine.

"Even I can find better employment,

M. Maitland. It is because I have a proposition to make that may interest you. Would you like to earn five hundred dollars?"

She plunged her hand into her dress and pulled out a little purse stuffed with bills. "It is all I have," she said. "It is yours, if—"

"If I'll take my departure immediately?" asked Will.

"If you'll tell me the name of the man who betrayed my uncle's schooners to the government last spring," said the girl, looking at him steadily, and only betraying her eagerness by the slight catch in her voice. "It's so easy for you to do that," she continued. "No one will know. No harm will be done." She held the purse out in her hand.

Will shrugged his shoulders, as one shrugs away an unpleasant memory. "Keep your offers for your own kind!" he answered, turning away.

She uttered an inarticulate exclamation. His anger seemed to surprise, almost to stun her. After a moment she went trotting past him, her face averted. Will's eyes followed her as she rode along the beach to the edge of the cliff road beside the river.

Here, where the road sloped upward from the meadow toward the outskirts of Bonne Chance, a rig with two horses was drawn up. The man in it was only a speck from that distance, but somehow Will imagined that he was La Rue, returned from St. Boniface.

The girl reined in her horse, and for a few moments the pair seemed to be in conversation. The rig and horsewoman alike disappeared, and the latter came presently into sight again upon the top of the cliff, within the single street of the village, to disappear finally among the cottages.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL MOMENT.

WILL, making his way across the meadow toward the camp, saw a man, who appeared to have been watching him, start off at a run. Something in his actions aroused Will's suspicions, but, at his shouts, the fugitive only increased his speed, and Will set off at a fast clip to overtake him.

He was a loose-jointed man of about thirty, with a thatch of black hair and a scrub of beard, and he scrambled as he fled, with a loose gait and unnecessary movements of the arms which told Will that it was the half-wit, Jean Desmoulins.

Will had noticed Jean loafing about the camp, looking at the mill and the steam-engine, peering slyly into the cottages, and watching everything in an apparently aimless, half-witted way. He had questioned Paul, who had told him that Jean was harmless, and tolerated everywhere; also a good workman, when the fit struck him, although it never lasted long. He also learned that Jean was a sort of familiar of Philippe La Rue.

Will caught up with Jean, seized him by the shoulder, and swung him round.

"You seem to be in an unnecessary hurry, my friend," he said, holding the imbecile at arm's length and surveying him.

"Ai! Ai!" screeched Jean Desmoulins. "Let go my arm, monsieur!"

"What were you doing here? What were you running away for?"

"I always run when I run, monsieur," Jean mumbled. "It is my way; I am a poor imbecile."

"Whom are you running to see?"

The half-wit only blinked and mumbled at him, but, as Will insensibly relaxed his grasp, suddenly squirmed out of his hands, wriggling like an eel, and in a moment was several yards away.

"M. Philippe!" he shouted maliciously over his shoulder. "Ai! He'll make an end of you, M. Maitland! M. Philippe will settle with you! You go to the camp and see!"

He started off at top speed again, taking the road toward Bonne Chance and stopping every twenty paces to glance over his shoulder and utter some insulting shout that was lost on the wind.

Will was surprised to see several men loafing at the mill entrance, and more so when there came rolling into view from

behind the cottages three rigs, all loaded high with household impedimenta. One of them was Paul's.

At the moment of Will's approach Paul emerged from the house, followed by his wife and trailing progeny of seven. Paul had a feather mattress in his arms, and the woman, who was crying, carried a great copper kettle in one hand and a cradle in the other. One of the bigger boys had Will's suit-case. The two mill-hands had already completed their loading, and were tying up their goods with cord.

Two or three of the gang, who had come in from the woods, and were apparently waiting to see what Will would do, hung about near the scene, smoking, and looking on with interest.

"Moving day?" Will inquired of Paul.

Paul Cawmill shook his head dejectedly, but he did not answer, and, his load being already fastened, except for the mattress, he dumped this on top of all and started to lead the disconsolate horse, which kept looking round, back toward the bridge.

The children, running forward with loud whoops, scrambled up the cart tail atop the shaking mass.

Will caught the horse by the reins. "Is this a strike or a circus, Paul?" he demanded.

Paul shook his head. "Ah, monsieur," he said, almost weeping, "you were kind and meant well, but I knew how it would all end."

As the two other rigs began to draw alongside, Will held up his hand, and the drivers pulled in.

"Now, Paul Cawmill, perhaps you will explain this," he said.

"M. La Rue has ordered us all to leave immediately," said Paul in desperation. "And he is coming himself to see that we are gone. To-morrow is the first of September, and my mortgage is foreclosed. And M. McGraeme has canceled my lease, too."

Will simply led the horse around until it faced Paul's cottage again. "Now you get everything unpacked and into your house inside an hour," he said. "And you, Gingras! You, Poulin!" he added to the two mill-hands. "When I hire men, they obey me, and nobody else! I'll have you understand that!"

He led Paul's horse back to his cottage. Paul ran up to him, stammering:

"But, M. Maitland, there is no longer any work for which to receive wages. Philippe La Rue has made Duncan McGraeme the foreman, and he has brought his own men here!"

Will became conscious that the men about the mill entrance had drawn toward him, as if by premeditation. Now he saw others coming up from all sides. He found himself the center of a grinning crowd, apparently enjoying his approaching discomfiture.

Several of them were Paul's men, who should have been at work in the woods, but had evidently been advised of the dénouement in store, and had come in to see the fun. Will recognized Angus, Alexandre, and Eudore among the crowd.

Suddenly Duncan stepped forward from a little group among which he seemed to have been concealing himself purposely, as if with an instinct for dramatic effect.

"You get off these limits!" he announced to Will. "This is my cousin's lands. Paul Cawmill is finished now, and I'm foreman. You go and make no trouble, you English spy!"

It was no new situation to Will, and he could not have been better prepared. He saw the lumbermen getting ready to jostle him; it was the psychological moment when they were nerving themselves to begin the attack.

This story will be continued in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.

Next week the second of George Shedd's "Blazing Road" complete novelettes, "The House of Simitars." It abounds in thrills.

While Dorion Lives

by Victor Rousseau

Author of "The Eye of Balamok," "Draft of Eternity," "The Diamond Demons," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

LANDING at the sea-coast village of Bonne Chance, Will Maitland, who had leased the Dorion timber tract from the Canadian government, found himself taken for a spy to trap the village brandy smugglers and an agent to pave the way for sealing steamships which would still further deprive the *habitants* of a livelihood. But Maitland's purpose was merely to locate a certain rare species of wood used in airplane manufacture. He won the support of Paul Cawmill, lumberman. The latter told him that he was being ruined by La Rue, bank manager and justice of peace, and Belley, storekeeper, La Rue's tool. The power in the town was Jeremiah McGraeme, owner of lumber schooners and a smuggler, and it was at Presqu' Ile, stronghold of the McGraemes, that Maitland discovered the very timber of which he was in search. On his return he found Cawmill, now in his employ, moving his goods by order of La Rue, the mortgage held by the latter having been foreclosed.

CHAPTER VII.

SINGLE-HANDED.

EVERY gang acts in the same way. Angus, at Will's side, was already spitting out insults, with the purpose of diverting his attention, and upon the other Alexandre was advancing with an insolent defiance that masked a good deal of wariness. Near him stood Eudore, his muscular torso contrasting curiously with the puffy, immature boy's face; his hat was on the side of his head, and he was chewing while waiting for the opportunity to rush in upon the interloper and deal him a succession of murderous kicks with his hob-nailed lumberman's boots.

Will sensed that all the opposition centered in the McGraemes: the lumbermen themselves were not openly hostile, though they would undoubtedly follow their leaders in any act of deviltry.

Taking the initiative with a sudden, unexpected spring, Will put all the strength of his shoulder muscles into a right-hand blow that caught Duncan squarely upon the jaw, sending him to the ground stunned, as if he had been poleaxed.

A gasp went up from the group. The deliverance of this blow before the preliminary parleying was over had taken the wind out of the sails of the lumbermen. This was not cricket, as it ought to be played.

Will gave them no time for recovery. Disregarding Angus, whose age and comparatively slow movements made him the least formidable of the McGraemes, he swung to the right and led a smashing blow with his left to Eudore's face, splitting both his lips and knocking his false teeth down his throat.

Eudore screamed, choked, and ran frantically from the scene, the blood streaming from his torn tongue. Will, whirling upon Alexandre, who had already drawn his knife, dealt him a rain of hammering blows that sent the weapon spinning out of his

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for November 27.

hand, beat down his guard, and knocked him, half stunned, across the sill of the mill-room door.

They said afterward that Will charged into the midst of the lumbermen like a mad bull. But nobody stopped to wait for him, or appeared disposed to champion the prostrate Duncan, or the cause of his employer. Will managed to head off a half-dozen men in their flight.

"I just want you to understand that I have leased this territory from the government," he said. "Get that through your heads. Those who want to work for me will receive good pay and fair treatment. I don't stand for nonsense. Do I make myself clear?"

"*Oui, monsieur!*" answered the lumbermen, with one accord.

"Then you can go. To-morrow I take charge. There will be jobs for all who want them."

They hurried away, and Will went back to where Duncan was lying. He was just beginning to come back to consciousness, he opened his eyes, and, recognizing his enemy, closed them hastily again. Will was about to attempt to revive him when he saw Paul and the two mill-hands at his side, looking at him in an awestruck way and stammering something, and pointing toward the bridge, across which the dejected lumbermen were making their way homeward to Bonne Chance.

Following the direction of their gaze, Will saw the rig with the two horses pulled up on the other side. In it sat a man leaning forward, and shouting angrily to the lumbermen as they passed.

"It is M. La Rue," said Paul. "What shall we do, M. Maitland?"

Will glanced at the three wagon-loads of furniture, to which the horses, patient in the shafts, still stood attached. "Get all that stuff unloaded and back into your houses!" he commanded.

They looked at Will a little dubiously, but hastened to obey. It was clear that they were still in doubt who was the master. La Rue lashed his horses, and the rig took the bridge and came dashing up. The driver pulled in the animals violently within a few feet of the mill door, yelled to Gingras, tossed him the reins, and leaped out.

"So you're Mr. Maitland, eh?" he bawled.

"I am," answered Will, looking at him with interest. "And you appear to be Mr. La Rue."

"You're right there! I am! Get off this land, or you'll be thrown off."

Will leaned back against the jamb of the mill door and laughed. All the remnants of his fighting rage dissolved in the peals of human mirth that came from his throat at this belated challenge.

La Rue stared at the big man in front of him, and, shifting his eyes, suddenly caught sight of Duncan, lying on the ground not far away, bleeding at the nose and ears.

His face went white. He had not learned of the fistic encounter from the lumbermen at the bridge, and had driven up, mad with rage in the belief that Duncan had shirked the task which he had given him. La Rue was no coward, but he had flung out his challenge in ignorance of the fighting qualities of Will Maitland.

For a moment he sat staring at him, nonplused. But he was accustomed to meeting situations quickly. He clambered out of the rig.

"Well, there seems to have been a little misunderstanding, Mr. Maitland," he began, in a tone that was meant to carry a compromise between suasion and jauntiness.

"There has not been the least misunderstanding, that I am aware of. This man came on my land at the head of a gang, and ordered me off. He has had what he deserved," he added, observing that Duncan was now only feigning unconsciousness. "You appear to know something of this matter, Mr. La Rue. There is no misunderstanding anywhere."

La Rue scowled. "Mr. Jeremiah McGraeme is the owner of this land," he answered. "I represent him. That is my interest in the matter. The man Duncan McGraeme is foreman. Paul Cawmill's lease has been terminated, and his property attached under a mortgage. That leaves you no standing here, unless you can prove your claims in a court of law."

"I hold the lease from the Provincial Government," Will answered. "And there is another fact which you overlook. I am at present in possession. I was in possession when your men came here. They seemed to doubt it. They are aware of it now. That is the immediate point for consideration."

"Well, you won't be in possession long," answered the other savagely. "You Ontario men will find you can't come into our province and seize private lands where you please. I'm the sheriff. What's to stop my arresting you and taking you to St. Boniface?"

Will smiled and glanced at the spot where Duncan had been lying. But Duncan had disappeared. Gathering his consciousness together, he had writhed like a snake upon his belly beneath the flume, and then run into the woods. The shattering blow had knocked all the nerve out of him. He had never been knocked out before. He did not understand it.

La Rue had offered him fifty dollars to throw Will Maitland off the limits, and he had proceeded in the sublimity of confidence. Will had not only knocked him out, but broken up his men. The whole process was bewildering. He only wanted to get out of reach of Will's terrible fists.

La Rue scowled more savagely at Will's implication. "Suppose Mr. McGraeme decides to let you stay and rot here all the winter," he shouted. "What then? He won't be losing anything. I own the flume and the mill. I don't want to operate, nor does Mr. McGraeme. And you can't, without the use of plain violence. But suppose you had everything. Do you realize you'd have to pay for every cord of lumber you took out when the court's judgment went against you?"

He ended in a milder key.

"There's no sense quarreling about a matter that can be adjusted," he said. "You're a business man. I admit I thought you were one of these cheap lumber sharks who come up here because bidding's cheap for the Romaine lands. Suppose you give up this lease—you won't be much out of pocket. You know you can't win, even if you've caught Mr. McGraeme napping. He doesn't want the trouble of this hold-up. Your ground rent's seven hundred dollars. There'll be no stumpage charges till you've cut. Five thousand for all claims."

"You're authorized to make that offer?"

"I act for Mr. McGraeme."

"I thought," said Will, "that Mme. Dorion was the owner of this property."

His words seemed to flick La Rue on the raw. "You can take it as coming from anybody you please!" he shouted. "That's my offer. Take it or leave it!"

Will glanced at Paul Cawmill's anxious face. Of course he had no intention of accepting any offer, in view of the existence of the firs. But it occurred to him for the first time that he had already committed himself in the shape of allies and enemies.

Singularly, he began thinking of Jeanne Dorion again.

"Well, what d'you say, Mr. Maitland?" La Rue demanded.

"Why, of course not!" answered Will. "This territory is going to be a gold mine to me."

"You think so, eh?" snarled the other. "Suppose I don't know about that airplane timber? That idea alone's enough to stamp you as a loser. Why, it ain't practical! And suppose it was, how are you going to operate? Where will you get the men? Mr. McGraeme's *seigneur* here, and you'll find his word goes in Bonne Chance."

Will was not greatly surprised to learn that Paul had already betrayed him. The secret would have come out anyway at an early date; little harm had been done. Yet he was surprised when, glancing at Paul, he saw him winking and nodding at him, as if conscious of having fulfilled some trust.

"I'll tackle those troubles when I get around to them," Will answered. "I have my own machinery coming up." He thought of the man's stranglehold on Paul, and his wrath blazed up. "Your offer's refused, and as much more as you like to add to it," he said. "And you're too previous with your foreclosure. It can't be done till to-morrow, and I've bought Paul Cawmill's property. Your note will be

paid to-morrow, and the rest as they fall due. That's all I have to say to you!"

La Rue swung about with a sneering laugh, and scrambled into his rig. He snatched the reins. "We'll see about that, Mr. Maitland!" he answered, from his safe point of vantage. "You'll be singing a different tune before the winter comes!"

He lashed the horses, and then pulled them in again with a jerk that set Will's pulses hammering more angrily than at his words.

"Will you take ten thousand?" he demanded. "It's the last offer!"

"No!" Will yelled back in exasperation. "And see here! If you jerk those horses' heads like that again, or use that whip on them that way, I'll use it on you!"

La Rue spluttered an oath and drove away, leaving Will almost beside himself with anger. He had won, he had overcome all opposition, and yet there seemed a curious futility about the whole affair.

He traced it back in his mind to the encounter with Jeanne Dorion, but he could not analyze the process of his impressions and reactions. Introspection of that kind was foreign to him. He only knew that he felt more humiliated than if he had been driven from the field.

Paul Cawmill came forward, breathing hard. "Ah, *monsieur,* how can we thank you!" he cried. "I stand by you, and Gingras and Poulin stand by you, too. You understand, it is not that anybody here loves Jeremiah or the McGraemes, or M. La Rue, either. For ourselves we care nothing at all: it is for our families. Now we believe that our jobs will last through the winter, or you had not refused that ten thousand dollars. *Bateche,* what a shock for Duncan! Only take care, *monsieur,* for he will never rest till he has got his revenge on you!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STRIKE.

WILL did not expect any of Paul's hands to report for work on the morning after his victory, but to his surprise every one turned up, and a dozen more, asking for jobs. The word had gone round Bonne Chance that he had really leased the Dorion tract from the government, and Bonne Chance had revised its opinion of him in the light of La Rue's discomfiture.

As a matter of fact, Gingras and Poulin had narrated the whole affair with characteristic embellishments to a vast concourse in the cellar beneath Hector Galipeault's stable, while the drinks circulated.

"*Ah, mon Dieu,* you should have seen! M. Philippe drives up in a black fury when he sees us *habitants en marche* across the bridge. He gallops his horses hard, and he looks at M. Maitland, and he sees him all covered with Duncan's blood. He gives one look—so, and his rage goes down flat, and he begs him to sell the lands back to him. 'Will you take five thousand?' 'No!' thunders M. Maitland. 'Will you not take ten thousand?' 'No!'

"And so he turns to drive home again, crestfallen, but M. Maitland seizes him by the throat. 'Rascal! You know not how to treat a horse!' With which he lashes M. Philippe three times across the face and kicks him into the bottom of the rig. A terrible man, this M. Maitland! No heart, no pity! It is an honor to work for him!"

Even Will's announcement that he would begin cutting on Presqu' Ile failed to deter his employees. The prestige of the McGraemes had received a shock from which recovery, if made at all, would prove a lengthy business. The outskirts of the smugglers' haunts were promptly invaded, without a word of protest.

Will meant to make a good cutting that winter, and have a load of fir to ship in the spring. He received a letter that morning by the mail, which was carried along the coast by horse-carriage in summer, and by dog-sleigh in winter, from a manufacturer with whom he had had an interview before leaving Quebec, asking for samples of his fir wood in good length. Will knew that what he could supply would open the manufacturer's eyes as to the possibilities of his timber.

It would create a sensation in the trade. The fir was even better than that from British Columbia. It was a primeval

growth, enormous trees with hardly a knot in the grain, tough and resilient. A load of this placed upon the market would create a sensation, would make the property of almost fabulous value. Will meant to get the samples out before winter, in good bulk; this would require a careful survey of the lands, and a selection from among the tallest and straightest trees.

His scheme required, of course, the complete construction of a camp on the neck, and the building of a new flume, though the work would not have to wait for its completion. The wood could very well be hauled to the mill, and hauled out again to the waterside by teams. That would suffice for the entire winter, during which he would be cutting along the boundaries of his camp clearing.

As soon as he had made them, Will spoke to Paul Cawmill about his plans.

"I'm going to take down your flume, Paul," he said, "and use the material to construct another one across the shallows, running from the watercourse under the cliffs to the bay. We'll dam that stream, and have the work largely finished by spring, if we have to keep a gang at work on it through the winter."

Paul had a disconcerting look upon his face that annoyed Will exceedingly.

"Well, have you anything better to propose?" he asked sharply.

Paul shrugged his shoulders. "*Ah, non, monsieur,*" he answered. "But perhaps you did not know, M. Maitland, that Hector Galipeault has built a cellar underneath his stable."

"What do you mean? What has that to do with what I've been talking about?"

"He keeps his brandy there, *monsieur*. Six gallons he brought over from the McGraemes—"

"Why the devil do you suppose I know or care anything about Hector Galipeault's brandy?" demanded Will irritably.

The light of sudden understanding flashed into Paul's eyes. He clapped his hands together. "*Bien*, M. Maitland!" he cried. "Assuredly now I understand you completely!"

"I hope you do," said Will, who loathed Paul in his mysterious moods. "And, in proof of it, suppose you confine your attention to the work in hand, and give me your practical view-point upon what I have proposed."

Paul winked at him. "Ah, *monsieur*, my discretion comes from the long experience of men," he answered. "I know now everything that is expected of me, and you can rely upon me absolutely."

Will turned from him impatiently. However, Paul ventured no mysterious allusions during the busy days that followed. The schooners had already departed for Quebec with the little foreman's lumber, the proceeds from the sale of which would suffice to put him comfortably upon his feet again. During the ensuing month the mill was taken down and conveyed by teams to the old clearing on Presqu' Ile, which had been regrubbed, and reassembled for rossing.

Will's gangmill arrived and was set up. It was not of the latest make, which would have involved a prohibitive price, but it seemed to answer its purpose well, and was capable of turning out enough board feet a day to meet requirements.

Corduroys were laid down, and the demolition of the old flume and the construction of a dam begun. Will also extended the clearing and set about the construction of a cabin for himself and camp shacks for the lumbermen.

October arrived. Another month would see winter at hand. Will pressed the work with all his might, in order to get out his sample shipment of fir before navigation closed. As soon as the gangmill was ready for operation he had his logs sawn and rossed and ready to be hauled there, and he was also constructing a road from the mill to the bay, by which the teams could haul the board lumber.

The work, proceeding with fair speed, proved a godsend to the settlement. Thus far there had been no trouble with the McGraemes; they had brought the schooners back and immediately departed upon some less legal expedition. Will had seen neither Jeremiah nor Jeanne Dorion. La Rue had gone to Quebec. If any plots were hatching, there was no sign of them.

However, Will expected trouble later, and was fully prepared for it. He knew

that neither Jeremiah nor his kinsmen would tolerate this inroad on their preserves, and the affront to their prestige in Bonne Chance, while La Rue's business was to fish in troubled waters. He hoped that the shipment could be got out before developments occurred, but he was inclined to doubt this, and his doubts proved true.

He wanted to put into execution a plan which had long been simmering in his mind. He had determined to explore Presqu' Ile systematically from the lighthouse point. The central part of the peninsula appeared to be an almost impassable tangle of ravines and cliffs. Yet there was a road into it, and across the central cleft. It was that which Jeanne Dorion had taken on the afternoon of their encounter. Will was resolved to locate it, and to determine whether or not the growth of fir existed beyond the ravine.

But there would come no opportunity for exploration for some time. Will worked from dawn to night. The camps were up by the end of October, and a few unmarried lumbermen had taken up their residence in them, though most of the men still came daily to their work from the village. Everything depended on making a good cutting for the sample shipment. The hum of the mill was music in Will's ears. The load was already cut and rossed when Paul came to his employer with a glum face.

"The men want more money," he said. "They say two dollars a day isn't enough."

"It's the standard wage in this part of the country," answered Will. "How much do they think they want?"

"Four dollars, *monsieur*," answered Paul, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"They must be crazy, then. What's at the back of it?"

"They say you told M. La Rue that the land was a gold mine," said Paul, "and that you're going to make your fortune out of it, so they mean to make theirs as well. And they think you can't get any more labor anywhere this winter, now that all the men have gone to work in the camps. And the McGraemes won't hire us their schooners for taking out this shipment."

"One thing at a time, please. So you think the McGraemes are at the back of this?"

"They have been waiting till M. La Rue came back from Quebec, M. Maitland. He has undoubtedly given his advice to Jeremiah."

Will nodded. The situation was a serious one. Of course he could break any strike; the men would have to come back to work after a brief interval, but in the mean time winter was at hand. All depended on whether or not they were aware of the importance to him of getting out the sample shipment. And undoubtedly the inspiration came from La Rue.

He had returned from Quebec a day or two before, and simultaneously the McGraemes had been seen about Bonne Chance. They had been on one of their brandy-running expeditions, and were now back for the winter, ready to resume their private quarrel with Will. He had been foolish to hope that the trouble might hold off until he got his shipment through.

"I'll telephone St. Boniface to drum up all the schooners they can lay hands on and send them here," he said. "And I'll speak to the men."

He addressed them in front of the mill at noon, but with little hope. They were as ignorant as children, and the rumor of the airplane project was just the thing that could be disseminated and magnified until the lumbermen would believe any story of Will's potential wealth.

"I understand you want more money," he said. "I'm not a rich company, and I have nobody at my back. I've put all I have into this enterprise, and I've been counting on you to help me put it through. I'm paying the standard rate. It's all I can afford. Those tales of millions are lies, spread in order to make you dissatisfied. If things go well, I'll consider a fifty-cent raise after the new year. Those who don't want to work for me on those conditions can step forward and get their pay."

Not a man came forward, though there was a little audible grumbling.

Will knew, however, that the McGraemes were busy at work. Moreover, they had brought back a supply of brandy

with them. It circulated in the village, and in the camp also. There was no way in which he could keep it out.

He had laid down a corduroy across the muskeg, connecting with the main road into Bonne Chance, and teams and men were coming and going all day long. The men came to work half-drunk in the morning, and drank all day. Worst of all was the air of brewing trouble, the sullenness of the hands, the slowing up of the work, and the general demoralization.

Added to this, Will's quest for schooners proved unsuccessful. He had, however, the promise of three, late in the season, after their last voyage was made, provided the ice held off long enough to allow them to make the journey.

The trouble came to a head on a Saturday afternoon. The men had worked sullenly all the morning, and, at the lunch hour, Will noticed that a number had come in from the foot of the range, where he had been driving a road, with the object of hauling out some timber of exceptional size, as soon as the snow had fallen deep enough. When the whistle blew, the hands, instead of returning to their work, started off in a body toward Bonne Chance.

The strike had been declared. Will took off his coat and walked down the road to intercept the men, who stopped uneasily.

"Knocking off work, eh?" he asked quietly. He saw Poulin's face among the crowd. "You, too, Poulin?"

The man came forward, shamefaced. "M. Maitland, we've got families," he answered. "We want four dollars a day. We won't listen to any argument. If you don't want to pay us four dollars, we'll quit."

"That's true!" shouted another, and others took up the cry. "You're making millions out of us, and you've got to treat us fair!"

And, seeing that Will did not contemplate physical restraint, the mob swung past him along the corduroy, leaving only two men behind. One was Paul, who had been raging futilely up and down among them; the other Gingras. The latter came up to Will. "I'll stay with you, M. Maitland," he announced.

Will clapped him on the back. "I don't need you now, Gingras," he said. "I don't want you to get into trouble in Bonne Chance. But you'll get your two dollars just the same."

He sent Gingras away, protesting, and went over the situation with Paul, a rather difficult matter, owing to the little man's mercurial disposition. Paul was not much use as an aid, in time of difficulty, for all his boasted shrewdness, but he was a good lumberman and knew his business.

"How long will they stay out?" asked Will.

"Maybe one week, two weeks," answered the foreman. "Wait till next Saturday night. The women will raise hell when there's no money coming in. That's why they struck on a Saturday; they've got to have their wages to take home. I knew it was coming, but I didn't know so soon."

"We've got them beaten then, all right," said Will. "It 'll hold us up a little, but they can't hold out long enough to keep our shipment here till spring—unless there's an unusually early winter."

"*Ah, oui, monsieur,*" answered Paul; "but, you see, Philippe La Rue has something else up his sleeve, you can depend on it."

That was sounder sense than Will had given Paul credit for possessing. Neither La Rue nor Jeremiah was paying out strike wages. It might be part of a general plan to hamper Will and his work, entered into with no very definite end in view, or there might be something more to it, as Paul had suggested.

Despite his optimism, he fretted badly over the situation, and he was unreasonably disturbed on the following day, when, making a trip into Bonne Chance to the post-office, he encountered Jeanne Dorion and La Rue riding side by side through the street, apparently engaged in intimate conversation.

Will, being on foot, had that sense of inferiority which one always feels under such circumstances. Nor was this lessened by some sneering remark about him made by the notary to his companion, accompanied by an amused glance that sent the blood to

Will's temples. Jeanne turned her face away in apparent anger.

Will persuaded himself that it was his reluctance to see the girl an accomplice of the notary that troubled him. He knew that she was sincere in her estimate of him, however mistaken. He believed that La Rue was not acting disinterestedly on behalf of Jeanne.

He hinted indirectly to Paul upon the matter, and the little man grew voluble.

"M. Philippe isn't backing Mme. Dorion and her uncle for nothing," he said. "Undoubtedly he would marry her if there were any chance for him. He has been after her ever since Dorion's death."

Will felt an absurd, guilty rush of blood to his temples.

"But Jeremiah McGraeme would never permit such a thing. You see, *monsieur,* there is a good deal of pride in Bonne Chance, and the McGraemes come of a great race, like the Dorions, though they are only *habitants.* While Philippe La Rue has never been anything but a *habitant.*

"Did you ever see a bear fishing, *monsieur?* Once only I saw that, years ago. He stands beside the water, so patient, such a long time, then—pouf! Out goes his paw, and there is the fish on the shore. So it is here, I think. M. Philippe knows how to wait. He is fishing for M. Jeremiah, who is a big fish, but stupid—very stupid, *monsieur,* for all that he got back the Dorion lands."

"And Mme. Dorion?" asked Will, loathing himself for speaking of her, and yet unable to resist.

Paul shrugged his shoulders. "A fine woman, *monsieur.* With spirit—but what can she do against her uncle and the McGraemes? For generations the McGraemes dreamed of the Dorion lands. When her uncle told her that she must marry the *seigneur,* so as to bring them into the family, she obeyed him. Never would Jeremiah permit the lands to pass to Philippe La Rue by marriage. But suppose the fish is on the bank? He cannot make his terms in the bear's paw. Sixteen she was when she married Dorion, and he drowned on the next voyage. It was sad!"

He looked up at Will with a twinkle in his eyes. "But take courage, M. Maitland. I am discreet. I know how things should be arranged. I am working for you—a word here, a hint there—"

"I hope, Paul, you don't imagine—" began Will hotly.

"*Ah, la, la!*" answered Paul, with his tongue in his cheek; and Will found nothing to say.

CHAPTER IX.

LA RUE SCHEMES.

JEANNE DORION went home flaming from her interview with Will upon the dunes. She said nothing about it to her uncle, however. From him she learned that the interloper was to be put off the Dorion limits by La Rue that afternoon.

Jeremiah, who had been advised to remain away from the scene, waited with growing impatience for the news of Will's discomfiture. It was late in the day before the story of what had happened arrived, in an exaggerated form, at the big stone house. Will had beaten up the entire gang of La Rue's men single-handed, and defied La Rue himself; he remained in possession of the field.

The news, brought by one of the men, sent the old head of the McGraemes into a white-hot fury. He clapped on his hat, took his heavy stick, and strode into Bonne Chance, to the notary's office.

La Rue's smile was anything but indicative of his inner feelings as he looked up at his flushed and indignant visitor.

"Well, Philippe La Rue, a nice hash you have made of the business!" shouted Jeremiah. "You insisted that I should keep out of it, and what happens? Duncan is knocked senseless, Eudore and Alexandre are badly beaten, from all accounts, and that scoundrel remains in possession of my niece's lands. What have you got to say about it?"

"Patience," answered the notary suavely.

"*Maudit,* is that all? I'd have thrashed the hide off the fellow. I'm not so old yet. But you told me to keep away. Now he

has made me a laughing-stock in Bonne Chance—me, the *seigneur!*" he shouted.

The word was not over-pleasing to La Rue. He masked the contortion of his face with a grin.

"Nobody could have suspected that he was the kind of man he turned out to be," he answered. "The men were staggered. They did not expect what happened, and, with Duncan knocked unconscious, they were not going to do anything. You know the *habitant's* respect for power. I'm not sure it wasn't the best thing that could have happened."

And, as Jeremiah snorted speechlessly, he went on, growing more and more bland and persuasive:

"You see, Jeremiah, we must be careful not to put ourselves in a wrong position. The government cannot take a man's lands away from him, even in Bonne Chance. When I am in Quebec next week I will look into the matter of the original title. If my investigations prove satisfactory, I will enter a suit in your name on behalf of your ward, Mme. Dorion. Even if the title cannot be found, we may still be able to retain Mme. Dorion's tenure of the lands by custom and inheritance, under the feudal régime. The courts are above the government, which has sent M. Maitland here to ruin you, because they think the loss of your schooners has put you at their mercy. Once they get a man down, they hound him."

Jeremiah thumped his stick violently. "I'll have no lawsuit!" he shouted. "What do I care for that? I'll put the scoundrel out myself. Where's the money for your lawsuit coming from?"

"Oh, as for that," answered the notary indifferently, "it won't cost you more than a few thousands. And I wouldn't press you for the interest on the mortgage until the matter is settled."

Something in the notary's tone brought a dormant thought into Jeremiah's consciousness. He turned on him with slow suspicion. "Eh, M. Philippe, you wouldna mind becoming *seigneur* of Bonne Chance yourself!" he said, with a quiver of sarcasm in his voice.

La Rue laughed. "I shouldn't mind owning the Dorion lands, I admit," he answered. "But I'd leave you the honor, Jeremiah. However, if you feel that way, I'll take no further action in the matter."

Jeremiah gulped. He knew he could not match himself against La Rue. "I didna mean to offend you, Philippe," he said slowly. "But what 'll I do now?"

"Wait till I've looked the records up in Quebec," answered the other. "Meanwhile, M. Maitland is in possession. If your kinsmen use violence, there will be unpleasant complications. If I'd known what sort of man he was, I'd never have proposed putting him off. Keep your men quiet, and make it as hard for him as possible."

Jeremiah went away with an ill grace. He fumed all the time La Rue was in Quebec. The development of the work on Presqu' Ile was a thorn in his flesh. A hundred times the fiery old man was on the point of going to Will and committing himself to some rash action. Jeanne restrained him.

"Better wait till Philippe La Rue returns, uncle," she said. "He'll know what's best to do."

"He knows too much," growled Jeremiah. "What's he to you, lass?" he added, turning upon her. "If I thocht—"

She shrugged her shoulders. "You know how much he is to me," she answered.

"How much, then?"

"As much as Emile Dorion was," she answered slowly.

Jeanne stood confronting him, a red spot burning on either cheek. Jeremiah checked an oath. His eyes dropped under his niece's searching gaze. He strode heavily away. He was no match for her, either, on the rare occasions when she opposed her resolution against his own.

Jeanne, more miserable than Jeremiah, waited, like him, for the return of the notary. She, the central figure in the play, had the least interest of any. The consciousness, increasing day by day as Will's sincerity of aim became apparent, that she had wronged him, increased her hate of him. She wanted to drive him from the lands, to conquer; but she did not want the lands. She cared nothing for them. She

only remembered his incredible insolence that day on the dunes.

The strike had been more spontaneous than Will had supposed. It coincided with the return of the McGraemes from their autumnal raid into the Prohibition counties; then La Rue was back, and he and Jeremiah sat down together in the parlor of the stone house on Presqu' Ile.

La Rue listened ironically to Jeremiah's account of what had happened. "Well, how far does that get you?" he asked. "You've stopped his working; it doesn't take him off the Dorion limits."

"He'll cut no more trees. And he'll get no more schooners. Let him stay there till he rots!"

"He won't rot," answered La Rue. "The men will be back at work within a few weeks. Now, I've done better than that. I've found the original deed to the Dorion property in the Record office. In fact, it was never lost, but it was overlooked by the land office people when the first government map was compiled, and of course each annual map was made out from that of the previous year.

"So I've entered suit, subject to your approval, and M. Maitland will be finished in Bonne Chance just as soon as the judgment's rendered, and all his cutting will be yours into the bargain. Routhier & Faguy will see the case through for you for five thousand dollars."

"Five thousand dollars!" shouted Jeremiah. "Where'd I get five thousand dollars?"

La Rue laughed. "Come, Jeremiah, don't tell me you can't lay your hands on five thousand dollars!" he said.

"I've naught but my little property here —this house and the grounds — and my two schooners."

La Rue appeared to hesitate. Jeremiah's connection with the smuggling was not a topic for frank conversation, but he knew that the old man had an immense supply of brandy ready to be conveyed to various destinations, upon the proceeds from whose sale he was dependent for his next year's living, as well as for the money to meet the interest on his mortgage of the Dorion lands.

The McGraemes's recent journey had not brought in more than enough to support the clan through the winter, and it had been made in unfrequented regions, which were safe, but unremunerative. It was the activities of the Blanche that held Jeremiah's stock hidden on Presqu' Ile.

"See, Jeremiah," said the notary presently, "when I advanced you that money on the Dorion lands, I did it out of old friendship. You thought, and I thought, that they were almost worthless. Now we know better. The title's sure, and the lumber alone should be worth a cool three hundred thousand, if that airplane story's true.

"Isn't it worth risking five thousand dollars to get the lands back in your hands again?" he went on plausibly. "And he's developing them them at his own expense —for you, Jeremiah. Don't worry about the interest on that mortgage. You've never failed in anything you undertook, until they stole your schooners—you, with your good judgment!"

"But I havena the money!" shouted Jeremiah doubtfully.

"I'll let you have five thousand more on the lands and your house here. We'll make out a new mortgage."

Still Jeremiah hesitated. La Rue interpreted his reluctance.

"Don't worry about Jeanne," he said. "By the time she comes of age next year everything will be settled, the mortgage will be paid; and, after all, you are acting in her interests as her guardian."

It was not a difficult matter to persuade the old man to commence an action in his niece's name. "But what about M. Maitland?" he demanded. "Am I to sit still and see him go on working my land?"

"That's the game, Jeremiah," answered La Rue. "You should never have tried to stop him. You ought to have encouraged him to get out all the lumber possible, and let him have every schooner in Bonne Chance to ship it in."

"Eh?" cried Jeremiah, fixing his eyes upon La Rue's face in bewilderment. "Have ye gone daft?"

"Not yet," smiled the notary. "But it's hard to stop a busy man from working. Why not make him work for you?"

Her uncle's extraordinary good humor after the conference told Jeanne that something was in the wind, but even its success would not afford her any satisfaction. She knew that, beaten, Will would depart with the same insolence, the same contempt for her and for Bonne Chance.

Will's new corduroy crossed the road between her uncle's house and the village, on its way to the sea, but the camp was a half-mile distant from it, and Jeanne could still ride into Bonne Chance without coming within sight of Will's operations until she reached the cliffs of the mainland.

Sometimes, when she felt intolerably oppressed by the web that was being spun around her by La Rue and Jeremiah, she would saddle her horse and gallop along the neck, and for miles along the coast.

Returning from one of these rides, she encountered La Rue on horseback, no common diversion of his, and she suspected the notary of having ridden out to intercept her. She neither liked nor hated him, though she was vaguely distrustful of his bold, staring eyes, and his manner, which could be both fawning and flattering, but was never frank.

Instinct had told her that this man was setting himself in pursuit of her, as Dorion had done, though La Rue's words had never given her cause to believe so. But all men were like that, she thought, and almost all girls appreciated being hunted. There would be no difficulty in diverting La Rue in another direction, if ever the occasion came.

He doffed his hat as she approached, and reined in, watching her with admiration in his eyes. "You are a great horsewoman, *madame*," he said. "I have sometimes hoped to obtain leave to accompany you."

"I ride when I am tired of my own company," she answered, letting him perforce bring his horse into step with hers.

"There's not much company worth your while in Bonne Chance, let alone Bout de l'Ile," La Rue responded. "I should think you'd find it too deadly dull to live here."

"I haven't had much experience of anything else," said Jeanne.

"A girl like you, a lady, ought to have a chance to mix with her own kind, instead of being cooped up here and seeing nothing of life. Get your uncle to take you up to Quebec, Mme. Dorion."

She winced at the appellation. La Rue had never called her that until Jeremiah mortgaged the lands to him. The notary leaned toward her confidentially as they rode down the hill toward the neck.

"You're too good to mix with those McGraemes," he said. "Jeremiah has no business to use you as his go-between. It hurts me to see that, Jeanne."

He fell back into the old friendly way of address designedly.

"If I could help you," he said, "I'd be glad to, Jeanne. But it's difficult for me. When you were a bit of a girl we used to be great friends. Now we're apart. You're miles above me, now that you're owner of the Seigniory."

She was touched by his words, and what she thought his humility, though the boldness of his gaze disconcerted her.

"Please don't say that, Philippe," she answered. "You know very well how I hate all this business, this matching of the Dorions and the McGraemes. It isn't what our families were, it's what we are."

They were turning down toward the neck when Will came into view, walking back from the post-office. La Rue looked at him, and sneered.

"We wouldn't accept what you said," he remarked. "I guess he thinks that all Bonne Chance is the dirt under his feet. At any rate, I've fixed M. Maitland for you." He laughed. "He'll be lucky if he has a penny to his name when he's made good for the robbery of your lands," he said. "I've fixed him, Jeanne."

Jeanne turned her face away. She felt an inexplicable, hot resentment—at Will, at her companion, at life, which had plunged her into this morass of antipathies and schemes and trickeries.

"I'm going to help you," said La Rue, leaning toward her over his horse's withers. "You're too fine for all this. And you could make me do anything you wanted, with those eyes of yours."

The boldness of his gaze brought the blood to her face. It reminded her of Dorion.

La Rue misunderstood. He chuckled over the memory of it afterward, when he sat in his office. Anybody could fascinate a woman: the difficulty was, not to win her, but to go slow enough to keep pace with Jeremiah's increasing entanglements.

He chuckled again as he placed the new mortgage away in the little safe in his office. The mortgage was innocent enough: he was not thinking of that, but of his plan to make Will work for Jeremiah. The old imbecile had jumped at the plot. But it was one thing to invent a plot, and another to put the cap on.

CHAPTER X.

THE HAND OF FRIENDSHIP.

WILL was not seriously disturbed when he received notice of the impending lawsuit, which he believed only an attempt to harass him. Being now perforce idle, until the strike ended, he resolved to put into execution his plan to explore Presqu' Ile from the lighthouse point, and strike inland.

Accordingly, he arranged with Jean Desmoulins, who owned a boat, to be rowed out to Bout de l'Ile on the following Sunday after early mass.

They started about ten in the morning. Beyond the smooth waters of the bay the rollers surged heavily about the submerged rocks. A line of buoys indicated the narrow ocean fairway. Beyond these was the swell of the sea, and beyond, again, the sunken fangs of Bout de l'Ile, through which the boat threaded her way toward the bottom of the wooden stairs.

Jean, having made the boat fast, followed Will up four long flights to the plateau on which were the lighthouse and the keeper's cottage. The foghorn station was immediately beneath, on a projecting shelf of the rock.

Will now perceived that the cottage alone was on the mainland, while the two other buildings were perched upon an isolated limestone rock, connected with the land by a natural bridge of the same formation, arched high above the waves, which beat upon the rocks below.

It was a singular natural construction, caused by a fault in the granite structure, through which the softer stone had oozed up, in a molten state, in some prehistoric convulsion.

Jean, ambling at Will's side, looked up and grinned. "Ai, *monsieur,* where do you go now?" he asked.

"Is there any road leading over that way?" asked Will, pointing toward the fringe of forest above the plateau.

"No, *monsieur,* there is nothing there. Besides, one may not go there. It is not permitted."

Will checked his annoyance; he was not inclined to discuss his rights with the half-wit. "You can wait for me in the boat," he answered. "I'll be back in two or three hours, probably. Don't go too far, in case I return earlier."

Jean loped away. Will looked about him. From the plateau of Bout de l'Ile he could see the entire four miles of the Presqu' Ile peninsula spread out before him, except the central portion, where the tangle of tree-clad wilderness rose into high peaks, cleft by ravines. On the one side lay the sea, upon the other the bay, calm and placid behind the barrier of the submerged reef, where the breakers crashed about the ridges and sprayed the points of the rocks.

Across the bay, in which two schooners lay at anchor, he could see the houses of Bonne Chance, looking like a row of stones strung out along the cliff, some fishing shacks below, the old camp in the meadow, and the new camp across the neck in the clearing.

A single glance confirmed Jean's statement that Presqu' Ile was not more accessible from the lighthouse end. A dense scrub scrambled across the rolling hills behind the lighthouse-keeper's cottage. Will hesitated a moment, and then struck out vigorously through this growth inland, fighting his way with difficulty among the wild raspberry briers and brambles, till he reached a fairly open tract, where scrubby spruce-trees intermingled with stunted aspen. Great rocks broke through the thin soil everywhere. A drizzling rain was falling.

He went on for half an hour, until of a

sudden he saw the ravine in front of him. He looked down the sheer face of a smooth cliff. It was impossible of descent, either there, or as far as he could see on either side of him.

It was the central fissure of the peninsula—on this side spruce and pine, upon the other the tall firs that he loved and coveted. Nature had set this boundary, as between two kingdoms, eons apart.

Beyond the ravine Will saw the high peaks of Presqu' Ile, extending upward and ranging to the summit, a great, gaunt scarp that rose like a watchtower in the very heart of all.

Then he caught his breath to see Jeanne Dorion moving among the trees upon the other side of the cleft. She wore a long raincoat and high boots, and she was passing along a trail near the edge of the ravine.

Instinctively Will shrank back, to avoid being seen by her. An intense curiosity arose in him. But she was gone in a moment more, and now the rain was coming down in torrents. The fog was sweeping in. The blast of the distant foghorn began to reverberate among the rocks. Reluctantly Will turned back. He would have to try again on a clear day—if ever there was a clear day in Bonne Chance.

He reached the plateau drenched. By this time the fog had become almost impenetrable. The foghorn blew continuously; from out at sea the blast of a steamship answered it with startling suddenness. The screaming of invisible gulls came out of the mist. The waves were splashing noisily upon the rocks below.

Will went down the stairs toward his boat. He had descended two of the flights when he began to be aware of a singular, persistent sound, like a muttered monologue, that appeared to come out of the heart of the rock beneath him.

He went down a third flight and stopped. He could just see the boat underneath, rocking upon the waves, which sent up clouds of spray about him. Running along the face of the cliff he perceived a narrow ledge. It was hardly six feet wide, and it extended for twenty feet or so before it terminated in a sort of natural rock platform, breast-high.

He began to make his way along it. Now he perceived that the arch which connected the lighthouse with the mainland was immediately over his head, and the muttering of the voice had become plainly audible. Then Will was on the platform, and looking at a stranger sight than the arch itself.

Half-way up the face of the granite cliff was a hollow rectangle of limestone. It was an old Protestant place of worship, a cave used in bygone years by the settler soldiers of Wolfe. At that time Bout de l'Ile had extended farther into the sea, the cliffs had not yet fallen under the encroachments of the waves; cottages had lined the rugged shore, and the burr of the Scot had been the speech of half the countryside.

The roofed interior might have been fashioned by some human builder, instead of by nature, it was so fairly made; and the convulsion which had created it out of the roots of the mountains had left, at the far end, a ridge like an altar stone.

But the Scot had long since yielded to the *habitant*, and only a single family remained to perpetuate the ancient worship, represented by the one person within.

Behind the altar ridge stood Jeremiah McGraeme, in his black broadcloth, a Bible in his hand, and he read to the two empty benches in front of him as if he addressed a whole congregation.

"'Wo unto Tyre!' he read. 'Wo unto Sidon, for she hath persecuted the faithful in her secret places. And unto thee, O Babylon.'"

Suddenly Jeanne Dorion stepped from a recess in the mouth of the cave and confronted Will steadily. It seemed to him incredible that she should be there, when he had last seen her on the other side of the ravine.

"Are you mad, Mr. Maitland?" she asked in a tense whisper, interposing her body between him and Jeremiah's vision. She almost dragged him beyond a projecting angle of the rock. "I don't know why you have come here," she said, "but go immediately! They will kill you if they find you here!"

"I am on my leased land," answered Will hotly.

She wrung her hands. "Go, in Heaven's name!" she whispered. "I tell you—your life is at stake. Take your boat and go, before they come! Never mind the rights of the land now! Why won't you go? I want to save you!"

"'For thou hast poured forth the measure of thine iniquity on thy high altars,'" droned Jeremiah within.

Jeanne laid her hand on Will's arm, pointing frantically with the other toward the steps. And suddenly there came a clatter of boots upon the stone, harsh voices, and three of the McGraemes appeared—Angus, Alexandre, and Eudore, with a little faded woman in an ancient black silk dress and black bonnet, Angus's wife.

For a moment the men recoiled, glaring at Will as he stood at the chapel entrance. Then they clustered savagely about him, cursing and jeering him.

Will set his back against the low parapet. It was one thing to take the initiative in an open field, and quite another to be baited here. Jeanne cried out in terror. The little, faded woman screamed, and, twirling her bonnet-strings, raced back along the ledge.

"Let's throw the dirty spy down the cliff!" shouted Eudore, his white face working with fury. His lips were still scarred and swollen from the blow that Will had given him.

Eudore and Alexandre drew their ready knives. Angus, apparently unwilling either to aid or to restrain them, looked on. Will had no leaping-space. He was calculating that he could dodge one knife and tackle one of the men, but not the other. Jeanne threw herself before him, her eyes flashing.

"Let him go!" she cried. "He didn't know!"

"Damn him, he came here to spy on us!" yelled Alexandre, working himself up to the point of attack.

Another moment, and Will would have been fighting for his life. But at that instant Jeremiah came striding down the chapel and out upon the ledge.

"What is this?" he thundered. "Have ye forgotten that this is a holy place—aye, and the Holy Day?"

"We've got him, and, by Heaven, we'll finish him now!" shouted Eudore.

Jeremiah dealt him a buffet that sent him sprawling. At his command Alexandre drew back, scowling at Will ferociously, and put his knife away. The old man went to Will's side.

"Have no fear, Mr. Maitland," he said. "This is the Lord's Day, on which we put aside all carnal strivings and endeavor to perfect ourselves in His service. 'Be ye perfect!' saith St. Paul. Mr. Maitland, I bid ye welcome here. Whether ye be of the true releegion or no, this chapel is holy ground for you and yours."

Will looked in amazement at Jeremiah, not a word of whose address seemed strange to any of the McGraemes. Angus and Alexandre stood sullenly by, Eudore had picked himself up, and slouched into the chapel. And it occurred to Will that this was not so much hypocrisy as the heritage of straitly religious parentage, the very phrasing ancestral and once common. Jeremiah used expressions naturally that had died among men two generations before.

"There is peace this day in the Lord's tabernacle," he said. "Let there be peace betwixt us henceforward. What say ye, Mr. Maitland?"

"I should like nothing better," Will responded heartily.

"I fear that we have misjudged ye, Mr. Maitland. We took ye for a member of the oppressor, the Pharaoh who rules this land from Ottawa and oppresses and persecutes us. Will ye pledge yourself that you are not come here to oppress us, to betray us and our ships to the government?"

"I am here to lumber, and for no other purpose," answered Will.

Jeremiah put out a great hand. "When the spirit enters, the carnal heart of man is softened," he said. "There shall be peace, and no more strivings, until the law has judged between me and mine and thee and thine. Then, he who is adjudged in error, and not to be the owner of these lands, let him confess the wrong he doth, and depart. How say you, Mr. Maitland?"

"That's satisfactory to me," answered Will, and he took Jeremiah's hand.

"My kinsmen, then, shall place their schooners at your disposition, as I shall mine," said Jeremiah, dropping back into the common vernacular. "And, as for the strike, I dinna think it will be a lasting one," he added, with a faint flicker of humor under the granite mask.

He turned to the others. "We have misjudged Mr. Maitland," he said. "Ye have heard he has pledged himself that he has not come for the government, but to cut timber. And there shall be no more enmity between us, but we shall work together for the credit and good name of our community, until the law has judged between us. My brethren, ye are late, but take your places, and we will begin the reading again."

CHAPTER XI.

JEANNE EXPLAINS.

WILL remembered the slim hand that Jeanne had extended to him, and the girl's face, averted, as if in shame at the remembrance of their dissensions.

He remembered it as he sat in his shack the following afternoon, and for once he could not command his thoughts, which flitted hither and thither, touching on all things but the situation which confronted him.

During the strike he had insisted on remaining at the camp, and had almost had to drive Paul away, when the latter wished to stay and cook for him. Will could not bear to be away from the scene of his work. Meanwhile, the strike had gone into its second week, and, unless Jeremiah's prediction were quickly verified, it would be impossible to get the sample shipment out before navigation closed.

This would mean not merely the loss of orders, but the failure to secure the additional capital which he would have to obtain the following spring. He had sunk everything in the enterprise, and the expenses were mounting steadily. It would be impossible to go on without backing.

He did not know how much credence to place in Jeremiah's words. The continued hostility of Bonne Chance, its stupid malignity, made him rage with impotent anger. La Rue, he knew, was the brains at the back of it all, and the notary was using him as a pawn in the game that he was playing with old Jeremiah McGraeme.

Jeremiah, the strikers, Jeanne, and the McGraeme clansmen were all pawns in the notary's game, moving with a certain spontaneity, yet nothing but La Rue's automatons. Will could not believe that the intrigues against him had abruptly ended.

It was late afternoon. After long pondering, Will had succeeded in clearing his mind and fixing it upon the problem before him. By putting all hands to work upon the shipment, he could get it out in time, provided the strike terminated with the second Saturday.

He went down to the bay, wondering, as he approached it, which way Jeanne Dorion had taken to cross the ravine. The road from Bonne Chance to Jeremiah's house ran near the water's edge. It gave no access into the interior of Presqu' Ile. The whole of the neck was no more than a mile in width, or a little more, but so diversified that exploration was impossible among the bogs and quicksands, while the growth of stunted spruce and birch prevented observation.

The trails behind the camp led always to the stark precipice of the cleft. It seemed certain that there was no direct way into the interior from that end of the peninsula.

As Will worried over the problem, suddenly he saw a figure moving among the evergreens at the turn of the road. Out of the shadows of the great firs he perceived Jeanne Dorion walking toward him.

He was about to turn away to prevent the embarrassment of a meeting, but it seemed to him, from the deliberation of her movements, that she had seen his presence, and wished to speak to him. He waited accordingly.

She came straight to him, and stopped. Her face was flushed, and she looked miserable enough, yet full of determination.

"M. Maitland, I did not expect to see you here," she said; "but I was coming to your camp to speak to you. It is hard—

but I must tell you that I know now your purpose in coming to Bonne Chance was to lumber, and nothing else."

"Well, Mme. Dorion, I am glad you do believe that," answered Will. "But I assure it was not necessary for you to tell me so. No harm has been done."

"I told you—I called you—"

"But that has all been forgotten," answered Will, lightly.

He could not turn her from her intention. "I must tell you that I am ashamed and sorry for what I said and did. But I want you to know that I did not lead those men to attack you in the hotel. I did my best to restrain them."

"I saw that, Mme. Dorion. I am grateful for it."

Thus peace was made, but she was not satisfied. "I want to tell you why Bonne Chance felt so strongly," she said. "Our people are good people. You do not know what they have had to endure. For three years now the government has hounded us of Bonne Chance. Ever since the first Frenchmen settled here our men have gone into the drift ice in spring, as soon as it began to break, and taken the seals. And those who were the bravest and the most daring among the floes brought back most skins. Bonne Chance men go where no others dare to go, neither from other ports on the North Shore, nor from Newfoundland, nor from the Magdalens.

"And now the government has said that for one month only shall the seals be killed. So men who never dared to set sail before the ice had left the shores now crowd the sealing-floes, robbing us of what we earned by our own courage and skill, because we may not sail before the middle of March.

"But the government is not content with that, for there has been talk for a long time of a great subsidized sealing company, which is to operate with steamships, and in this way rob us of the remnants of our livelihood, and make us work for it, for, when the seals are sighted, a steamship can come up with them long before our little schooners can, and it is sealing law that the men upon the ground are in possession. And they are trying to harass and crush us, dragging men away to jail for months at a time, because of a little brandy sold, which hurts nobody—all to impoverish us and rob us of our schooners.

"We cannot endure it any longer. Last spring, when some spy betrayed my uncle's schooners, which had been one day out of season in the drift ice, we swore that we would show the government that even the *habitant's* patience is not eternal. That is why our men were so bitter against you when you arrived on the Blanche."

"Of course I knew nothing about this feeling, or I should have been more careful," Will answered. "There was no other boat for days, and I was anxious to get here as soon as possible. But that is all past, Mme. Dorion. What I would rather speak about is my lease of the lands you claim as yours.

"I assure you I did not even know such a claim existed until I was on my way up here. The lands are recorded as government property upon the maps. If I had known, I should have tried to arrange matters. And, after all, can't they be arranged without a lawsuit? I am only leasing them. I would be ready to pay a royalty, perhaps—if we could talk it over—"

He rambled on, feeling that his words were more and more ill-chosen, and stopped suddenly to see that her eyes were full of tears.

"I never want to hear of the lands again!" she cried, stamping her foot. "If I only were concerned, I would say, 'take them, M. Maitland, take them, lease and leasehold!' It is not I." She broke into unrestrained sobbing. "They have embittered my uncle's life and mine," she said.

"I'm sorry. I did not know this," Will stammered.

"I want to tell you," she answered, dabbing at her eyes with a bit of a handkerchief, hardly larger than the palm which held it. "When I was a child, brought here to my Uncle Jeremiah, who is really a cousin, no more, by a kinsman from the south shore, who knew he had not long to live—my father—"

She stopped incoherently, pulled herself together, and went on:

"From that first day of my Uncle Jere-

miah's charge of me I learned about the lands. It was the eternal theme of every conversation. My uncle was mad on the subject. They were supposed to have once belonged to the McGraemes. There had been bitter rivalry with the Dorions, who were as poor as we. My uncle had given his life to getting them into his family. At last he saw his chance. Emile Dorion, the seigneur—"

Will laid his hand on her arm. "I know," he said quietly. "Never mind! Why do you want to tell me?"

They were standing on the edge of the bay: the sun was just dipping into the horizon. It lit her face and seemed to transfigure it, it touched her brown hair and transformed it to a web of gold.

Something gripped Will's heart as he looked at the slight, frail, boyish figure—pity, not love: she could almost have been his daughter: she seemed too fine a thing to be the plaything of these cruel ambitions of two rival clans and races.

"I want to tell you," she aswered in a low voice. "I don't know why. I am going to tell you. Perhaps because I have done you a wrong, or because"—she turned and smiled at him in frank confidence—"because I trust you, M. Maitland."

Will swallowed the lump that rose in his throat: he did not answer her.

"Emile Dorion, the seigneur, was a sealer, like the rest of us. He had a boat of his own. My uncle financed him in a small way. He got to trust him. He fell under his influence. He was not strong-minded—a great, simple *habitant*, frank, honest, friendly to all, and—and a drunkard, *monsieur*. Strong — there was no man who dared oppose him: and, when he had been drinking, he was capable of any act of rashness. All the girls adored him—even I was at first fascinated by his boldness, his courage, and his looks. He was handsome—like a Viking, such as we read of in books. And one day he began to take notice of me.

"That night my uncle said to me. 'Emile Dorion has been asking me about you, Jeanne. Now is the chance to win back the Dorion lands.'

"I laughed, but I was destined to hear a great deal about it in the days to come. He fell in love with me. I became more and more afraid of him, of his violence, his drunkenness. All the time my uncle was playing him, as one plays a well-hooked fish. He told me that if I married him, Emile Dorion would settle the lands upon me as a marriage gift. And I had been brought up hearing nothing but the lands that ought to be ours. My uncle, Angus, all of them were at me constantly after the seigneur began his pursuit of me.

"I was not seventeen. Imagine how this constant persecution wore down my spirit. Every influence was brought to bear on me. At last I consented to marry him. Only, I insisted that it should not be until he came back from the spring sealing.

"He swore that he would make me his bride before he sailed. All the girls of the village thought I was very fortunate. They envied me, who would so gladly have changed places with any of them. But I held fast against my uncle and all of them, and, when I yielded, it was with the stipulation that the ceremony should take place an hour before the fleet sailed.

"When the marriage was performed, and I was Emile Dorion's wife, I ran from the church, distraught. From Presqu' Ile I watched the fleet set sail, carrying Emile Dorion, my husband, and my uncle with him, and I prayed—I prayed in my despair and wickedness that I might become a widow before the fleet returned. God heard that prayer, *monsieur!*"

Her face was deathly white now. "God heard that wicked prayer! Now I've told you. Now you can understand why I never want to hear the lands spoken of again. The lawsuit is my uncle's: it is not mine, even if it is brought in my name. I have done my part toward him."

Will was holding her hand, and his face was as white as hers with fury. "If I had known that when he gave me his hand yesterday—" he began.

She turned upon him quickly. "M. Maitland, that is what I came here to speak about. You must not trust him! Do not believe one moment that he means well by you! He has some scheme — I

don't know what it is. But be on your guard. That's all I wanted to say. Be on your guard!"

"I shall be on my guard. But what you've told me has troubled me a good deal—"

"Why?"

"Because I—am sorry for you, I suppose."

Her face hardened. "Don't be sorry for me. It's all past now, and I don't care—only—only—"

"Only?"

"I hate all this," she exclaimed passionately. "This life—this sordid life! It is not what my father would have had for me. He wanted me to be educated, to live in the world. Uncle Jeremiah promised him that he would send me to school, and all I ever learned was in the parish school, from the cure's books before he went to Rome, and from newspapers. I am ignorant—I know it—" She made one of her quick movements toward him. "M. Maitland," she went on: "you are an educated man. It's not the time now, so soon after I have wronged you, but some time I—I want to ask you to help and advise me, to tell me about books, what I should read, so that I can make something of myself."

"I'm anything but an educated man," said Will. "I've knocked about the world; that's been my education. I didn't learn much at college."

"You know the world, though," she said wistfully. "And I have never even been to Quebec!"

"You ought not to have to live here, Mme. Dorion—" Will began. But she interrupted him with a quick gesture. "Don't call me that!" she said, shuddering. "So long as I am here the memory of that marriage weighs on me. This trouble about the lands is only the old trouble in another form. I feel helpless in the midst of it all. I have begged my uncle to let me go away, but he doesn't understand. He has always lived here. I suppose I should not tell you all this."

The pathos of her tone rang in Will's ears long after. He took her hand in his.

"I'm glad you have, and that we have become friends," he said. "I'm going to think what advice to give you."

The sun had set, and they had turned back toward the road. Suddenly Jeanne uttered a low exclamation. Will looked up, to see Philippe La Rue coming toward them. He was not twenty yards distant, and had evidently been to Jeremiah's house.

He raised his hat to Jeanne. There was a sneering scowl on his face as he addressed her, ignoring Will.

"If you are going home, *madame,* permit me to escort you as far as your uncle's house."

"I won't take you out of your way," she returned.

"It will be a pleasure, *madame.*"

"I do not need it. Mr. Maitland is with me."

"So I perceive," returned the notary. "That is why I offered you my escort."

Will flushed and stepped forward. "Just what do you mean by that?" he demanded.

This story will be continued in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.

TO THE READERS OF ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

BECAUSE we have discontinued the Log-Book and Heart to Heart Talks I do not wish you to feel that the personal touch between readers and editor has become non-existent. I appreciate highly the flattering words you have said regarding those two departments and your regret over their passing. And because we have no section now in which to print them, do not feel that any letters you care to write me concerning stories or other matters connected with the magazine are tossed aside. They are all read, and I am happy to seize the chance this corner affords me to thank you for them. : : : : : THE EDITOR.

While Dorion Lives

by Victor Rousseau

Author of "The Eye of Balamok," "Draft of Eternity," "The Diamond Demons," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

LANDING at the sea-coast village of Bonne Chance, Will Maitland, who has leased the Dorion timber tract from the Canadian government, found himself taken for a spy to trap the village brandy-smugglers and an agent to pave the way for sealing steamers which would still further deprive the *habitants* of a livelihood. But Maitland's purpose was merely to locate a certain rare species of wood used in airplane manufacture, and he won the support of Paul Cawmill, lumberman, whose business he took over after repulsing a mob of the McGraemes single-handed and humiliating La Rue, the latter bank manager and justice of the peace, and the former schooner owners and smugglers with their stronghold at Presqu' Ile, where Maitland discovered the very timber of which he was in search. The work of cutting began, but La Rue instituted a strike and became Maitland's bitter foe. Meanwhile Maitland had met Jeanne Dorion, at first in an unfriendly encounter as her uncle, Jeremiah McGraeme, claimed for her the timber lands Maitland had purchased from the government, but later, when she came to know Will better, she told him how she had become a mere tool, having been forced to marry Emile Dorion, the seigneur, formerly at enmity with the McGraemes, in order to get the disputed lands into the family. But she had been Dorion's wife in name only, he having been lost at sea a few hours after the ceremony. In the walk in which Jeanne confided all this to Maitland, they chanced to meet Philippe La Rue, who offered to escort Jeanne as far as her uncle's house. But when she explained that she had the escort of Maitland, La Rue retorted: "That is why I offered you mine."

"Just what do you mean by that?" Will demanded, stepping forward.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TRAP.

THE girl stepped hastily between them. "Never mind, Mr. Maitland," she began. "I do not need your escort, Philippe. Won't you please leave us?"

"Unless he has something further to say to me," suggested Will hotly.

"Since you invite me, Mr. Maitland," sneered the notary. "I am not afraid of you, as you suppose, and if you lay your hands on me you'll learn that there's law and order even in Bonne Chance. Don't presume too far on our tolerance, or think that you can impose on our community with your fists."

"Is that what you have to say?"

"No! This is what I have to say! I've just come from Mr. McGraeme's house, and I understand that he wishes to show you every consideration pending the legal decision. But nevertheless you and Mme. Dorion are opponents in this case. I am her representative. I am justified in advising her not to permit herself to be waylaid by you and perhaps persuaded, or even compelled to take some action inimical to her interests."

"I was not waylaid by Mr. Maitland!" cried Jeanne hotly. "And I am quite capable of protecting my interests!"

"Now," said Will, "you have advised her, and you have heard her answer."

La Rue turned to Jeanne. "*Madame,*

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for November 27.

I ask again to be allowed to see you home. Otherwise—"

"Are you going to threaten me, Philippe La Rue?" asked the girl, with sudden anger.

"I am going to do my best for you and your uncle," he answered sullenly.

"Then I don't want your escort, if you must have it!"

"Therefore, you will kindly go on your way," Will added.

La Rue removed his hat again with a mocking bow, and, without glancing at Will, proceeded along the road. Jeanne watched him for a few moments. Then she turned to Will with a troubled look.

"He is going to make trouble for us," she said. "But I'm glad"—she held out her hand again—"glad we are friends!"

On the following morning Will's tide of ill-fortune began to turn, and Jeremiah's prognostication proved to be true.

It began with a deputation from the strikers, followed by the whole gang, and headed by Poulin, imploring Will to take them back again at their former wages. Ten days of steady drinking had depleted their funds to the vanishing point; nagged by their wives incessantly, and with the fear of their winter's jobs gone irretrievably, they had leaped at the mysterious hint circulated the night before that they would better go back to work.

They were frantic with fear of such a winter as Bonne Chance too often knew, through which one lived on food doled out by Alphonso Belley, the usurer, to be worked out with bitter labor among the seals, and in the camps during the ensuing summer.

By noon Will had the whole gang in the woods at work again, and the sound of the ax rang everywhere. The mill hummed, and the sawn fir-planks rapidly accumulated, ready for conveyance to Quebec.

Jeremiah McGraeme proved as good as his word, and, if he or La Rue chuckled in secret over any ulterior plan, everything ran for Will with perfect smoothness. It was now the middle of November, but the schooners were already being loaded, and would depart in a day or two.

Jeremiah's two vessels, those owned by the clan, and several more had been requisitioned, and the small sample load was going to become a fair-sized shipment. Angus, Eudore, and Alexandre participated in the loading; their manner was surly enough, but they were not Will's employees, and they seldom met.

It was a day or two before Will met Jeanne again. That was outside the post-office. She came up to him at once.

"I want to tell you," she said hurriedly, "I am convinced I was right when I said some scheme was being planned to injure you. The McGraemes laugh about something among themselves. You must be more careful than ever. Philippe La Rue is my enemy, now, and he has told my uncle of our meeting, and my uncle has not said one word to me. That alone would make me suspect some scheme. They are suspicious of me. They mean to ruin you. I want you to promise you'll be careful."

"I promise you I'm not asleep. But when shall I see you?"

She seemed disconcerted. "Mr. Maitland, I spoke foolishly to you that day. I was distressed, and I hardly realized what I said."

"You are not going back on our pledge?"

She laughed. "If it meant anything to you—"

"It meant that we were to be friends, whatever the outcome of this trouble about the lands."

"You didn't think, then—"

"What?"

"That I was presumptuous in asking help of you, after the way I had treated you, and that I was foolish?"

"I thought you were honoring me in making me your confidant."

"I've been worried since, because I thought I should not have told you what I did. But I meant it, Mr. Maitland," she continued earnestly. "Only just now this wretched business upsets me, I am so anxious about your shipment, and afraid some trap is being laid for you. You will be as careful and watchful as you can?"

"I will," he answered, impressed by her seriousness.

He knew that Jeanne had come to occupy his thoughts to an unreasonable degree. Now there would flash into his mind a picture of her, heading the crowd at the hotel, commanding him to leave the settlement, now he would see her taunting him from her horse upon the dunes, now apologetic and ashamed, but always loyal and brave, and strong in a sort of innocence which was, as it were, a spiritual armor.

Because it was years since any woman had entered his life, he told himself that he was a fool, and twice Jeanne Dorion's age, and put himself to work the harder. At last the loading was completed, and the schooners were to sail on the morning's tide. Will sat in his shack resting.

He was thinking that he would at last have a little leisure, and he meant to use it in order to discover the secret of the approach to the interior of Presqu' Ile. There must be a way through the swamps, a passage across the ravine.

Paul, to whom he had spoken of the matter, had at first professed ignorance, and had then given him one of those mysterious looks that were at once irritating and baffling. Jules Gingras had denied all knowledge of such a road.

Will was sure that it was known to every one of his workmen: but in their fear of the McGraemes, and with the natural secretiveness of the rustic mind, even his most loyal workmen had banded themselves together not to reveal it.

He did not blame them for preserving this secret of the countryside, but he was all the more resolved to find it out for himself. He was to discover it much more speedily than he had imagined. For as he sat there of a sudden the gibbering presence of Jean Desmoulins loomed out of the fog that had enwrapped Presqu' Ile.

"Ai, *monsieur,* you are to go to her!" babbled the idiot.

Will got up. "What's that? Who sent you here?" he asked.

"Ai, *monsieur,* it is she! It is Mme. Dorion! She has fallen down the cliff! She cannot move! She must see you at once, to tell you something!"

Will took him by the shoulders. "Who sent you to tell me that?" he said.

"Ai, *monsieur,* Mme. Dorion is hurt! Ai, come at once, *monsieur!*"

It was like the mechanical repetition of some record, impressed on the half-wit's brain. There was nothing more to be learned from Jean.

Will strode out of the shack in the wake of the half-wit, who was already striking his way across the swamps. The road which he had cut to the bay, along which the flume was ultimately to run, had been built with a great deal of patient labor and care; it ran in places on a firm substratum beneath shallow deposits of quicksand; piles had been driven here and there for a foundation, and corduroys laid down; out of it little trails ran everywhere, made by no stronger agency than the foxes which swarmed on the peninsula, and any of these might bear a man's weight or plunge him into a fathomless depth of bog and muskeg.

Yet Jean, leaving the road, struck out with sure confidence, and made his way along a narrow trail with withered swamp growth on either side of it. It wound interminably along the base of the hills, and Will could only vaguely estimate that they were roughly paralleling the Presqu' Ile shore.

Then, of a sudden, when he imagined that they were a quarter of a mile from the bay, there was disclosed before them a wide creek, narrowing, at the shore, into a hardly perceptible inlet, overgrown with bushes.

Yet in the mouth of the inlet, filling it entirely, a schooner lay moored and afloat. One might have swept the Presqu' Ile shore with glasses from the bay, and never dreamed that such an entrance existed.

Before them the ravine extended, its sheer cliffs sloping to the water's edge. They had approached through a break in the near side of the rocky wall, accessible only by means of the trail they had taken. It was impossible to follow the stream inland along either bank, for, at a distance of fifty yards, the cliffs rose to their prodigious height on either side of it.

Jean gibbered, and pointed to the schooner, and then, with a gesture of secrecy, swung to the left, and they began

to traverse an upland tract of spruce. Ten minutes more, and again the transverse ravine yawned in front of them. Will saw that at the point which they had reached the two sides, almost hidden beneath the trees, which grew to the very edges, approached each other within four or five feet.

Only here, for the ravine widened east and west, and the whole locality was so overgrown with brush and taller timber that one might never have guessed such a place existed, unless he stood there.

Jean leaped the chasm, and Will followed him. The half-wit struck straight out toward Bout de l'Ile. The river was not within sight, and Will was completely puzzled by the many twists and turns they had taken. He realized, however, that the chasm could be crossed from either side at this one point, and that there was a second passage down to the bay.

As they went on, with the woodsman's eye Will began to recognize the scenery. He had passed that way on the day of his exploration of the farther end of the peninsula from the lighthouse. He had traversed the same glades, turning back just where he was walking at present, and Jeanne must have been just across the leaping-point when he had seen her.

It seemed that Jean was leading the way immediately toward the lighthouse, but the man skirted the ravine, and presently came to a stop on the extreme edge.

At this point huge boulders overhung it, their bases enlaced with roots of trees. The tap-root of a huge pine formed a great arch between two rocks, each as large as Will's shack. Jean glanced back, gibbered, and swung himself beneath the archway.

Peering into the gloom, Will saw the rungs of a ladder just below the surface of the ground.

In a moment he was descending. The ladder was a long one; he counted twenty rungs before he saw a faint light at the bottom, and emerged in a cave half-way up the face of the cliff, concealed from sight on either side of the ravine by the overhanging rocks. From the mouth of the cave a winding track led down to the bottom of the cleft.

Jean looked back and pointed. Will followed him down the track, which had been widened here and there by cutting into the débris of the rocky wall. In a minute or two they reached the bottom of the ravine.

Jean scampered on. At first the passage seemed to lead straight toward the bay, until Will expected to see the rocky shore in front of him; but then it turned northward, paralleling the length of the peninsula. They began to scramble up among great masses of rock that strewed the ground as fantastically as if they had been hurled about by giants.

They struggled up a trail. High overhead towered the great watch-tower of scarp, the heart of the peninsula. They reached the summit of the precipice. And now the secret of the ravine disclosed itself.

They were standing on a road, the two or three inches of snow that covered it trodden hard by innumerable footsteps. The road ran down from the uplands to the gorge in which the stream flowed to the bay. They could hear the beating of the waves against the rocks of Presqu' Ile shore, which could not have been more than three hundred yards away.

But those three hundred yards were impassable, except by water. The road ended on the hither side of the great cliffs that barred the entrance. The only access by land was the immensely circuitous route that Jean had shown. By boat one could pass immediately into the bay through the hidden entrance. It was small wonder that the retreat of the McGraemes had remained undiscovered.

Will followed Jean up the road, which presently began to dip into a small, cup-shaped valley. It was a settlement, for it contained two or three fairly substantial cabins, and a strip of cultivated land, ragged with weeds and stubble. They passed a small, square structure, the still where half the illicit brandy of the countryside was brewed. A thin coil of smoke issued from the low chimney, and there came a blast of warmth from behind the locked doors.

A sudden squall blew in from the sea. The rush of mist obscured the stars. The

rain came down in drenching torrents. Struggling against the fury of the storm, Will followed his guide into the valley.

Here it was more sheltered. The clouds of rain, which drove overhead and lashed the mountainsides, here dropped only a drizzling sleet; but Will's hands were numbed with the frost, and the long journey aroused his fears for Jeanne to fever heat.

They passed a long, barnlike building. Will could see, by the light of two lanterns suspended from the interior of the roof, that it was packed with cases of all sorts and sizes, stacked up against the walls, containing contraband. Within the entrance a large number of brandy kegs were standing, as if they had just arrived, or were awaiting removal.

Jean ambled past, and, approaching the nearer of two cabins, which stood some little distance from the third, began to hammer upon the door, turning round to gibber at Will, who reached the threshold just as the door was opened timidly by the frightened, harassed-looking woman whom he had seen outside the stone chapel on Bout de l'Ile. She screamed a shrill inquiry at the grinning half-wit.

Will glanced past her into the cabin. It was a typical *habitant* dwelling, with a kitchen and living-room on the ground floor, and an upper story. The beams and rafters were of blackened pine. A long pipe from the kitchen stove protruded its sections through the wall, ascending to the upper part of the structure. There were a table, two or three chairs of the cheapest kind, and a gaudy, ill-woven rug of native workmanship upon the floor. On the walls were chromo lithographs of Sir Wilfrid Laurier and the Holy Family.

"Where is Mme. Dorion?" demanded Will, turning upon the woman. And, as she stared at him in fright, muttering unintelligibly, "She has been hurt!" he continued. "Where is she? Is she in this house?"

"*En haut, monsieur,*" gibbered Jean, pointing up the tumble-down stairs, which now began to be discernible in a far corner, by the light of a flickering oil lamp upon a shelf.

Jean disappeared into the rain. Disregarding the woman's shrill exclamations, filled with suspicion of some harm to Jeanne, Will ran toward the stairs, scaled them, and emerged into a single room running the whole length of the upper story, and containing three stretcher beds covered with dirty blankets, and a guttering candle.

Jeanne was not there. The room was empty. Will turned and went quickly to the head of the stairs. The woman was standing below, peering up at him with her hand over her eyes, and chattering in her shrill tones.

"Where is Mme. Dorion?" shouted Will again. And, as the woman shrilled back something that hardly sounded like mortal speech, he made his way quickly down.

"Mme. Dorion!" he bawled in Mrs. Angus's ear.

"She is not here!" she shrieked. "How should she be here?"

"She has been hurt. She sent for me."

"They lied to you, *monsieur*. It was Jean the Fool. Nobody listens to Jean the Fool. She has not been hurt, and she did not send for you. Merciful Heavens, what should she be doing at night on Presqu' Ile? You have been betrayed, *monsieur*. Run, while there is time!"

She clutched him fiercely by the arm. "The men will be back here in a moment!" she cried. "If they find you here they will murder you. I can't have murdering; I've got enough to stand. Go, M. Maitland!"

She pointed desperately through the open doorway into the darkness. The storm had increased in violence; gusts of wind drove the rain violently against the windows of the cabin, whistling into the room, and all but extinguishing the flickering oil-lamp.

"Go, M. Maitland!" shrilled the woman, and suddenly stopped, finger on lips. She darted to the door and closed it. Above the squalling wind and pelting rain they heard shouts of men running toward the cabin. There came a beating of fists against the door.

"Hide yourself!" whispered the woman, trembling, and pointing up to the loft.

"Quick! They'll kill you if they find you!"

The voice of Duncan bellowed without. "Open the door, Rose! We know you have that spy, Maitland, with you!"

The woman cast a desperate look at Will. She seemed now paralyzed with fear. There came a renewed onset.

"Open the door!" yelled a half-dozen voices. "We've got him! Open! He's trapped us this night, and, by Heaven, he'll pay for it!"

"I'll open the door when my husband orders me!" shrieked Rose McGraeme. "There's nobody here. Angus! Angus!"

The voices yelled in execration. The outlaws beat their fists furiously against the door. They set their shoulders to it. It cracked and swung from the top hinge, disclosing Will standing at the woman's side. With a roar of triumph they flung themselves against it, and the broken door collapsed inward, striking Will to the ground.

As he fell, he saw the little woman tossed aside, and run screaming into the rain. Then he saw Duncan, Eudore, and Alexandre, with two or three others. Eudore thrust a revolver muzzle against Will's forehead.

"*Eh bien, monsieur, l'espion,* we've got you now!" he snarled, his puffy face working with fury at the remembrance of his former punishment.

There was one second of imminent death, and then, as Eudore's finger tightened upon the trigger, one of the band leaped forward and dashed the muzzle aside. This man seemed less drunk than the rest, and Will fancied that he had once worked for him.

"Put up that pistol, Eudore!" he cried. "Give him a chance to tell how he came here."

"*Maudit!*" yelled Eudore, "the Blanche is off the point! That's why he came here!"

Will had managed to struggle to his knees. He remained perfectly still, but every single muscle was tense for action. For an instant a peaceful explanation seemed a possibility.

Then Duncan bellowed, pushed Eudore aside, and came leaping at Will, knife in hand. He struck furiously at his chest. Will's coat caught the knife, which glanced upward, only ripping the skin of his breast, and Will, as if uncoiling himself from his knees, plunged forward, his shoulder catching the smuggler in the stomach. Duncan, losing his balance, collapsed over him.

At the thrust the whole gang sprang forward. Eudore, with an oath, pressed the trigger. But his arm was shaken, and the bullet buried itself in a plank across the room. In the instant of confusion Will found his feet, and, with a sudden bound, wrested the revolver out of Eudore's hands and smashed the butt into his face.

By chance this blow struck the puffy-faced youth in exactly the same place where Will's fist had struck him before, and with exactly the same effect. But this blow had twice the force. Eudore's false teeth went flying into his throat again.

The ruffian plunged his fingers frantically into his gaping mouth, screaming in a high, whistling key, until he had freed his gullet and got his breath, when he bolted, out of action for good, sobbing with pain and choking with blood from the reopened wound.

Meanwhile the remaining five had hurled themselves on Will and wrested the revolver from his hand. He fought back grimly, and they struggled all round the little cabin, smashing into the furniture, which went crashing to the ground, staggering into the walls and rebounding from them.

The lamp was hurled from its shelf, and went out upon the floor with the smash of broken glass. But in the ensuing darkness it was impossible for whoever had the revolver to aim it, and this saved Will from immediate murder.

As the lamp went out he perceived Duncan in front of him, his knife in his hand, pressing through the mob to thrust at him. Upon the outlaw's right was Alexandre, also with a knife. Will seized Duncan's right wrist with his left hand, and ran his knuckles down the back of the fist, a schoolboy trick, the pressure on the sinews opening Duncan's fingers with a spasmodic jerk that sent the knife clattering upon the floor. At the same time he drove his fist

full into Alexandre's face, catching the man between the eyes and hurling him back into the mob behind him.

Conscious that Duncan was his most dangerous antagonist, Will did not loose his hold upon his wrist, but, dragging him with him as he advanced, used his right fist like a piston, with terrific effect against the struggling crowd, closely packed in the dark room.

In this way he inflicted unbearable punishment, knowing that every man was his enemy, while the smugglers could not distinguish him among the crowd, and became jammed together in the door, toward which Will was fighting his way.

Will's hand closed upon a broken chair. Swinging it about him, he cleared his passage; but to do so he was compelled to release Duncan, who made a furious rush at him, butting him in the chest and sending him staggering back. The chair, whirled round his head, struck the long stovepipe, and brought it clattering down, striking Will to the ground, and filling the room with dust and soot.

The fall of the mass of iron dazed Will for a moment. As he tried to rise, the whole pack was upon him with whoops of triumph. A wooden bar struck him across the forehead. He staggered to his knees, but everything was turning black, and Duncan's evil face, glaring into his own, was fading. He heard the smuggler shouting for a knife to finish the job. Blows and kicks rained on him.

And suddenly there came a roar of fire. Coals from the fallen stovepipe had come in contact with the spilled oil from the broken lamp. In an instant the wooden cabin was ablaze. It was so much dry tinder, rotted by years and weather, and parched to a powdery fiber by the inner heat of the cabin. The wind fanned the flames, and they took hold and ran with lightning speed from rafter to rafter.

Duncan, who seemed nonplused without a weapon, kicked Will again and again with brutal savagery. There were yells outside the blazing cabin. Suddenly the smugglers turned and ran. Will, upon the borderland of unconsciousness, was faintly aware that Duncan's kicks had ceased.

He tried to rise, but the fiery heat was all about him, and a wall of fire between him and the door was driving inward upon the wind. Dimly he fancied that he heard Jeanne's voice calling him. He fell back, and a vast pit of darkness seemed to open beneath him.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TRAP IS SPRUNG.

JEANNE'S spontaneous confession to Will had left her ashamed and troubled. She could not understand how she had come to voice her secret thoughts to this stranger, this man who had been, the week before, her enemy. She was careful to avoid him thereafter.

After the meeting outside the post-office, however, she felt more comfortable. He had neither presumed nor misinterpreted her. She thought of him a great deal more than suited her ease of mind, all the same, and the consciousness that something was afoot increased her restlessness.

Her feelings toward La Rue had undergone a complete revulsion. Perhaps it was the contrast between him and Will Maitland.

She could hardly look at him now without aversion. She knew, though his manner toward her was unchanged, and he made no allusion to the encounter on the road, that he had told her uncle. And, as she had told Will, Jeremiah's silence was what convinced her that trouble threatened Will.

The old man, who had come to dominate Bonne Chance by luck and sheer personality, was no match in brains for La Rue or any educated man or woman. He made up for this lack by an intense, half-malignant, half-curious suspicion of every one. Jeanne knew that his impulse would have been to have stormed at her and wrung from her an explanation of her conversation with the common enemy.

He said nothing. He even became jocular. His kinsmen, the McGraemes, who were never admitted to his house as equals, visited him, and he drank their own brandy with them. There was a vast, half-con-

cealed amusement among the members of the McGraeme clan over the fir shipment.

And all of them had come to look upon her, not as an enemy, but as one who could not be trusted. Jeanne had been Jeremiah's go-between; it was she who had enabled her uncle to carry on his business with the smugglers, while maintaining his dignity and aloofness. It was she who signalled "All clear" to the smugglers' schooners from the balcony of the stone chapel, when they lay in the secret cove, awaiting the dip of the flag that was to start them on their run.

Now she had tacitly become an outsider. And, burning with loyalty to her people and hatred of the revenue men, Jeanne felt the new situation intensely.

On the day before the schooners were to sail with Will's lumber, Jeanne could not rest a moment. The household duties were mostly performed by an old *habitant* woman who had worked for her uncle since his wife's death, a number of years before. This left the girl largely free. She spent the day wandering along the shore; a dozen times she was tempted to go to Will; but always the inadequacy of any possible excuse restrained her.

Sunset came. When she returned her uncle seemed in a feverish impatience. He upbraided her with her absence.

"I suppose ye've been with Mr. Maitland, eh, Jeanne?" he purred, in his soft falsetto that preluded the storm.

"Why should you think that?" she demanded, turning to meet his gaze steadily.

Jeremiah exploded in a string of French oaths—he never swore in English; perhaps he had some hazy notion that the Deity spoke English. "Havena ye been gossiping and hobnobbing with him day in and day out along the road, and at the post-office?" he stormed.

It was his first allusion to what he had known for some time.

"I have talked with Mr. Maitland—yes," answered the girl defiantly. "Why not? He is not my enemy."

"Whose is he, then? Tell me that, eh, Jeanne? Whose lands am I fighting for and spending good money with lawyers for?"

"Mine. But did you ask me? Have you consulted me, or given me any accounting for these expenses?"

"Ye're not of age!" thundered Jeremiah; but he winced; she had dealt a home thrust, and he felt as if the ground were cut from under his feet. Jeremiah had considered Jeanne's interest in the lands as something that he need never regard seriously. Legally, an accounting would be due shortly.

"If you are bringing a suit against Mr. Maitland on my account, you haven't treated him rightly," she continued. "You know he is no government man—yet you have set our kinsmen against him. You have permitted Bonne Chance to think that of him, and you knew in your heart it was not true."

"I told him I knew it wasna true!" shouted her uncle. "Go on, Jeanne! Tell me next ye'll marry him and bring the lands to him!"

"You are unjust to me as well," she retorted. "And it all springs from the same root. Since my father brought me to you, you have used me for your own ends. You—"

He took her by the wrists and drew her to the window. His face was pale with passion.

"Dorion again, eh, Jeanne?" he asked; but there was no sneer in his voice now. "Ye're quit of him. It wasna for me. It was for the McGraemes—for you, for the children ye might have had. They were not my ends. Ye've got a bitter tongue, lass, when your heart's speaking through it. Aye, I know!" he let her hands fall. "Go your way, then. If duty counts for nought—"

She was full of remorse instantly. "It's no use saying any more, Uncle Jeremiah," she said. "Let us forget this."

"Aye, we'll forget," he answered sullenly.

She left him and went down to the shore. It had been a clear evening, but the fog was creeping over the bay like a white wall, blotting out, one by one, the distant lights of Bonne Chance. She had never felt so lonely and so wretched. She had told Will of her desire to leave Bonne Chance, but

she knew that its associations hateful though they were, were woven inextricably with her life.

Her uncle cared for her in a way, too, as she for him. If there were some way in which she could turn his mind from his besetting passion, everything would be changed for her. Mingled with these thoughts was her ever-present fear for Will, and her fear lest he should realize the extent of her interest.

She had turned back toward the house when the sight of a dark figure upon the beach startled her. Then she recognized Jean Desmoulins. The half-wit was ambling forward at his accustomed gait; he would have to pass her at that narrow angle of rock and sea, and she stood still and awaited him.

He saw her and tried to dodge past her, but Jeanne held her ground, put out her hand, and caught him by the shoulder.

"What is the matter? Where have you been?" she asked breathlessly.

"Ai, ai, let me go!" mewed the half-wit. "I am a poor imbecile!"

"Not too imbecile to tell me what you have been doing!"

He squirmed in her grasp, but Jeanne knew that the least show of force cowed him. "You shall not go until you tell me!" she cried. "It is Mr. Maitland!"

"Ai, ai, let me go, Mme. Jeanne!"

"You are going to tell me!" the girl persisted vehemently. "Where is Mr. Maitland?"

"He is in Mme. Angus's house," answered Jean sullenly. And, as the girl started involuntarily, he squirmed out of her clutch in an instant, and was running along the shore, looking back every score of paces to utter menacing shouts.

Jeanne, half stunned by the news, and dreading the worst, suddenly heard a sound that brought her back to herself effectively. It was the dip of oars in the sea, followed by the grating of a keel upon the shingle beyond the rocks. In an instant she was racing along the beach. She climbed the rocky ledge, and saw, beyond it, large against the mist, the uniformed officers and sailors of the revenue department, guiding their rowboat into the secret cove.

She turned and ran full speed into the woods. As she reached the ravine she heard the voices of the seamen below, echoing in sibilant whispers from the flank of the precipice as they guided their boat up the stream. She swung herself down the ladder and ran like a chamois along the rocky trail, climbing with panting lungs, but never slowing her steps, until she saw a blaze of light leap fiercely from the valley beneath her.

In front of it the figures of the smugglers moved, black against the flames. Within she saw two struggling forms. She darted to the entrance. Will lay, apparently unconscious, and almost encircled by the fire. Bending over him was Duncan.

She grasped the ruffian by the arm and swung him fiercely away from his victim. She dashed her fists into his face. With an oath Duncan turned and broke from the hut.

Jeanne grasped Will's body in her arms and dragged him to the entrance through the approaching walls of fire, which singed her hair and scorched her clothing. The reeking smoke stifled her, and she stumbled upon the entrance, half unconscious. Then hands seized her and Will and carried them into the open.

Will, opening his eyes, became confusedly aware that the choking heat was gone. The rain dropped softly on his face, but suddenly the clouds parted, and the moon shone out, filling the whole valley with light. He looked up into Jeanne's face.

"Where am I?" he muttered, wondering why his head was on her knee, and why she wept.

And, fighting back the stupor, he sat up. His head reeled from the blow he had received, and the fumes of the blazing cabin; he was bruised by the ruffian's kicks, but neither burned nor wounded.

As Jeanne tried to restrain him he heard a jovial voice addressing him.

"*Hein,* you had a narrow escape, *monsieur!*" it cried. "He is recovering. I told you so, *madame!* How do you feel, M. Maitland? Take it easy now; the danger is over, and if I had the chance I would lie there forever!"

Will recognized Lessard, captain of the

Blanche, coatless, black, perspiring, and pertinaciously devil-may-care.

"Just in time, M. Maitland!" he went on. "Another minute and I wouldn't have given a keg of *habitant* brandy for your life. Excuse me!"

He darted forward to receive and direct a procession that was coming through the trees. It consisted of some sailors from the Blanche, led by another officer. Herded into their midst, handcuffed, and scowling at Will with murderous hate, were Angus, Eudore, and Alexandre McGraeme, with two others. The first of these, who had taken no part in the attack on Will, had returned just in time to walk into his captors's arms and see his home in flames.

Eudore was hardly recognizable with his cut and swollen lips. Alexandre's eye was closed, and fast blackening, from Will's blow. As they passed Will they snarled at him like wild beasts.

"Just in the nick of time, M. Maitland!" continued Captain Lessard heartily, coming back to where Will sat. "I am glad, for your sake, for assuredly it was a brave act that you performed to-night. Those men admit that they meant to murder you. Well, we've got them, anyway, and we'll take no chances on their getting away before we reach Quebec. It's a feather in my cap, if I say so myself. We'd been trying to locate this place these two years past, but we'd never have found the entrance if your men hadn't guided us."

Will heard a sharp exclamation from Jeanne. She had drawn away from him, and was looking at him with an intense questioning upon her face. Not far away he became conscious that Paul Cawmill was standing, sheepish, but smiling. Paul favored him with a wink of enormous significance.

"The neatest trap I ever heard of, *monsieur,*" continued the garrulous captain, turning to watch some of the seamen, who were carrying out the kegs of brandy. "To let them think that they could run their brandy right into Quebec beneath your lumber! I don't know how you contrived to win those fellows' confidence. I had a man along this coast six months, and he knew no more when he left than when he arrived. And twenty score of gallons—the largest consignment ever captured! Well, *monsieur,* your wood will now get free freightage to Quebec, anyway, and we'll get the schooners, and maybe a taste or two of the brandy all round, eh, boys?"

Will began slowly to realize something of the snare that had been set for him, although he could not follow it in all its implications. He saw that Jeanne had gone.

"Captain Lessard, I sent you no message!" he cried angrily. "I had no men to guide you!"

Lessard looked ludicrously penitent. "Ah, *monsieur,* no need to say any more," he answered. "I understand. Perhaps I have been a little indiscreet. But it should be five years before these good fellows"—he winked toward his prisoners—"are home again, and you will find your work more profitable in their absence. Five counties got their brandy from that still, which we shall demolish to-morrow morning," he added. "Well"—to the captives—"'tis the fortune of war, *mes braves.* Next time we shall bring back M. Duncan to keep you company. *Ben! Marchez, donc, mes enjants!*" he cried cheerily to the captives.

And sullenly the handcuffed men took up the trail toward the waiting boat, while the sailors followed them, carrying their spoil. The burning cabin was already sinking into a mass of red-hot cinders. The rain had recommenced. Will waited till he was alone.

Not wholly, for he became conscious of Paul Cawmill, wearing that intensely irritating look of wisdom upon his face.

"Well! What have you to say?" demanded Will, rounding sharply upon him.

Paul rubbed his hands. "Ah, *monsieur,* it was wonderful! It was a masterpiece!" he exclaimed. "Did I not tell you that you could rely absolutely on my discretion? Yes, *monsieur,* and, when you kept up the play with me, did I not give you back as good as you gave, telling you that I knew nothing of the entrance to this valley?"

"You showed those revenue men the path in my name?" shouted Will.

Very slowly the pleased grin faded from

Paul Cawmill's face. "*Ah, la, la, monsieur!*" began the foreman.

Will struck out straight from the shoulder and knocked Paul flat. Without waiting to ascertain the effects of his blow, which set his own head to aching again terrifically, he turned and made his way past the smouldering ruins of Angus's home toward the smaller cabin, whither Jeanne had gone.

He knocked at the door, and, when no answer came, opened it. Two women were within. One was Mme. McGraeme, seated huddled up in a chair, her apron over her face, rocking herself and moaning. The other was Jeanne, leaning over the table, her face in her hands, and the tears streaming through her fingers. She did not look up or pay the least attention as Will entered, nor when he began to speak.

"You saved my life—" he began huskily. "Mme.—Jeanne Dorion, listen to me!"

She raised her head and looked at him steadily. There was neither scorn nor hatred upon her face, but it seemed to Will at that moment as hard as the granite face of her uncle.

"You must listen to what I have to say," said Will.

"Please say nothing, Mr. Maitland!" she answered. "I realize that you had your duty to do. It was your task to betray and help capture those poor men. You used the only means that were in your power. If you traded on the good-will and faith of a woman, and used me—well, I should have understood that you had no alternative."

"You shall listen to me!" said Will insistently.

"I do not intend to, for there is nothing that you can say. I have uttered reproaches to you where I ought to have remained silent. I mean neither to reproach you nor to speak to you again. I take the blame. I have only this one thing to say: I have known good men, and bad men, and treacherous and loyal men, but never before a man whose duty it happened to be to trick a woman as you tricked me!"

"What were the words you used to me in Bonne Chance?" asked Will vehemently. "That some scheme was being planned to injure me. That they meant to discredit me, and ruin me besides."

"I heard what Captain Lessard said to you."

He went to her side. "Jeanne, won't you look at me and see if you still believe that I am a trickster?" he asked gently.

Mme. Angus raised her head. "No, he is not to blame, Jeanne," she muttered. "He came to find you. They trapped him here. Jean the Fool brought him."

Jeanne caught her breath. Under the compulsion of Will's demand she rose to her feet and faced him. Her eyes, resting on his, tried to search into the depths of his soul. Neither of them perceived the shadow that the moonlight cast on the wall, where no shadow had been, nor the vicious, evil, distorted face of Duncan as he lurked outside the door, the revolver leveled.

"Will you swear to me—" began Jeanne. "Will you swear to me that it was a lie—what Lessard said to you? That I"—she caught her breath—"I can believe in you again?"

The shot rang out before Will's lips could frame an answer to the girl's challenge. Will spun round, pitched forward upon his face, and lay motionless upon the floor of the cabin.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WHITE DEVIL.

THOUSANDS of miles away a man reclined under the slight shade of a thorn tree in the jungle of Guiana. His convict suit was rags, rent by the jungle thorns that had crisscrossed his face and hands and arms with bloody scratches. Wherever the blood had oozed a little cloud of flies clustered and buzzed and settled, so that each scratch was an inflamed ulcer. He was half-naked, starving, worn from want of sleep, and upheld only by the implacable resolution that seemed like a coal in his heart.

His hair and beard were blond, but his skin had been burned to a dull yellow-red by the sun's rays, scorching and peeling until it had acquired a protective pigmen-

tation on the exposed parts that gave him a strangely mottled look. He was in odd contrast with the littler, plumper, dark-haired man at his side, who awoke out of his sleep to lift up his voice in lamentation.

"Curse you!" he wailed. "I wish that I had stayed on the Devil's Island instead of joining you in this crazy adventure. There we had food and sleep, and some day we might have been set free. Now, if they catch us, we shall never be free. At least, why won't you give me a chance to rest, instead of hurrying on like this? Let us turn back to the last village. We were well fed there, and there is no danger of pursuit now."

The other snarled back at him in tones that quickly reduced the little man to submission.

"God knows I didn't want you for my companion, Blackbeard! Why did I take you? Because they made us companions, being both from Miquelon. Well, go back and give yourself up, if you love captivity! The gendarmes are not far behind!"

"No, no, I'll stay with you, Ironlimbs," wailed the other. "I'm a true comrade. I'm a man of my word. I said I'd stand by you to the end, and I'll do it. But other men are not like you. When you were dying of dysentery your coffin was already made, and the grave blasted in the rock—yet you got well. Are you a man or a devil?"

The other's face twisted into a grotesque grin. Crouching beneath the thorn, he looked like some huge jungle beast, rather than a man.

"I don't know whether I am a devil or a man, now, Blackbeard," he answered. "Once I was a man. But, if I am not a devil now, there is a devil inside me, and he has promised me that I shall not die until I get my hands about the throat of the man who betrayed me. He is a good devil, and I trust him just as much as I used to trust God."

"What did you do, Ironlimbs?" whimpered the other. It was the one question that convicts never ask each other upon the Devil's Isle, because the murderers would be at the throats of the traitors to France, if they knew who they were. But in the jungle this convention lost its hold over the dark man. "It must have been something magnificent," he continued. "You killed a priest, perhaps!"

"I killed a gendarme. But it was on Miquelon Isle, as you know, and they sent me to France, and France sent me here to rot, all because there is no guillotine on Miquelon. That's nothing. They did their duty. It is the man who betrayed me that I am after. I don't know who he was, but my devil will tell me when I am near enough to get my hands round his throat and see his eyes bulging out, and his face blackening. What did you do, Blackbeard?" he continued, without much interest.

"Me?" whimpered the other. "I killed my woman—not in Miquelon, but in France. She had a lover, and they would have acquitted me, only there was a little insurance in my name, and so they would not believe me. Listen, Ironlimbs! Let us turn back to that comfortable village, and rest till we are strong enough to continue the journey. We shall be quite safe there, and we can sleep."

The fair man, giving a contemptuous shrug, rose and began to limp along the track, and his companion, after voluble protests, limped after him.

Thus they made their way in single file along the path frequented equally by the Indian, jaguar, tapir, and deer. It was nothing but a trail, generations old, through the saw-edged grass. The low-lying lands along the French Guiana coast are a fever-stricken morass, and almost uninhabited. The black-haired man's teeth began to chatter as the cool night wind struck him. He followed his companion, moaning and cursing under his breath, until at last they emerged into a little clearing, planted with manioc and cassava.

Among the plantations a few huts were clustered. In front of these a half-dozen Indians and coolies were squatting over the cassava pot. Without a word, the famished men joined the circle, dipping their hands greedily into the mess. The stolid natives evinced no surprise at their appearance.

When they had eaten, the two fugitives made their way into a near hut and sat down, the fair man squatting with his knees drawn up and his back against the circle of poles, the other lying down, with his tattered coat for a pillow. He let his head fall back, and was soon asleep.

Notwithstanding his contemptuous reception of the dark man's plea of fatigue, it was clear that the fair man was fatigued to the point where it was impossible to keep awake. Gradually his eyes closed. Once or twice he opened them with a slight start, surveying his companion with a suspicious stare. Then sleep conquered him. His head drooped on his breast, his hands hung limp at his sides.

As soon as he was sure that his companion was not feigning, the black-haired man sat up, crept to his feet, listened for a moment to the other's breathing, and slunk out of the hut, heading back along the trail by which they had come. His gait was altogether different now; he ran at a steady jog-trot, with occasional pauses, covering the ground at a rapid rate, until he stopped, a little more than an hour later, at the village through which they had last passed.

It was very similar to the other, with the same huts and manioc fields; the only essential difference consisted in the young French officer and two troopers of the Guiana Police, who, having just arrived, were unbuckling their belts and seating themselves at a folding table, on which a native servant was laying a cloth for supper.

"Well, so you are here!" growled the lieutenant. "I thought you had betrayed us!"

"Not me," laughed the black-haired man. "But that fellow is a devil. He would walk, and he hasn't slept for two nights till now. I knew you would not wish to capture him awake, for assuredly he would be more than a match for all of you, in spite of your revolvers. *Diable,* I have seen him catch a bushmaster and wring its head from its body!"

"We'll see about that!" snapped the lieutenant. "As soon as we have dined you shall lead us on the way."

"Wait a moment," pleaded the convict. "It is understood, then, that my pardon is to be recommended to the Government in return for this service? *Diable,* he would tear me to pieces if we were put together on the Island again!"

"That was promised you by the magistrate at Petit Pot, to whom you went with your project of betrayal. It is the custom, and assuredly you will not be wrongly dealt with. But you've been a devil of a time in getting him in our hands."

The other shrugged his shoulders. "It is hard work to catch a devil," he said. "If he had suspected me, he would have torn me limb from limb. I had to go cautiously."

"Lead the way, and let us have no more of your talk!" said the lieutenant, finishing his meal hastily.

The three soldiers buckled on their belts, and the black-haired man led the way along the trail, followed by the lieutenant, with his loaded revolver in his right hand, and the two dismounted troopers, each similarly armed. After about an hour and a half the party reached the village. It was abandoned by the Indians, who, fearing the white man in the hut, had taken to the jungle.

"Where is he?" demanded the lieutenant in a low voice.

The traitor, stricken with a ghastly fear that his comrade was likewise gone, crept to the entrance of the near hut, and peered in. Then he smiled, and beckoned to the officer, himself stepping out of the way.

Inside the hut, reclining exactly as when he had sat down, was the escaped prisoner. A long knife lay beside one knotted hand, and the great chest rose and fell with labored breathing. The man's teeth gritted as memories of the past flitted, ghost-like, through his brain and tormented him.

Suddenly, as if impelled by the gaze fixed upon him, the man's eyes opened. And instantly the prisoner was awake. With a single bound he was upon his feet and in the midst of the party. As he sprang, he had contrived to seize the knife in his right hand.

He did not stab, however, but, still holding the knife, grasped the traitor, lurking in the entrance of the hut, and flung his

arms about him. The black-haired man, helpless in his grip as a rabbit caught by a constrictor, yelled frantically. But the two were so intertwined in their struggle that it would have been difficult for any of the soldiers to fire without the risk of killing the informer.

The knife, held at the traitor's throat, pricked the skin lightly. A drop of blood appeared. The black-haired man's terror grew extreme, and turned his face a livid grey. One of the soldiers stepped up and placed his revolver behind the blond man's head, turning to look at the lieutenant, who, however, shook his head as, with a short laugh, the fair man threw the knife out of the hut and turned to salute his captors with a bow of mockery.

"Enough, *Monsieur!*" he said to the lieutenant. "I do not mean to hurt him. I have bigger game than that in mind. That was an experiment, so that I may know how I shall feel when my devil tells me that I am holding the right man."

"He is mad!" whispered one of the soldiers to his companion, who nodded. But the madness passed out of the prisoner's eyes, and the man waited patiently for his handcuffs.

"You were wise not to kill him," said the lieutenant, who felt that he was speaking with a man of character. "I have had exceptional interest in tracking you."

"And I have had enough of traitors," answered the other. "I am glad to be taken. He need not be afraid of me; you can leave is two together if necessary. He is a pretty rascal, and I suspected something like this when he told me that he killed his woman for the insurance money."

"It is a lie! She had a lover!" screamed the black-haired man, dancing frantically in a cloud of dust raised by his own movements upon the mud floor of the hut. "*Monsieur,* you will solicit my pardon from the government according to the promise that has been given me?"

"Shut up!" said the lieutenant, casting a contemptuous glance at him. "You will receive your deserts and more, you may be sure of that." He turned to the fair man again, and a smile broke out on his face. He addressed him as an equal.

"It has been a great pleasure to me to find you, *monsieur,*" he said, "because I am able to inform you that your pardon arrived from France three days after your abrupt departure from the Island. Consequently, you have been a free man these six weeks past, although it will probable be necessary for you to wait till spring for a government transport."

"Damnation!" shrieked the other. "But you will still recommend me to the government, *monsieur?* I did my best! You will tell them that—"

"Stop his noise!" said the lieutenant curtly to the two troopers, who stopped it.

"So, *monsieur,* you will return with me, to await the government vessel, and to receive the customary gratuity," the lieutenant continued.

The blond man was silent, but the light that had been in his eyes when he had the knife at the traitor's throat was there again. It was possession. Men who had looked into his eyes when that mood came upon him had spread the story that he was possessed; and even the wardens, brutalized as they were, had found it advisable not to meddle with him too much at the time of his seizure.

"Oh, I'm willing! I've nothing against the government!" answered the fugitive, bursting into a peal of laughter. "They've treated me all right. I earned what I got. I have other fish to fry."

The lieutenant looked at him curiously. "Yes, *monsieur?*" he asked politely. "I trust you will not find that things have altered much in your world since you came to us."

"Oh, no, indeed! I'm going home to kill another man," responded the other nonchalantly. "And my devil has just told me that I'm going to do it."

CHAPTER XV.

THE STORY OLD.

FOR three days and nights Will's life hung so evenly in the balance that it was impossible to say which way the scales were likely to fall. The bullet had passed under the left shoulder, piercing the

lung, breaking a rib, and emerging an inch above the heart.

There was no doctor in Bonne Chance, but a bonesetter, brought from a neighboring hamlet, came, looked, and reported that Will would certainly die four days later, coinciding with the full of the mon.

During those three days and nights Jeanne sat at his bedside, hardly stirring, and never closing her eyes until the fourth morning, despite the peremptory messages of her uncle. Then the scales fell. Will opened his eyes and knew her.

After that the danger grew gradually less, and Will's semi-consciousness began to be permeated by glimpses of faces—Jeanne's, and that of Mme. Angus, once Paul's, and, later, those of Gingras and Poulin.

By the end of the second week the danger was past. Will was sitting up in bed in the cabin. Jeanne now came to sit with him daily, returning home at nightfall.

One of the first men whom Will asked to see was Paul. Paul had come every day, always to be driven away by Jeanne, after a brief glimpse at Will. Will noticed a fading bruise upon his cheek, the mark of his blow. That had weighed on him throughout his illness and he had been eager to make things right with the little foreman at the first opportunity.

Paul, admitted at last for an interview, after Jeanne had registered a strong protest, came in with his customary joyousness, rubbing his hands.

"*Eh bien,* M. Maitland, how are you to-day?" he cried. "We are all happy to know that you are getting on so well. You will be pleased to see the work we have done on the corduroys since you have been ill. And the snow is sufficient for hauling now, *monsieur*—if, indeed, it is your intention to continue the cutting," he continued, fixing his eyes somewhat dubiously on on those of his employer.

Will glanced out at the landscape, now snowbound, and back at Paul.

"Paul," he said, "never mind the lumber now. I'm sorry I struck you. It was a cowardly thing to do, and I hope you'll forget it."

"Ah, *monsieur,* that was nothing at all!" answered Paul. "I was discreet enough to understand, *monsieur.* You thought that Mme. Dorion overheard Captain Lessard, and so you must carry on the play. And yet, *monsieur,* I feel that there exists a misunderstanding between us."

"I feel that decidedly," said Will, "because I don't understand in the least what you are talking about. I want to have this out with you. Did you warn the authorities that there was a plot to smuggle brandy into Quebec aboard those schooners, under cover of the lumber?"

"But no, indeed, *monsieur!*" protested Paul warmly. "It was not my business. It was you who did that, as we all know, employing the half-witted man!"

"I?" cried Will, so loudly that Jeanne came to the door and stood there for a moment in frowning irresolution, half-minded to end the interview, and send Paul away.

"Ah, *monsieur,* what need is there now to keep up the pretense with me?" pleaded the foreman.

Will drew in a breath to calm himself. "Go on, Paul," he said. "Explain to me why you suppose I knew anything about the Blanche."

"But certainly, M. Maitland!" answerer Paul confidently. "Did I not tell you that day at the hotel, when you offered me the job, that I am a poor man with a wife and family, and therefore I will spy for you?"

"Either you are a liar or a lunatic!" shouted Will, growing enraged at Paul's infantile air and look of injured innocence. "No, Jeanne! I am going to have it out with this fool before he leaves. It would throw me back terribly if he went away before I've finished with him."

"But, *monsieur,*" pleaded Paul softly, "did you not tell me that day at the hotel, when you hired me to work for you, that it was to cut fir for airplanes? And that I must not tell a soul about this?"

"I did. And you blabbed the story immediately."

"But, M. Maitland, did I not wink at you, and did you not wink back at me?"

Will, remembering that wink, which he had most certainly not returned, was silent, because there no longer existed any words

which were of service to express his feelings.

"*Ben, monsieur!*" began Paul, gathering confidence from Will's silence. "For a minute I believe you. But then quickly I understand. 'He is a poor, ignorant *habitant*,' you think. 'He will believe me.' But what man in his senses would believe such a mad tale, *monsieur*, about cutting down fir trees to make airplanes?

"So I understand what passes in your mind, because, although a *habitant*, I am a discreet and intelligent man. 'He is a poor, ignorant *habitant*,' you think. 'He will tell everyone about these airplanes. So much the better. That takes the suspicion from me, and very soon I trap the McGraemes and seize all their brandy, and take it to Quebec with me.'

"Good God!" was all Will could say.

"*Puis*, M. Maitland," continued Paul, growing quite bold with his explanation, "I wink at you, and you wink back at me. You say to yourself: 'He is not such a fool after all, this *habitant* Paul.' So then I pluck up the courage to tell you of Hector Galipeault's brandy-cellar, because you hire me to spy for you. But that is too small a thing for you. It is to trap the big men that you are come here. That I see, because the Government has given you so much money to play at lumbering that it is evident they will pay anything to capture the McGraemes.

"Well, *monsieur*, you pretend not to understand me. You put me on my mettle. I have already told that story about the airplanes through Bonne Chance, and they are all deceived by it; yet you do not trust me. Every time that I approach you, as man to man, you say: 'Paul, do not be mysterious!' In vain I tell you of my discretion. You have no faith in me.

"So there is nothing for me to do but wait. And when Jean comes to me and tells me that you have arranged for the Blanche to come that night, and have gone ahead, and that I am to show the way to the officer, of course I obey. And *voila!* Everything comes off just as you planned it. It was a masterpiece."

"I begin to see at last," said Will, gulping. "I thought you were a fool, Paul."

"But now, *monsieur*, at last you see that I am to be trusted," suggested Paul hopefully.

"Now, Paul, I understand why God made the backwoods and put men like you in them," answered Will. "Well, the mischief's done. The work must go ahead. You will understand in future that you are hired by me to take charge of my lumbering, and not to spy, eh, Paul?"

"It is your intention to continue to lumber, then, *monsieur?*" asked Paul, mystified. But, as Will stared at him without answering, a look of illumination spread over his countenance, and, favoring him with a wink of enormous significance, he withdrew.

As Will had said, the mischief was done. The smugglers' haunt was a secret no longer; the gang had been effectually disrupted. Only Duncan remained, and he had departed for parts unknown, and was not likely to return.

Bonne Chance breathed a sigh of relief. The opinion was general that Will was in some way responsible for the betrayal, but Bonne Chance did not care. The lumbering promised a winter's occupation to all who wanted it. It was now December, and the thick snow made conditions ideal for lumbering. Navigation had closed, the lighthouse gleamed no longer, and ice choked the bay. Two weeks before the buoys had been picked up by the pilotage vessels from Quebec. The land lay bound by winter.

Jeanne and Will had grown very intimate in those days of his illness, when she had defied her uncle's command that she remain at home, and had gone daily to the cabin to care for him. She had brought linen and comforts, and when Jeremiah alternately sneered and menaced, had demanded of him whether he was willing to have Will's death on his conscience. Of late, however, the girl had grown more reserved toward Will; he could not help noticing this, but, wrestling with his own heart, he had said nothing.

The love that he had put out of his life so many years had returned with a strength that overwhelmed him, and he fought it instinctively, because he knew that it

threatened to sweep away the personality which he had built up, and carry him away with it. He fought his realization of it from motives that he did not himself understand. Perhaps it was that to confess its power would be to nullify and make foolish the past twelve years which now began to seem incredibly futile to him.

He was out of bed now, and they were walking together along the frozen road through the valley. There was an intense peacefulness in the still air, one of those perfect winter silences, broken only by the occasional cawing of the crows, and the distant grinding of the ice against the shores.

"You are anxious to get back to your work?" asked Jeanne.

"I'll be glad to tackle it again. It's been a stiff job, stiffer than I dreamed of; but the worst's over, and there's nothing to do now but go ahead. I suppose there's the lawsuit to face. That's folly. Your uncle is throwing his money away. If you could convince him—"

"Will," she said in a low voice, "I must tell you something. I have defied my uncle's wishes in coming here to take care of you. I did what was right; but, now that you are well, I—I shall not be coming here any more. And—I shall not see you often. I must stand by my own, even when they're wrong."

Will laughed and drew her arm through his. "I've been doing some thinking, Jeanne," he said, "and I've come to the decision to go up and talk things over frankly with your uncle. He was very conciliatory when we met in the chapel. Surely a little face-to-face talk will enable us to get together, and persuade him to abandon that absurd lawsuit."

She shook her head. "You don't know how embittered he is against you, Will. You see, he has lost his last schooners now, and our kinsmen's, in which he had an interest. He had invested everything in this smuggling. He thinks that you betrayed him. When I tried to convince him he was angrier than I have ever seen him before. He almost struck me. Had he done so, he would have lost my loyalty forever.

He refrained from that, but he was beside himself with anger at the mention of your name. And since I have been coming here he has hardly opened his mouth to me. He has lost everything, and he is likely to lose the lands that he mortgaged to Philippe La Rue."

She clenched her fists. "If my uncle had listened to me from the beginning!" she said. "He has fallen completely into that man's power. Philippe La Rue schemed from the beginning to usurp my uncle's place in Bonne Chance. He led him on to borrow money from him. And I know now it was he who betrayed my uncle's sealing schooners to the government, in order to ruin him, just as he persuaded my uncle to smuggle his brandy underneath your lumber, and then betrayed him again, and tried to have you go to your death under suspicion of being the betrayer.

"I had thought such a man would be driven out of Bonne Chance. But everybody knows it now, and nobody cares. They think it smart of him. People are like that. He has only my uncle to deal with now, and he has him in his power.

"So, Will," she said more quietly, "you see what my own duty is. I have come to see that I was wrong in abetting my uncle, in signalling to the schooners when they were ready to run out of the cove. I thought they were rebels against an unjust government. But it was all money, and greed; something has opened my eyes; only—I must stand by my own."

They had stopped at the rim of the valley, and faced each other. Will drew her toward him. "Jeanne — Jeanne, dear, make me your own," he said.

She tried to free herself. "Will, this is folly—it is impossible—"

"I love you, Jeanne. We'll stand by each other, and see this thing through." He had taken her in his arms. She turned her face away in brief resistance. Inevitable as she knew their love to be, it was equally impossible; everything was between them. The moment's indecision paralyzed her will. She had surrendered before she was aware of it. At the touch of his lips on hers happiness filled her whole being.

"What can we do, Will?" she faltered. "We are enemies. I am fighting you for my lands. I am a traitor to everything I have ever learned, disloyal to my uncle—"

"I am going to see him and ask him for you. I'll make him listen to me."

"Will!" Terror came into her voice. "You—must not! Not now!"

"Do you think he'll feel any sweeter toward me as time goes by? Especially after he's—after you've lost that lawsuit?"

"How do you know that he's—that I'm going to lose that lawsuit?" she asked, in laughing challenge.

"Because my case is clear. I lease the land from the Government. You have no title, Jeanne."

"I don't know about that," returned Jeanne thoughtfully. "Philippe La Rue has assured Uncle Jeremiah that he'll win, and I believe he meant it. But, anyway, you must wait, Will. Until my uncle has had time to get over his loss a little. If you go to him now, and Philippe La Rue gets wind of it, there'll be no chance at all. I mean, Will, dear, I'd have to choose between giving up the man who adopted me, and brought me up, and to whom I do owe a great deal—"

"You owe him nothing, Jeanne!" Will interrupted angrily.

"—Or you."

"You couldn't do it, Jeanne! Why, we're engaged! I come before everybody now."

"I don't want to be put where I'd have to decide, Will. So promise me to wait a little."

"I shall see you?"

"Just as often as I can, dear."

He took her in his arms again. "I want to know one thing," he said, with newborn jealousy. "Philippe La Rue never cared for you, Jeanne?"

"I—don't think so, Will."

"Nor you for him?"

The shudder that ran through her answered before her words did. "I didn't hate or dislike him; he was nothing to me until that night when he threatened me. Then, all at once, I began to see him in a different light. I have hated him since then."

"And you have never cared for anyone, Jeanne?"

"Nobody," she answered solemnly. "And, Will, dear, not even he—you know who I mean—ever kissed me."

Suddenly the specter of the dead man, which had seemed to intervene between them, with one menacing arm catching at Jeanne, faded out of Will's consciousness. He kissed her, and laughed gaily as he said:

"I'll wait as long as you wish, Jeanne. But our engagement is true, none the less?"

"The truest thing in all my life—and the dearest," answered Jeanne solemnly.

CHAPTER XVI.

LA RUE GROWS BOLD.

JEANNE'S attendance on Will during his illness was the fly in the ointment of La Rue's triumph. The notary had seen them with hands clasped that evening on the beach. He had suspected more than the truth, and he had seen all the structure of his schemes toppling under the unexpected blow.

The approaching culmination of years of scheming had awakened in him a passion for the girl who formerly, illusive and immature as she appeared, had hardly attracted him. From thinking of her as something between a necessity and an aspiration, he had become enamored of her. That was after their ride. Now the fear engendered by this new intervention had united in him an intense hatred for Will, far stronger than his former antagonism, with an overmastering desire for Jeanne.

He recognized the difficulties that beset him, and he was too cautious to go rashly. He sensed that Jeremiah would resent any appearance of undue interest in the girl's actions. And he had kept away from him for several days after the raid, not knowing whether the old man suspected his part in it. With Jeremiah in his power, it was easy to go slow—except for Jeanne.

However, he came face to face with Jeremiah in the street of Bonne Chance. From every window busy eyes were watching the old man, whose parade was more

ostentatious that was his wont. Jeremiah was going down with flag flying, and the flourish of his great stick, the pompous, slow stride were more lordly than ever.

Though all Bonne Chance suspected, Jeremiah was the last to guess who had betrayed him. His greeting of the notary was condescendingly magnanimous, and La Rue, too wise to condole with him, exchanged commonplaces about the weather. After a while he threw out a hint about the girl, as one wise man advises another to beware of scandalous tongues.

Jeremiah shut him up sharply. Mme. Angus had the care of Will, he said, and Bonne Chance would go to a place not on the map, which he named in the French tongue.

He went on his way, oblivious of the looks of the villagers, who had been watching the interview, and frowning heavily at the remembrance of La Rue's words. He was too proud to show his resentment of the insult to Jeanne, but it infuriated him against the girl.

This was the first occasion on which Jeanne had positively defied him. He had found himself wholly unable to cope with her. He had been compelled to resign himself to her ministrations of the wounded man, and for the two past weeks had virtually sent her to Coventry.

La Rue went on his way, too, which happened to be to Belley's store. He financed the storekeeper in his petty usurious transactions. Returning toward his house, he looked across the bay, and saw a woman's figure on the shore of Presqu' Ile. Tiny as it appeared, it was unmistakably Jeanne's. *Habitant* women do not walk by the sea, unless to pick something up, nor do they linger.

The sight whipped La Rue's senses into insistence. He had not spoken to Jeanne since the night of the raid. He hurried to intercept her, acting for once without forethought.

Jeanne, who had just left Will, and had gone to share her delicious secret with the sea and the sun, did not perceive the notary till he was close upon her. She started in dismay. La Rue was the last person whom she desired to see just then, and the very air of the man told her that he had come purposely to waylay her. It had been very different when he had met her riding, before Will's love came to her.

The notary interpreted her little movement quite accurately. He bit his lip. "Well, Jeanne, it is a long time since we had a talk together!" he said. "And so the old friendship vanishes when the new love comes, *hein?*"

"You have no right to speak to me like that, M. La Rue," she answered, feeling her heart begin to hammer, nevertheless, at the bare reference to Will.

"It's not my statement," he retorted. "It's what all Bonne Chance is saying about you, Jeanne. People are wondering how a McGraeme girl can make up to the man who betrayed her folks to prison."

She turned and faced him, flaming into swift anger. "Don't you dare speak that way, Philippe La Rue!" she cried. "I know who betrayed my kinsmen!"

"Some of the spy's lies, eh?" he sneered, devouring her with his eyes. "If you can swallow those, you can swallow his professions of love, I suppose!"

"Have you come here to insult me?" she demanded scornfully. "Go away from me! I didn't invite you here! I won't see you!"

Her anger, her flashing eyes made his heart begin to pulse furiously. He dissembled his emotion with difficulty. He grew pleading. "Jeanne, I'm sorry," he said. "But you know we are old friends, and we mustn't quarrel because of a little jealousy on my part. It's natural, isn't it?"

"You have no right to insult Mr. Maitland, nor to mention him to me at all!"

"I shouldn't have done so. But, Jeanne, you know I've cared for you a long time. I never found the courage to speak to you. You're above me—at least, I've always felt so. I—"

"You must not tell me that, M. La Rue."

"Why not? Have I lost the right? Has he—has somebody else cut in before me? Or is it just that you don't care for me, Jeanne?"

"I don't care for you, if you must know.

While Dorion Lives

by Victor Rousseau

Author of "The Eye of Balamok," "Draft of Eternity," "The Diamond Demons," etc.

CHAPTER XVII.

HIS CARDS ON THE TABLE.

THE girl tore herself free, and ran toward Paul Cawmill, who came hurrying up. She caught at him with incoherent cries, and began sobbing hysterically.

"Eh, M. La Rue, what have you got to say about this?" demanded Paul, advancing truculently.

La Rue swung out a smashing blow and caught Paul on the temple and felled him like a log. "You mind your own business next time, Cawmill!" he shouted. "Get back where you belong!"

But Paul was on his feet again and rushing at the notary once more with whirling arms. This time they clinched before Paul went down again, bleeding at the nose. Jeanne screamed, and tried to stop La Rue from rushing upon him. But Paul, quick as a cat upon his feet, was rushing at La Rue instead. This time the notary, whose collar had become wilted and tie disordered, tried to parley.

"What the devil do you mean by this? It's a private matter between Mme. Dorion and myself!" he shouted.

Paul clinched again. His fists circled each other in the air like little vanes. When he went down for the third time, with a split lip, La Rue had a swelling welt across the forehead, and looked as if he had been fighting.

He glared about him in dismay, and, as Paul leaped to his feet once more, put his dignity behind him and made off as fast as a walk would carry him. Jeanne clung to Paul as he was about to start in pursuit.

"Oh, Paul, you little gladiator!" she cried, half sobbing and half laughing. "Thank you—thank you, Paul! He must have been mad! Promise me not to say a word about it to anybody."

"*Ben!* Not a word, if you wish it—not a word Mme. Jeanne!" said Paul, submitting complacently as Jeanne wiped the blood from his face. "It is nothing at all, *madame*. When M. Maitland came to me and told me that he loved you, desiring that I should use my ripe experience of mankind and womankind to bring you two together—"

"What's that, Paul?"

"I did so, Mme. Jeanne. For I know how to watch, and how to plan, and how to remain silent. He loves you, *madame*, and a woman would assuredly be happy with him, for, now that he has entrapped the McGraemes—"

"Paul, what in the world are you talking about?" cried Jeanne hysterically.

"The government will undoubtedly give him a high post in the detective service," continued Paul, implacably. "And, even though they are your kinsmen, Mme. Jeanne, one must be prudent, and look to the future. He can provide comforts, luxuries—"

"Paul, won't you please stop?"

"So go to him, Mme. Jeanne, and do

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not be afraid to let him see that his love is returned. And for your sake I shall say not one word of what has happened, for lovers are jealous, and—"

"Paul, if it were not for what you have done I should box your ears!"

Paul, having practically finished his exposition, grinned comfortably, convinced that he had done a good day's work for his diffident master.

The ludicrous dénouement restored Jeanne's sense of perspective. This was fortunate, for the days that ensued were trying ones. Her uncle obstinately refused to speak to her. Meanwhile she came to the hard decision not to see Will for the present; she was afraid that she would surrender to the desire, almost irresistible, to yield to his wishes, and let him force the situation, and she waited each day for the opportunity of a talk with her uncle, which Jeremiah, obstinate and implacable, steadily denied her.

The notary, when out of sight of Paul, recovered his self-possession speedily, and came to the realization of his folly. It was several days before he ventured to Jeremiah's house. A chance meeting during that period having convinced him that Jeanne had not told her uncle, or that, if she had done so, the old man had not regarded his lapse seriously, he resolved to take action which he had long contemplated.

Philippe La Rue found Jeremiah seated beside the fire, reading his Bible, and opened up on him after a few preliminary exchanges.

"Of course this treacherous act of M. Maitland has put you in a difficult position, Jeremiah," he said, "and therefore you must push the case against him hard. As for me, I shall hold to my promise not to press you pending the settlement. You and I have always been good friends, Jeremiah, and I am not the man to take advantage of another man's misfortune. *Diable,* no, indeed!"

He pulled at his small mustache, studying the old man. There was no sign of emotion of Jeremiah's granite features, and he could not repress a sense of admiration to see the old man's gameness. He knew well enough that he was broken, but his spirit refused to flinch.

"Ah, well, Philippe, you didna come here to tell me that," Jeremiah returned.

"You're right," said La Rue, affecting to be amused. "What you've lost is nothing compared with what you stand to win. Have you considered that the Dorion lands are worth a fortune? That airplane timber is no lie. I've been looking into the matter. Once you have won the suit, there'll be more money at your disposal than you will know what to do with.

"Why, the Banque Industrielle, which I represent, would take the lumber rights alone off your hands for a quarter of a million. I'd pledge myself to that. The lumber rights on the Chadwick seigniory sold for three hundred thousand last autumn, and that isn't airplane timber. Keep your heart up, *mon vieux!*" he added, with a familiarity upon which he had never ventured before.

Jeremiah sat up straight and knit his heavy brows together. "Eh, Philippe La Rue, what do you get out of it?" he asked suspiciously. "You're not come here for nought!"

"No," answered the notary, pulling his mustache and smiling. The question is, whether or not we shall divide the profits."

"Eh?" growled Jeremiah, subconsciously warned into alertness. "What do you mean by that, Philippe?"

"You see, Jeremiah, I've helped you to the best of my ability. Now I have to take a business view. If I foreclose on you you lose everything. I won't do it if I can help it. But I can take everything."

"Ye canna! The lands are Jeanne's!" cried Jeremiah.

"A point that I was coming to. When you mortgaged them, it was not my business to assume that you were committing an irregular and illegal act. But you and I know that it was just that. If I foreclose, I cannot take the lands, but I can prosecute and ruin you, Jeremiah.

"Not that I will! But I can do it. You mortgaged your niece's lands as her guardian, and lost the money in your own ventures, and, though she comes of age two months before the mortgage falls due,

that will not cancel the evidence in my possession of an offence against the law. There's no way out for you except my way, Jeremiah!"

Jeremiah had risen slowly to his feet as he began to understand. His rugged face had whitened. His great hand whitened, too, by compression of the fingers on the edge of the table.

"What is it ye want, eh, Philippe La Rue?" he purred, in a voice like the rising of a storm. Speak plain to me. I'm a plain man. I'm no skilled at lawyers' tricks."

"Jeanne is what I want," answered the notary, sinking back in his chair and caressing his mustache again. He was prepared for a violent outburst, but Jeremiah only looked at him.

"I want Jeanne for my wife," said La Rue. "If she'll marry me, I'll tear up the mortgage on that day and take over the lands for a hundred and twenty-five thousand on the day the verdict goes in our favor."

The rumbling voice that came from Jeremiah's chest seemed like an invisible interlocutor, for the old man's lips did not appear to move, and he never relaxed a muscle of his carven face.

"'Twas you, Philippe La Rue, betrayed me, then, and not this M. Maitland!"

"Oh, talk sense, Jeremiah!" answered the notary, impatiently. "I love Jeanne, and I want to marry her. There's a fair business proposal, man to man."

"Damn ye, no!" shouted Jeremiah, bringing out the English oath roundly.

La Rue rose and faced him. "Why not?" he demanded bluntly. Few men cared to confront Jeremiah McGraeme in his anger, but the notary had staked everything upon the result of the interview. "When your niece comes of age the lands will be hers. She'll marry. Would you rather see that scheming spy, M. Maitland, your son-in-law? It shouldn't come so hard to you, after Dorion. I am a better man than Dorion."

"Out of my house, and do your worst!"

The door opened, and Jeanne came in, to see them facing each other across the table, Jeremiah speechless, his right arm raised aloft, La Rue bristling with rage and chagrin. Her entrance dissolved the tableau.

"Think it over, Jeremiah," said the notary in a quiet voice, as he took up his hat. "It's the best thing you can do. I won't hurry you. And I won't take your answer now. You've got till spring to pay."

He stalked out of the house, and Jeanne went to where her uncle stood and put her arms about him.

"Has he been threatening you, uncle?" she asked. "Is it about the lands? Don't be afraid of him. If it's the lands, I've told you a hundred times that I don't want them. They're yours to do what you like with, and just as soon as I come of age I mean to turn them over to you, because I owe you everything in the world."

Jeremiah turned toward her, put his hands upon her shoulders, and stared into her face. He held her thus for half a minute before he let her go. All the while his lips were moving, but no sound came from them.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TWO AGAINST ONE.

WILL left the cabin for Presqu' Ile on the day following his last interview with Jeanne. Before leaving he gave Mme. Angus a hundred dollars. The old woman burst into tears as she thanked him. It was a fortune.

No news of any kind had reached Bonne Chance about the outlaws. The land was in the grip of winter, and there would be no mail for three weeks. Will knew, however, that Angus had treated his wife badly, dealing out abuse and blows to her.

She was his second wife, and not the mother of Alexandre, who made a slave of the old woman, in common with his cousins. The removal of all of them was a blessing to her, whether or not any wifely sentiments survived.

Will took up the routine of his work again. Whatever Paul Cawmill's other shortcomings were, he had kept the camp busy during Will's illness. The men had worked well, and great inroads had been

made into the tracts marked out by Will for cutting. The arrest of the smugglers established his authority in the eyes of all.

Will found a letter from Routhier & Faguy, which had arrived a day or two before, informing him that a suit had been begun by Philippe La Rue, acting under power of attorney for Jeremiah, in the name of his ward, to oust him from the Dorion lands.

The case would be heard about the middle of March, and they asked to be placed in communication with his own lawyers. Will forwarded the letter to his representatives in Quebec, leaving it to go out by the returning dog-sleigh mail a few days later.

Inasmuch as his own case rested simply upon his lease from the Provincial Government, there would be no need of a preliminary consultation. Will's own opinion was that it was simply a bluff on the part of La Rue, and that the case would never come to trial.

A greater source of worry was the fact that he had received no communication from the manufacturer to whom he had written a day or two before the raid, apprising him that he was consigning him the shipment of lumber. The confiscation of the schooners had left the fate of the consignment doubtful, in spite of Captain Lessard's assurances of free freightage.

It was a case in which correspondence, delayed through weeks as it must be, would be futile; the matter would have to rest until his journey in March, and that would bring him perilously near the end of his resources.

It was a week before Will saw Jeanne again. He had looked for her each day along the road of the Presqu' Ile peninsula, and, as each day passed, he went to his cabin in the assurance that he would see her on the morrow.

He found a hundred excuses for her long absence. To him it was inconceivable that she would not hurry to him at the first opportunity. Then, when he was beginning to grow alarmed, and was thinking of going up to the house to beard Jeremiah, he found her at last, waiting for him beside the frozen shore.

They ran into each other's arms, both talking at once, like happy children, and Will's troubles were instantly forgotten. It was half an hour before Jeanne spoke of her delay in coming to him.

"I couldn't come, Will, without his discovering where I had gone," she said. "He watches me all the time. I told Uncle Jeremiah that I would have cared for any sick man as I did for you. Now I must take care that he learns nothing until things have developed.

Will tried to overcome her by argument. "The longer we wait before telling him, the harder it is going to be," he said. But she was so insistent that he did not attempt to force the issue. "How will the situation be altered, dear," he asked, "if we wait until the lawsuit is decided?"

"If you win, Will, my uncle will know then that it is I you want, and not the lands," she answered.

She cried in Will's arms, urging him to trust her; and it was ten days before they met again.

After that the subject was tacitly dropped. Will was forced to accept Jeanne's wishes, and to look forward to the verdict as the thing that was to bring them together. Their meetings were very far apart now, and even their kisses acquired something of the same furtiveness.

Few men could have been satisfied with such a situation. Will, who could never doubt the loyalty of others, accepted it because of his love for Jeanne, and the same quality that led him to do this would lead him to hammer his way through all obstacles to a settlement when the time came.

Christmas arrived, then the new year. Now it was February, and the dull routine went on. The only incident that occurred, if it might be called one, was the arrival of Angus, who had snowshoed his way down from Quebec, with a great tale of acquittal for lack of evidence against him, while the other McGraemes had been committed for trial, as having been caught red-handed upon the scene.

It was a very subdued Angus who came to Bonne Chance. Meeting Will on the road, he touched his hat respectfully, and

he seemed to have forgotten any enmity that might have existed between them.

February, usually the coldest month of the year, had come with a sudden rise of temperature that was almost a forerunner of spring. It had been, on the whole, a singularly mild winter. Hopes ran high in Bonne Chance for an early raid into the seal rookeries, and there was a great wagging of heads as the inhabitants discussed their prospects.

It also happened that two or three men who had been associated with the smugglers, Angus among them, went up and down among the village folk, and became specially garrulous as they helped drain the last of Hector Galipeault's supply of brandy in the cellar beneath his stable.

As they detailed their plans, fierce assent flashed from the eyes of their listeners. They meant to take no chances that spring, when the schooners departed, either with the Blanche, or with the strange Englishman who both lumbered and also worked for the government.

While Will worked with a single mind toward his ends, Jeanne bore the whole burden of their clandestine engagement. She had resolved to keep from him all knowledge of the episode with La Rue upon the beach, and of her uncle's predicament. She was fighting with all her might to keep the two men whom she loved, and ultimately to bring them together.

Yet, as the days passed, she felt that she was farther that ever from accomplishing her purpose. Jeremiah's quarrel with La Rue had been short-lived. The notary was constantly at the house now, accosting Jeanne as if nothing had happened, forcing conversation from her reluctant lips; both men watched her continually, and the same unspoken question was in the mind of each.

It was as if the ghost of Dorion was already reaching out from his grave to grasp her vicariously. Nothing was said, but Jeanne knew that her uncle was aware of La Rue's suit, and favored it.

All this Jeanne hid from Will, for fear of precipitating the final choice that she dreaded, and, woman-like, procrastinated, telling herself that all would come right in the end. Nor was she versed enough to see that her concealment clouded her meetings with her lover, arousing in him a vague discontent which he would not allow himself to cherish.

The storm broke one afternoon toward the end of January. La Rue had been to the house to dinner; after the meal Jeanne went out, as she always did when he was there. She returned from Mme. Angus's cabin, where she had been with some little comforts for the old woman, about four, expecting that the unwelcome visitor would be gone. Instead, he was standing with Jeremiah in front of the fire, and the moment that she entered she knew that trouble had been brewing.

She drew off her gloves composedly, however, and was about to go to the kitchen to help the old *habitant* woman when Jeremiah rumbled: "Philippe wishes to speak to you, Jeanne."

Jeanne stopped and looked at La Rue, who glanced at her uncle, as if even the opening of the attack were preconcerted. "Where have you been?" demanded Jeremiah.

"Over to Mme. Angus's," answered the girl.

"Ye didn't chance to meet that M. Maitland on the way, or returning?" purred Jeremiah, in a tone premonitory of the breaking storm.

"I did not see Mr. Maitland."

"Ye've been meeting him on the Bonne Chance road three and four times a week!" thundered her uncle. "Ye can't pull the wool over my eyes! When ye went to him every day at Angus's ye told me 'twas because he was sick, and ye'd have done as much for any sick man. That was a downright lie, and ye know it!"

"You shall not say such things in the presence of another man!" cried Jeanne.

"Philippe La Rue is not another man, as ye call him! He has come to me like a gentleman, asking permission to seek to make you his wife. I've given him leave."

"He can ask till Doomsday, then!" retorted Jeanne. "A gentleman, as you call him, does not hound a girl, knowing that she dislikes him—hates the sight of him."

"That's our fine spy talking!" sneered La Rue.

"You do well to call Mr. Maitland a spy! Haven't you been spying on us? Didn't you tell my uncle that we'd been meeting three or four times a week?"

"It's true, then!" thundered Jeremiah, banging his great fist on the table.

"I've met Mr. Maitland."

"And he's asked ye to marry him, I suppose! Poor fool, ye canna see it's the lands he's after, because he knows that he'll be a beggar by the spring."

"I'll tell you whether or not Mr. Maitland has asked me to marry him when you ask me alone, Uncle Jeremiah," answered Jeanne. "I am not going to be bullied or questioned this way in the presence of M. La Rue."

"Ye dinna have to tell me. I've got eyes in my head," retorted Jeremiah. "He's a traitor and a trickster, and he'll be a pauper soon, and he's taught you to be a traitor to the hand that fed you and the blood that runs in you."

"You have no right to say such things!" cried the girl passionately. "I have never betrayed you."

"Will ye marry Philippe La Rue?" shouted Jeremiah.

"Why?" asked Jeanne quietly.

The simple question came home to the angry old man with stunning effect. He gasped and growled, and could not find anything to say.

"Philippe La Rue met me upon the beach some time ago and insulted me grossly. Paul Cawmill rescued me. Is that the way a gentleman, as you describe him, tries to win a girl's heart?" asked Jeanne.

"What's that ye say? What's this, Philippe?" demanded Jeremiah.

"I leave it to your good sense, Jeremiah," returned the notary. "Has Mme. Dorion spoken of this before?"

"Not a word! If she had, I'd have had it out with you," roared Jeremiah. "You'll court her aboveboard and honorably."

"It's easy to see what my disadvantage is," said the notary suavely, "when my actions are misrepresented in this way. I own I did forget myself for a moment—nothing any man might not have done—and that man Cawmill, who was spying for his master, tried to attack me.

"But, Mr. McGraeme, this is hardly the way for me to approach the matter. I simply complained to you that this M. Maitland is deceiving the woman I love, to whom you have given me permission to make my addresses. He is putting me at a disadvantage. I do not wish to distress Mme: Dorion; all I ask is that you'll try to open her eyes to this man's real character."

"I'll open them!" said Jeremiah. "Ye winna-see him again, girl! Ye understand me? I forbid it!"

"You have no right to forbid it, Uncle Jeremiah."

"Will ye obey me or no? If not, ye're no blood of mine any longer."

"I'll answer your question when we're alone."

"Ye'll answer me now!"

Jeanne made her way quietly toward the door. "If you have the right to forbid me to see Mr. Maitland, uncle," she said, "understand that I have the right to refuse to see M. La Rue. And if he persists in coming here I shall leave the house till he has gone."

La Rue scowled and began to draw on his gloves. "I'll talk things over with you another time, Jeremiah," he said, and, as the door closed behind the girl, "this is no way to bring things about. You've got to bring her to reason gently. I'll attend to this Mr. Maitland. I'll see to it that he doesn't come back to Bonne Chance from Quebec. You go gently with Jeanne and try to turn her. It's no use shouting at her as if she were a man."

"Aye, Philippe, I'll do my part," muttered Jeremiah. "But I tell you this: she'll marry you of her free will, or you can sell my house, and me, too. She's my flesh and blood, and if I thought it was anything but a girl's stubborn whim I'd never raise a finger against her."

He was sitting with his great head in his hands when Jeanne went back into the room.

For a moment she hesitated to approach him; her pride burned in her, and her humiliation was intense. Then she resolved to

make a last effort to achieve what her heart was so set upon.

"Uncle Jeremiah, what have you against Mr. Maitland?" she asked. "Don't you see that he is worth ten such men as Philippe La Rue?"

He turned slowly round toward her. "Ye run when he whistles for you," he said, in scathing tones. "You run in friendliness against my will, to a thief and a robber, one of Belial's sons, who has sent your kith and kin to jail, and betrayed us all with shameful lies, and ruined me. Aye, I'm ruined Jeanne!"

She burst into tears. "It is shameful to say such things, Uncle, when you know they are not true. You know it was Philippe La Rue who warned the Blanche, and entrapped Mr. Maitland in the valley, so that he should be suspected—"

"Aye, aye, glib words. He's taught you your lesson weel, lass!" muttered Jeremiah.

"Ask any one! You will not see, because you have closed you mind! Listen, uncle! I will never marry Philippe La Rue. Nor do I wish to marry Mr. Maitland without your consent. I want you both—you and him. No, listen to me! I married once, at your command, to save the lands. That was in itself a lifetime of duty cancelled. You cannot force me into this second marriage. Remember the promise that you gave your brother, that you would care for me!"

She was weeping without restraint, and could hardly continue, but she forced herself to speak: "It would be a crime, Uncle Jeremiah. I hate Philippe. I don't know what his hold over you amounts to, but, if he can take our home away, let us go, in Heaven's name. Don't try to force me into this. Let us leave Bonne Chance, rather, and start anew somewhere else. Uncle, I do not want to be driven from your home, and you are driving me. Promise me never to require this marriage of me!"

She wept over his great hands, kneeling beside his chair. "I will never marry Mr. Maitland if you will free me from this persecution!" she begged.

"Persecution, Jeanne?" The word had, for Jeremiah, implications of martyrdom. For a moment he seemed to waver, then he sprang out of his chair with an exclamation of fury:

"I'll hear no more of it!" he cried. "I'll not be beggared and ruined and broke and jailed for the whim of a girl. I've stood by ye all my life, and you'll be true to the blood that's in you!"

He strode from the room, leaving Jeanne kneeling beside his empty chair.

CHAPTER XIX.

"WHILE DORION LIVES!"

WITH the waning of February Jeanne had abandoned hope. La Rue was ever in the house, bland, deferential, and evidently determined to win her by siege. He had begun to treat her as an ungrateful child, already bound to him by some vague tie. He emphasized his proprietorship of her in innumerable insignificant ways whose cumulation nearly drove her frantic.

Jeremiah said not a word, but his whole attitude was one of open hostility. A new ally had appeared in the shape of Angus, evidently pressed into the service of the besiegers. Angus was ever at her, urging her not to let her uncle be ruined, or to put her inexplicable folly for Will before the welfare of those who had reared her.

Sometimes, goaded to desperation, the girl contemplated flight to Will. She would ask him, if he wanted her, to take her to Quebec with him, never to return to Bonne Chance. But that was at night, after the sufferings of the day, and morning always brought reflection.

All her training, her loyalty to the great dream of the McGraemes, dinned into her ears since her earliest days, fought against her instinct. And by now she knew that refusal to marry La Rue meant dishonor for her uncle. The notary made no secret of it. He reigned supreme in their little dominion on Presqu' Ile.

Under such circumstances, the girl's meetings with Will were only productive of unhappiness. He, true to their agreement, strove not to believe her love for him had changed, and forced himself to wait and

utter no reproaches. But he could not avoid asking himself the secret question that had burned in him from the beginning.

He was nearly forty years of age, and Jeanne no more than twenty. Had he made a mistake, in rashly committing her to an engagement with a man almost old enough to be her father? He did not doubt her loyalty. But the acid was slowly eating into his soul as the weeks passed.

They met about a week before the day on which he was to start for Quebec. It was difficult for Jeanne to leave the house unobserved now, and she never knew what eyes were watching her. But she had come at last to a decision. She would never marry La Rue. But neither could she make herself directly responsible for her uncle's losses and degradation. She would give Will up, with the mental reservation that a woman always makes, in case of happier times dawning. She had gone to tell him so.

He kissed her, and, holding her by the hands, looked at her keenly. "It seems to me, Jeanne, we haven't got very far in the past three months," he said.

"No," answered Jeanne faintly, feeling a sick terror at what must be said.

"Been going backward, Jeanne?"

"Yes, Will."

"Your plan didn't sort of work, did it?"

"No, Will."

"Can't we make a better one before I leave for Quebec? I'd like to bring back a plain gold ring for you, and another with a diamond in it."

"Will," she said, unable to bear his rallying, forced though it was, "I'm—afraid—it's impossible."

She burst out crying, and put her face on his shoulder. His arms around her gave her a sense of unutterable relief, the terror of losing him forever made her tremble until she would have fallen but for his hold of her. She wanted to sob out everything, but it all hinged upon her uncle's act of unpremeditated dishonesty, and nothing Will might do could save him from La Rue.

"You mean you want our engagement ended?" asked Will, trying to soothe her grief. "Tell me why, Jeanne."

"My—my uncle will never consent. Things have gone from bad to worse all the time."

"I was afraid of it. And there was nothing that I could do to help. Now I'm going to see him."

"No, Will!"

"Listen to reason, dear! I've done all you asked of me; I've waited to no purpose, and I've been eating my heart out these past months. I'm going to him."

"It's hopeless, Will."

"Tell me why."

"I can't, dear. It's hopeless," she reiterated.

"Is there something I don't know? Some reason why I should not go to him that you have not told me?"

He could learn nothing from her. Jeanne only wept miserably, and he took her hands in his again, and studied her face.

"You know I'm leaving for Quebec today week, Jeanne. I shall have you in my mind all the time there, just as much as here. I want to go with hope."

"Will, believe that I love you," she answered. "And I shall never marry anyone else."

"But you want our engagement broken, Jeanne?"

No answer.

"That releases me from my promise, Jeanne."

He could not keep her there, wretched as she was, and almost incapable of answering him. He raised her hands to his lips, and she broke from him and hurried along the road back toward her house.

She left him with a new sense of rankling in his heart. The incomprehensibility of the girl's actions had created a feeling of bitterness in him that was foreign to his nature. The acid was biting deeper.

It was two or three evenings later when Paul, who had been eying him in a mysterious manner for several days, came up to him as the gangs were knocking off work.

"Ah, *monsieur*," he began, shaking his head mournfully, "you are troubled, I

know. Yet see, *monsieur*—" laying his hand on the sleeve of Will's mackinaw—" such thing are of the nature of life. We love, or else we do not love. We cannot help the things of life."

"Out with it, Paul!" said Will sharply.

"She is a good girl, and a fine woman, M. Maitland. But you see, he has known her since they were chidren, and so, as is natural, she remembers that they were sweethearts before Emile Dorion came into her life, and she feels, perhaps, that she has treated him badly."

Will stood as if turned into stone. When suspicion takes hold of a nature like his it has the edge of a sword.

"But take courage, *monsieur,* for all women are that way. Me, I know it well! It is only necessary to marry them, *monsieur,* and straightway they forget the old sweetheart. But if one lingers too long—*ah, là là, monsieur!*" He nudged him playfully in the side.

"You will pardon me, *monsieur.* I venture to speak this only because you ask my help. I have been working for you, although I have known how to remain silent. I am discreet. A word here, a word there—such is my way. Still, *monsieur,* it is not well to wait too long, for there is always the old sweetheart to be reckoned with, especially when he has the old uncle at his mercy, and can take everything that he has."

Will seized the little foreman by the arm. "Now, since you will talk, Paul, you shall go on to the end!" he cried. "Nothing more about Mme. Dorion or the old sweetheart, please, but just explain what you meant about M. McGraeme losing his home. I know he owes M. La Rue money, and that he has given a mortgage on these lands."

Paul looked sheepish at the tempest he had aroused. "I only repeat what all Bonne Chance knows, M. Maitland," he answered. "M. La Rue holds a mortgage on Jeremiah McGraeme's home, and he is now placed where he can make the terms. And everybody knows that he still loves Mme. Dorion."

"Well?" cried Will, gripping his arm with a pressure that made Paul wince.

"*Eh bien, monsieur,* unless she consents to marry him M. Jeremiah—"

"That will do!" said Will, releasing him. And he stood stock still, struggling with the new light that had been cast upon the situation. What a fool he was not to have guessed! By relieving the money pressure on McGraeme he could come into his own!

Eager as he was, he took no precipitate action. He laid his plans to the last detail, and prepared to put them into execution on the night before he left.

That was four nights away. A team of dogs had been collected in the village and broken in for the journey. Will meant to beard McGraeme, take Jeanne away, and start with her for Quebec on the fifth morning.

In Hector Galipeault's cellar, busy among the plan-makers, some of whom were Will's own employes, there might have been seen, about this period, Duncan McGraeme. The outlaw had been in the vicinity for some time, and, as he had a trick of putting up shacks at various points in the woods, he could find shelter almost anywhere.

As a matter of fact, he had never gone very far from Bonne Chance, and if he had not returned to Presqu' Ile it was because he had his winter work to do. His personal ill-will toward the Englishman, as he called any man from Ontario, would nurture itself by brooding. That was the maternal ancestry in Duncan.

His work consisted in laying down traps and gathering in their harvest, in shooting moose out of season, fishing through the ice, hobnobbing with other outlaws and wanderers at appointed drinking-places, giving himself up to the roving life that was of his nature.

For a time Will Maitland had been only a dim memory in his mind. Now, with the preparations for the sealing raid, caulking of timbers, testing spars and sails, apportioning hands to the few schooners that would make the run from Bonne Chance, Duncan remembered quite well that he had some unsettled business on hand.

It was important enough, in the eyes of

Angus and others, to warrant a trip to St. Boniface on snowshoes, and a telegram from there to Eudore and Alexandre, now out of jail, and loafing away the month of February among the pleasures of Quebec.

Ordinarily at this time of year there would have been great conclaves in Jeremiah's house. This time there were none. Jeremiah would send no more schooners to the sealing grounds. The old dream, craftily fed by La Rue, monopolized him.

Sometimes, about this period of the year, wandering seamen would appear along the coast, to ask for employment as hands in the sealing schooners, coming from heaven knew where, or in what manner; true waifs of the icy coast, as if they had hibernated through the winter and come out, like the ground-hog, to stretch their limbs and look for the sun.

Such a man was the stranger who appeared at Jeremiah's door one afternoon and asked for a meal.

He sat down with Jeanne and her uncle, in accordance with the custom, and presently La Rue, who had business with Jeremiah, came in and joined them at the table.

For the first time in weeks Jeremiah seemed to be taken out of himself by the stranger's conversation. He was a little man, black-haired, with a black beard of extraordinary thickness, almost like wire, plumper than a good seaman expects to be, and full of strange speech and stranger adventures.

"Ha, *messieurs,* our country is good, but you should see the *Guianas!*" he cried, smacking his lips over a glass of brandy. "That's the place to live in! Not that I come from there, for my home is Miquelon, but many a year I spent there in the service of the French Government, as warden upon the Devil's Isle, where they send the murderers, and, again, in the Police, upon the mainland.

"That's a country, *mademoiselle!*" he continued, winking at Jeanne, "where the girls are all beautiful, and the sun always shines, no frost or snow, and the birds have gay plumage, and there are flowers as big as my hat at Christmas. Indeed, I do not lie, *mademoiselle!* And the jungle swarming with tigers! Many a one have I killed. Aye, and many an escaped convict have I run down in those same jungles, and captured with my own hands, as if he were a tiger himself!"

"And how do you come here?" asked Jeremiah.

The seaman shrugged his shoulders. "Ha, *monsieur,* I pined for my own home, and would not be content until I had taken ship for Miquelon. And now I make my way toward Quebec, for I am minded to settle down and find a wife for my own age. Beauty is good—yes, *mademoiselle,* but I am not over-particular as to that, so I can find one with a fair little dowry, or an insurance that will fall due in no long time. If *mademoiselle* has no other plans, now—"

He winked at her impudently. Jeanne laughed, and declined, and, as the seaman grew more voluble, under the influence of Jeremiah's liquor, she took the opportunity to escape from the room almost unnoticed.

"Eh, *monsieur,* your daughter resembles one whom I had in my mind's eye for a long time!" said the visitor. She was the sweetheart of one of my prisoners, who gave me her picture, among other gifts, in gratitude, because I was kind to him when I recaptured him after he had attempted to escape from the Devil's Island. An extraordinary resemblance, *monsieur,* as I shall let you judge for yourself, and it is a pity they could not marry!"

He picked up a burlap sack that he had brought with him, and unfastened the string about it, pulling out a miscellany of articles—a flannel shirt, a pair of corduroy trousers, a hand mirror, a razor, plug tobacco, two or three weather-stained letters, and a small photograph, which last he handed to Jeremiah.

Jeremiah looked at it, and, with a single bound, had pinioned him by the arms.

"Where did you get this, rascal?" he hissed in the man's ear. La Rue, white and shaking at the sight of Jeanne's photograph, pulled the old man away—not by force, though, for Jeremiah's hold had become as feeble as a child's.

"Eh, *monsieur,* what does this mean?" spluttered the seaman, picking up the pic-

ture. "First you invite me to dinner and give me brandy, and then you attack me!"

Jeremiah, who had sunk into a chair, returned no answer, but La Rue took the man by the arm. "It is the resemblance," he said. "He lost a daughter. It is best to go. I apologize in his name."

Much disconcerted, the sailor tied up his bag and made his escape from the house with speed. Jeremiah raised his great head from his breast. "It's God's judgment on me, Philippe!" he whispered huskily.

La Rue was beginning to recover his nerve. "Nonsense, *mon ami!*" he answered briskly. "How he got to the Devil's Isle I do not know, but he's there, and he was evidently recaptured after he tried to escape. They'll give him no second chance. He's there for life now. He's as good as dead."

"I saw him shot," muttered Jeremiah. "Eh, call that man back! We must know more, Philippe!"

"We don't want to know more," the notary retorted. "We don't know anything. Keep your head, Jeremiah. Are we going to believe that fellow's babble? Dorion's dead, and dead men never come back."

Jeremiah brought his fist smashing down on the chair. "Eh Philippe La Rue, you go too far!" he said. "Dorion's alive, and while he lives ye'll never marry Jeanne, nor can ye, either by your church or mine, or any law of God or man! Take my house, break me at your will, but neither you nor any man shall have her while Dorion lives!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE HAND INVISIBLE.

JEANNE, in her room, sat by the window, looking out at the whirling snowflakes. It seemed incredible to her that in a few more hours Will would be gone. She realized now how his presence, even on Presqu' Ile, had upheld her spirit. And she fought there the hardest of all her battles, every quivering nerve in her calling to her to go to him, to run out into the swirling storm, find him, and leave him no more.

She had not even said good-by to him, knowing that it was an ordeal to which she could not trust herself. She knew that, if she betrayed the longing that she felt to go to him, he would overcome her powers of resistance. And, being a woman, she felt a little spring of bitterness in her heart that he had not compelled, but had obeyed her.

She heard the voices of the three men in the room beneath. Once there came an outcry from her uncle, a sudden scurry, which brought her to her feet in fear. But it subsided almost immediately, and she sank back into her chair, fighting her battle over again.

Shaken by this inner storm, she was all the while conscious of La Rue's voice beneath, lowered in a lengthy monologue. She knew he was speaking of her; not a day passed but she had to fight one or both of them now, and sometimes Angus, too.

With Will gone, it would be unbearable. In the midst of her bitter thoughts the sound of steps on the snow made her start violently. The blood rushed to her face. Looking out, she saw Will coming up the path toward the house.

Half fainting, she leaned against the wall, and heard him mount the single step before the door and enter the hall. There followed the sound of the parlor door opening; then Jeremiah was on his feet, his face convulsed with rage.

"You?" Jeremiah roared. "You—you come here?"

"Yes, it's I, Mr. McGraeme," answered Will quietly. "I came to see you, because I think it's time that our misunderstanding was at an end."

"There can be no end. There can never be an end."

"I'm sorry to hear that. I hoped that if I waited a while you might come to feel differently. You gave me your hand in the chapel that day, Mr. McGraeme, and nothing has happened since to justify your ill-feeling."

"You betrayed me—"

"That is not correct, Mr. McGraeme. I had no part in the betrayal of your plans. If it comes to that, it is you who tried to

trick me. But let that pass. You know who the traitor was—"

"It's a lie!" yelled La Rue. "He means me, eh?"

"He's put the cap on," answered Will.

"You betrayed me," repeated Jeremiah, with stubborn malevolence, though, looking at his face, Will could see that the old man was trying to convince himself against his judgment. "I'll have no truck with you!" shouted Jeremiah, with an oath. "Leave this house of mine!"

"I think it better that you should first hear what I have come for."

"I dinna want to hear. I know, damn you!" cried Jeremiah venomously.

"You are going to listen to what I have to say to you before I leave," persisted Will. "I ask Mr. La Rue to withdraw. If he insists on staying, that is his business."

"He'll stay!" shouted Jeremiah. "If you must speak, out with it and be gone!"

"It's about Mme. Dorion."

"Aye, about Mme. Dorion and the lands!" sneered Jeremiah.

"I wish to ask your consent to my marrying her. We love each other, and are waiting for your approval."

Jeremiah could hardly hiss out the answer. "You lie!" he screamed. "It is the lands you're after, not Jeanne. It's the lands, because ye know that ye're beat, and that ye'll be flung from Bonne Chance like the pauper ye be!"

"You are the only man who could say that to me," Will returned, trying hard to keep his temper. "I've something more to say than that."

"I winna hear ye. I'll rot in hell before ye steal the lands of Jeanne!"

"You are in difficulties with Mr. La Rue," Will went on imperturbably. "He has a hold over you, and he's exercizing pressure on you and Jeanne. I want you to let me help you. I may be able to place you where this pressure will be removed. It's my right to ask this, for Jeanne's sake."

"Are you going to listen to this, Jeremiah?" sneered La Rue.

Jeremiah extended his huge right arm toward the door. I've heard ye now, Mr. Maitland!" he rumbled. "And here's my answer, and it's the same; leave my house and never enter it again!"

"I won't take it!"

"What's that?" bellowed the enraged old man.

"Not with Jeanne! I know the reason of your hatred, Mr. McGraeme. You wish to force your niece into a marriage with a man she doesn't love, to sell her, as you sold her before. If you had any shadow of justification, you lost it when you refused my offer. Your act releases Jeanne from any further duty toward you."

Jeremiah leaped forward with an oath, but checked himself as Will faced him, his hands at his sides. At his bound Jeanne came quickly into the room. "Uncle—" she began, putting her hands under his arm.

He shook her from him, menacing Will with his great fist. "Will you make me put you from my door?" he cried thickly.

"No, I'll go. But I'll take Jeanne with me."

He turned to the girl, who stood with clasped hands before her uncle.

"You have told me that I can leave your home and go to Mr. Maitland," Jeanne cried. "But I want you, too. I heard what he said to you. I never told him of your affairs, and I do not ask help for you from him. But I have told you that I'll never marry Philippe La Rue as long as I live. Show him your door, uncle, and Will and I will wait; else I—am—going to him!"

Will caught her as she swayed toward him, and put his arms about her. La Rue stepped up to Jeremiah and began to whisper in his ear, but the old man tossed him aside.

"If you leave the house with that traitor, Jeanne," he cried, "you leave forever!"

"She'll leave forever, then," answered Will tersely. "Run up-stairs, and get a few things, Jeanne, dear. I'm going to take you to Quebec with me to-morrow."

Walking as if her lover's words commanded instant obedience, the girl went out of the room and up the stairs. With an execration, Jeremiah rushed at Will

again, but again stopped as Will quietly awaited him, as if resolved only to defend himself.

"Come back, Jeanne!" he bellowed in a voice that seemed to shake the rafters. Overhead they could hear Jeanne moving to and fro, but no answer came back.

La Rue, fuming and biting his lips, approached Jeremiah again, and again the old man shook him aside. So the three stood until, in a minute or two, Jeanne came down, carrying a little bag and wearing her hat and cloak. She went straight to Will and put her arm through his. He took the bag from her and led her to the door.

"Jeanne!" cried her uncle, with a sound as if he were strangling.

Will, still controlling the girl's movements, half turned. Jeremiah was leaning heavily across the table. Ye canna take her, Mr. Maitland," he mumbled. "Ye canna go. Ye dinna understand. Come back, lass!"

Jeanne looked back, but the pressure of Will's hand on her arm drew her toward the door. As they entered the hall, the outer door swung back, as if opened by an invisible hand. The fierce blast whipped their faces. The shadow cast by Jeremiah's huge form danced up and down grotesquely as the wind set the lamp flame whirling. Then they were gone, and the door had closed behind them.

La Rue leaped forward, dragging at Jeremiah's sleeve. "Stop them, you fool!" he shouted. "Get help! Get Angus! She's going to Quebec with him to-morrow morning! God knows where she's going to-night!"

For the third time Jeremiah shook him away. "'Tis the Lord has spoken!" he cried, with the inspired ardor of a fanatic in his voice. "They dinna understand. I thocht in my pride to raise myself above all men, and He has pulled down my altar and abased me in the dust. Aye, I'll bring them back! I'll tell them!"

He whirled upon the notary. "Ye've heard the voice of the Lord! He has made you the instrument of His wrath upon me. Get you hence!" he cried.

"You're mad, Jeremiah!" cried La Rue, breathing heavily. "Stop! Come in and talk it over!"

"Out of my way!" cried the old man, snatching his cap from the peg in the hall, opposite the parlor door.

"You'll be sorry if you do!" panted the notary. "I thought I'd convinced you just now. I never guessed a little thing like that photograph would have upset you." He placed his hand on Jeremiah's arm, to be flung staggering back.

"Listen to reason, you old fool!" shouted La Rue, beside himself. "Cool down first! If you tell them that—which isn't true—where do I come in—or you? I'll have no mercy on you!"

He gasped violently as Jeremiah caught him by the shoulders. "You don't know Dorion's alive, I say! That man may have been lying. A photograph—good God, what's a photograph?"

"Stand out of my way!"

"You shall not go, damn you!"

La Rue spun like a blown leaf in Jeremiah's great hands. He fell back against the front door, seeing the furious old figure advancing on him. He was utterly helpless, strong as he was, in Jeremiah's hold. The hands clutched him again and twisted him out of the way.

As La Rue toppled against the wall his fingers brushed against the heavy stick that Jeremiah habitually carried, which he was seeking instinctively. It was a piece of age-toughened wood, as thick as a child's arm, with a great round knob of a handle. He seized it, leaped back, and, as Jeremiah rushed at him, brought it crashing down on his head, striking with all his strength.

The stick smashed into three splinters. Jeremiah McGraeme staggered beneath that blow, which would have felled any other man like a log. La Rue's anger went swiftly out in fear. He darted toward the door, looked back; Jeremiah was swaying like a falling tower. His hands worked convulsively, tremors ran through his frame, and, without a sound or the least relaxing of the great limbs, he pitched, face forward, on the floor of the hall.

La Rue ran to his side. "Jeremiah!" he called weakly.

He flung the fragments of the stick away and knelt beside the prostrate man. With a great effort he succeeded in turning the great body upon its side. Jeremiah was breathing slowly and heavily, the rugged frame was motionless; the face expressionless; the eyes were open, but there was no recognition in them.

A lump was forming where the stick had fallen, and there was a tiny trickle of blood under the gray hair.

In panic La Rue placed his hands beneath Jeremiah's armpits and dragged the great body into the parlor. He tried to place it in the chair, but, finding himself unable to raise it, was forced to leave it seated on the floor, the head lolling against the seat. La Rue stood looking at it, uncertain what to do.

Suddenly he remembered the broken stick, and, darting into the hall, picked up the pieces. He went back into the parlor and placed them carefully in the hottest part of the blazing log fire.

He looked at Jeremiah again. He shook him, called to him in vain. He poured a little water from a carafe into his hand, and dashed it into the face. There was no reaction. He raised each hand in turn and watched it fall limply.

Slowly his courage was beginning to return. Nobody could say that Jeremiah had not had a stroke; and, indeed the appearances seemed to indicate that it was a stroke, brought about by the excitement, culminating in the blow, and not an injury due to the fall of the stick.

La Rue remembered how thick Jeremiah's voice had sounded. He began examining the injury. Jeremiah's skull did not seem to be fractured, and his whole body was apparently paralyzed.

He tried a new method of reviving him. He shook him by the shoulders violently. "Wake up, Jeremiah!" he shouted into his ear. "You've been dreaming about Dorion, and if I hadn't stopped you you'd have ruined both of us. Wake up! Do you hear me?"

Jeremiah did not wake up. The head lolled back over the seat of the chair. The heavy breathing continued unchanged. After deliberating for a moment or two La Rue grasped the great form and turned it over upon his face again, placing it in such a manner as to make it appear as if the swelling upon the head was the result of a fall against one of the iron dogs, which stood some distance out from the large fireplace.

Then he put on his cap and coat and went out of the house. By the time he was well upon the Presqu' Ile road his confidence had almost entirely come back to him. After all, he had only been defending himself. Jeremiah would probably have had the stroke, anyway; nobody would believe that he could have felled the giant. Jeanne must be informed, and she would certainly return to her uncle when she learned of the accident.

Meanwhile he had gained a respite, almost miraculously, and, if Jeremiah never recovered consciousness, and Will went to Quebec, as he must do, defeat might yet be converted into victory.

CHAPTER XXI.

LEFT BEHIND.

WILL and Jeanne had walked into the storm. In their new happiness they did not even feel the grip of the cold, or hear the roaring blasts. Their arms were round each other, and they were like children again, or lovers in their first ecstacy, embracing each other continually.

After a while Will began to tell Jeanne of his plans for her.

"I'm going to take you to Mme. Cawmill for to-night, dear," he said. "And in the morning you shall start for Quebec with me. And we'll be married in St. Boniface." The little protest died neglected. "It isn't just the way I hoped to marry you, but I'm not taking any more chances. No regrets, Jeanne?"

She looked up at him happily. "I can't regret it, Will. I had given up hope; then, when my uncle refused your offer, I saw that I had done my duty toward him."

"You should have told me before, Jeanne."

"I couldn't, Will. You understand now, how I suffered all those months—"

"And I was beginning to think you didn't care for me, Jeanne." He put his arms about her.

"Not care, Will? How could I help caring?"

"I'm much older than you."

"You're not old!" she said indignantly.

"Seventeen years older, Jeanne. Each year's a milestone after thirty. I'd never have plucked up courage to come to-night if somebody hadn't told me the situation."

"Paul?"

"He did. And he told me something else, too. He said Philippe La Rue was an old sweetheart of yours, and that you had begun to care for him again. That was what started me. It made me fighting mad, and resolved to win you."

Jeanne's eyes flashed. "How dared he tell you such a wicked falsehood!" she cried. "I can't imagine how Paul gets such notions into his head. And he's always posing as a wiseacre. I shall let him know my opinion of him."

"I wouldn't say anything."

"Why?"

"Well, it has occurred to me that he had an object in view when he told me. He may have wanted to bring us together. And he certainly did."

"Oh, no, Paul's too stupid for that," answered Jeanne. "Do you know, Will, he still believes you are a Government agent?"

They both laughed. They were crossing the neck of Presqu' Ile, going toward the old camp, where Paul still lived. Jeanne stopped and looked back.

Do you think my uncle will ever forgive us, Will?" she sighed. "Or that any harm will come to him?"

"Yes, to the first; no, to the second. I don't think anything very serious will happen to him because he owes La Rue money."

"You see, dear, he mortgaged my lands, and that makes him responsible."

"With your consent?"

"Of course I knew about it, and didn't mind. But it was for his own interests, not mine. And that's the way La Rue got him into his power."

"I don't think you need worry. La Rue will ruin him, but he won't prosecute him out of spite. And then, when he has lost everything, will come our chance to help him. We'll be rich then."

"Which ever way the suit goes," she answered, laughing. "It is beyond belief, Will, that you are about to take me to Quebec to pursue my suit against you!"

"To be sued by my wife! And the cream of the joke is that your property will be mine, anyway, under the antiquated Quebec marriage laws! And who knows, dear but that may turn out to be M. La Rue's extinguisher!"

She was thankful for the night that hid her blushes. She clung to him for a moment.

"You're sure you never will be sorry?" she whispered. "I'm giving up everything I have ever known for you—so gladly, dear, if only I can be sure you won't ever be sorry."

He swore dutifully and truthfully, and they hurried on, at last conscious of the storm, to Mme. Cawmill's cottage. Paul, opening the door, uttered an exclamation at the sight of them, white with snow from head to foot.

Mme. Cawmill, coming forward from a rear room, where the Cawmill progeny lay hushed in uneasy slumber, understood the situation long before it had begun to penetrate Paul's head. Like all the women of the village, she had been a sympathetic spectator from the beginning of Will's struggle against La Rue. Will's secret, as he thought it, had been very public property indeed in Bonne Chance.

When she learned that Jeanne was to start for Quebec with Will by dog-sleigh in the morning she first cried out in horror at the fearsome journey, and then began to beam with joy at the romance. As for Paul, he listened, scratching his head, as if he could not take it in.

Since the dogs were to start at daybreak, Will took his departure very soon, insisting that Jeanne should get all the sleep that was possible, and arranging for Paul to bring her to the camp on Presqu' Ile neck in the morning.

In spite of his own determination to sleep soundly, Will lay awake a good part

of the night in sheer joy, as he had tossed on the same bed the night before, beset by a thousand fears. He had been hopeless, after the long months in which hope had slowly run out, like the sands of an hour-glass. Now the hour-glass had been reversed. The sands of his happiness were pouring back, and it seemed too unbelievable to be true that Jeanne would be his upon the morrow.

He could not make himself believe it, and the gray shadow of fear crept across his joy as he lay there, wooing sleep in vain. At last, overburdened by his premonitions, he dressed and went out. The storm had ceased, it was bright moonlight, and he saw a figure hurrying toward him along the corduroy.

He went to meet it as he might have gone to some foreknown disaster. Paul broke into a run, and came up panting.

"*Monsieur,* you are to come to the house at once!" he cried. "M. Jeremiah has had a stroke. Mme. Dorion has gone there with Angus, who came for her. She did not wish you to be awakened at first, but as soon as she saw her uncle she sent me for you."

He hurried along at Will's side, explaining as they went. It appeared that Angus had met La Rue, who had told him that Jeremiah had been acting strangely, and had advised him to go to the house and see if he was all right. Angus, entering, had discovered his cousin unconscious on the parlor floor, his head bleeding from a wound occasioned by falling upon one of the iron dogs.

Angus, learning that Jeanne was with Mme. Cawmill, had gone there and awakened her, and she and Paul had hurried to Jeremiah's house. Paul and Angus had with difficulty contrived to get the old man up-stairs to bed.

"Mme. Angus has come, and she and Mme. Dorion are at the bedside, *monsieur,*" Paul continued. "He is quite unconscious, and it is not known if he will live until morning."

Will found Jeanne and Mme. Angus seated at Jeremiah's bedside. The old man was lying inert upon the bed, his eyes, wide open, staring up at the ceiling. The muscles of his face were set rigidly, the pupils fixed. The slow, stertorous breathing told Will that the diagnosis was correct, and the complete paralysis of the great body indicated that there was little hope.

Jeanne, who was crying bitterly, rose, and drew Will aside. "I can't bear to see him like that," she said, "and to think that I may be the cause of his seizure."

She would not listen to his attempts to change her belief that she was the cause. She broke into bitter self-reproaches.

"It is terrible to think that I was so happy a few hours ago," she said, "when perhaps my uncle had already been struck down, with no one at his side. I feel so guilty. I feel as if I never deserve to be happy again."

Will, finding it impossible to console her, was wise enough not to attempt to argue with her. Inwardly he cursed the fate that had thwarted all his plans, his hopes of happiness. Will understood Jeanne's grief, but he had little sympathy with Jeremiah. He realized that all thought of taking Jeanne with him that day would have to be abandoned.

And for many days thereafter. Either he must set out upon his journey to Quebec alone, or resign himself to an endless waiting. The latter plan was impossible; he might as well abandon the journey altogether. The journey was vital to him, less on account of the lawsuit, which might very well be heard in his absence, than because of the fir shipment.

His capital had sunk to a point where another month would mean suspension of operations. He had banked everything upon interesting the shipper and securing substantial backing in Quebec. He knew that the latter could be obtained once he had convinced the interested parties that the wood was what he claimed it to be. And the wood was lying heaven knew where — probably in some government warehouse.

He racked his brains with the problem throughout the remainder of the night, now watching the sick man, now helping Jeanne in her care of him. There was little enough that could be done, but apoplexy was the disease that the villagers were best compe-

tent to deal with, on account of its comparative frequency, and Mme. Angus had some rude knowledge of nursing.

Toward morning Jeanne left the room to make Will some coffee. He had a brief chance to speak with her. He was wondering how to put the situation before her when she herself spoke of it.

"You must leave at the time you planned," she said. "You have too much at stake to risk by delaying. And it will be days before we can even begin to guess whether my uncle will get better. It is no use waiting even one day."

"I think I ought to go," Will answered, choking down his disappointment.

She put her cheek against his. "I know how much it means to you, Will, dear. And to me, too. It is just fate. We must bear with it. I shall be anxious about you every minute on that dreadful journey."

"And I for you. That's the hardest thing to think of."

"I shall be safe here, Will. Don't worry about me. Angus will take charge of everything."

"I can't bear to trust you to Angus."

"You must remember that he is my kinsman, Will. I shall be perfectly safe with him, I promise you. And I shall look forward to your returning; I shall count the days, and mark each night where I think you are. And—you know that nothing will ever change me, dear."

He held her in his arms for a few moments. But there was nothing more to say, and, after a hurried breakfast, he started back, Jeanne accompanying him as far as the camp on the neck, to say good-by there.

The sun was just rising. The storm had ceased, and the snow crackled crisply underfoot. An ideal day for that journey which they had hoped to take together, upon which they should have even then been starting.

Even at the last there seemed hardly anything to say. While Paul was harnessing the dogs, and loading the sleigh with those provisions which the famine-stricken state of the North Shore in winter would render necessary, whenever he stopped for the night in any of the smaller hamlets, Will tried in vain to smother his forebodings in their embrace.

"Come back quickly, dear. And good luck!" she said, trying to smile through her tears.

"I'll be back soon, Jeanne." A last good-by. Will took the whip.

"*Marche donc!*"

The dogs tugged at the traces, and he walked resolutely beside the sleigh, not trusting himself to look back toward the little, lessening figure that watched him from the road.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE AMBUSH.

HAVING reached Ste. Anne, the terminus of the electric line, Will stabled his dogs there and ran into Quebec by the prosaic trolley. He registered at the Chateau Frontenac, and at once set about his business.

His first visit was to the manufacturer to whom he had shipped his consignment of fir. He was surprised at the frigidity of his reception. At first the man pretended hardly to recollect the circumstances of their last interview. Then he appeared disposed to make light of it, as an informal conversation. In the end, Will's blunt insistence wore him down.

"Well, perhaps I did admit my interest to you fairly plainly, Mr. Maitland," he acknowledged, "because I confess I thought your proposition held possibilities in it. It interests me still. But you omitted to inform me of one vital fact when you were here—that you are conducting your lumbering operations upon another person's land."

"So you have had a visit from M. La Rue?" asked Will.

"I am informed that the Dorion limits, on which you are operating, are not yours, and that proceedings to oust you are now pending."

"I explained to you that I lease my territory from the government in the regular way. It is a matter of record."

The manufacturer threw up his hands with a weary gesture. "My dear sir," he

said, "that is no concern of mine. All I know is that the territory in question is the subject of a suit by another party. That is all that interests me at present. Surely, Mr. Maitland, you do not imagine that I am going to buy lumber from you when I may become involved in the suit? Settle the case, sir, show me a clear title or lease; then show me the fir, and we'll talk business, and perhaps get down to figures."

"That's fair enough," admitted Will. "But what is your opinion of that fir?"

"I haven't seen it."

"You got my letter, stating that it was being consigned to you?"

"I did, and I went no further. I am not going to be involved in this business until you know where you stand."

There was no more to be said. Will went next to the revenue department. Securing an interview with the man whom he wanted to see, after a long delay, he learned that the schooners, with their load, had been confiscated by the government. The lumber was being held, and protracted formalities would be necessary before Will could secure it.

The official became more communicative. "And you will certainly not be able to do so until your lawsuit has been decided," he told Will. "A claim upon it has been filed by your opponent, Dame Dorion."

From the same person Will learned that the charge against the outlaws had been reduced, through the intervention of certain potent influences, to a minor one alleging offense against the customs regulations, and that Eudore and Alexandre, with their companions, had been released after a short term of imprisonment.

Will's third visit, which could not be paid until the following day, was to his own lawyers on St. Peter street. The surprise that was awaiting him was more unpleasant than any he had yet received.

"We wired you only last week, Mr. Maitland," said M. Gagnon, the head of the firm, asking you to hurry here at once, as your case will be heard in about ten days. I understand that your opponents will not be present in person, as this is not requisite. In fact, our only purpose in endeavoring to secure your presence was to consult you as to your plans in the event of the decision going against you. I may say that Mme. Dorion is not disposed to compromise."

"But surely there is no possibility of the decision going against me," protested Will.

"You are not aware that the original title to the Dorion lands has been found?" asked the lawyer.

That was Will's first intimation that La Rue's case was stronger than his own. M. Gagnon elucidated the matter.

"Instead of your opponent having to base her case upon custom and inheritance, under the old feudal regime," he said, it is now for you to base yours upon those same extravagances—for I can hardly call them anything else.

"The question of feudal tenure is an immensely complicated one. It dates back to the days of the Normans. Tenure was granted under two or three dozen different regulations. This matter is further complicated by the fact that the Dorion lands were once in the possession of a clerical order, which was banished from the country, and later readmitted. Frankly, Mr. Maitland, I am afraid your only chance will lie in an appeal."

Meaning that the courts in Quebec will decide against me?"

"Inevitably, upon the fact that the Dorion title exists. So will all the courts of Canada. On the other hand, an appeal to the Privy Council might hold out some chance of success. They will examine the validity of the early French grants thoroughly. Of course it will cost—"

"How much?" asked will.

The lawyer pursed his lips. "If you intend to appeal through all the courts, to London," he said, "you should be prepared for an outlay of at least a quarter of a million dollars. That is the minimum. Also, an injunction will undoubtedly be granted, forbidding you to develop the lands. The whole case may last four years."

Will smiled, and M. Gagnon smiled, too. "What is your intention?" asked the lawyer. "You mean to take the matter into the local court, I suppose?"

"Since I have gone so far."

"Of course you have a fighting chance, but nothing more. We are going to assail the validity of the title upon the ground that the seigniory rights lapsed under the Act of 1854, and that the lands were not then registered as privately owned. We'll do our best for you," he ended, with a smile which suggested that the best was not likely to amount to much.

Will left the lawyer's office with the sense of utter ruin. Fate had stacked the cards against him from the beginning, down to the last blow of Jeremiah's seizure, but for which circumstance Jeanne would now have been his wife, and the entire proceedings possibly invalidated. He anticipated the result of the action as if the verdict had already been handed down, for he knew that only a miracle could save the lands for him.

And his imagination awakened as he brooded under the force of the blow, and he had a thousand fears for Jeanne. He pictured her at the house on Presqu' Ile, with the sick man, and at La Rue's mercy. Perhaps La Rue was powerless to harm her physically, but Will could at least realize the slow drag upon her spirit, and the loneliness.

After he had waited in Quebec some days the case came up for trial. The miracle did not occur. Will understood very little of the proceedings, which were in French. M. Gagnon appeared to be constantly protesting, and to be as regularly snubbed by the judge, an old man, who might have been in league with Jeanne's counsel, Faguy.

On the second afternoon the proceedings came to an abrupt end after an animated exchange between the judge and Gagnon. Suddenly the scene dissolved, and Gagnon came up to Will, shrugging his shoulders. "Well, M. Maitland, it is as we expected," he said.

"We lose?"

"I regret to say that the decision has been given against us. A case has, however, been stated for a higher court. The decision, you understand, is a technicality, it does not go very deep into the rights and wrongs of the matter, but only reviews the facts immediately at hand. On the whole, nothing else could have been expected."

The few spectators in the court-room had already grouped themselves anew to attend the hearing of the case following, which had the interesting complication of arson. The old man in the gown, with the white hair, frowning at M. Gagnon and chatting in a confidential undertone with Faguy, had ruined Will's life without the slightest qualm.

Gagnon walked with his client toward the cliff elevator. "If you wish to proceed, M. Maitland, the next step will be to apply for the appointment of a commission, to examine into the land decisions under the French regime," he said. "That will provide the substance for our appeal to the Dominion court."

"What do you advise?"

"In heaven's name let the case go!" answered the lawyer. "You will be throwing good money after bad. I understood, *monsieur,* that there was some local feeling—you wished to uphold your right—but, *monsieur,* these land disputes come before the courts every month of the year, and nobody has ever sought a decision on the question of the feudal tenures before."

"It's quitting," said Will; but the word had no special significance to the lawyer.

"Quite so. I advise you to quit, *monsieur,*" he answered. Perhaps he had sized up Will's financial capabilities; possibly he was too honest to lead him after a will-o'-the-wisp.

Will went back with the lawyer to his office, and ended the business there and then, finding himself five hundred dollars the poorer. He considered that he had got off easily, from the monetary point of view.

It was beginning to grow dark as he made his way along St. Peter street toward the cliff elevator again. He had turned up Sous-le-Cap when, feeling the undefinable impression that he was being followed, he turned, and seeing a man shrinking into an alley behind him. The set of his shoulders gave Will the momentary idea that it was Eudore McGraeme.

For a moment he was tempted to follow him. Then he dismissed the project. If it was Eudore, and the man had been follow-

ing him, it mattered nothing. Will had more pressing worries than the McGraemes.

He paced the Terrace a long time, despite the falling snow, and afterward sat a long time in his bedroom, making his plans. The injunction against him would go into force immediately. So far as his work was concerned, there was no compulsion to return to Bonne Chance. He would arrange for his workmen to receive their pay. The gangmill could not be removed till navigation opened—and there was nowhere to remove it to!

There remained only Jeanne. He knew she loved him, and that the loss of his suit meant nothing to her. But quixotic considerations of his poverty insisted that he could now do nothing more than ask her to wait till he had established himself again.

Yet he meant to see that La Rue's persecutions were finally removed, and he started in a frenzy of eagerness, moving to some unknown end, with his purposes only half formulated.

A spell of intensely cold weather had come in March like a belated February, and Will took up the long tramp from each settlement to the next with plodding doggedness, in a temperature that was never far above the zero point. He was utterly worn out when he reached St. Boniface.

From St. Boniface to Bonne Chance is one long day's journey. He started early on the following morning, in order to make his destination before sunset, sending his anxious thoughts before him. That last day seemed the hardest, though the dogs, conscious that they were approaching home, pulled with a good will. Intense anxiety took hold of him. He had inquired about Jeremiah in St. Boniface without eliciting any intelligible information. He could not even learn if the old man was alive.

Throughout the journey Will had perceived a schooner out in midstream, moving down the Gulf, and apparently keeping pace with him. She was still abreast of him that day. It was a dangerous voyage, for, though the middle Gulf was clear of ice, the impending break-up of the floes that bound the shores might at any time fill the channel. Will imagined that the little craft was bound for the sealing grounds.

In the early afternoon a fierce storm sprang up. It heralded a rising temperature, it was one of those fierce cyclones that swoop down in spring from the wastes of Labrador, with a fury of wind and pelting snow. It grew steadily fiercer. Nothing was visible any longer. Out of the obscurity came the sound of the grinding of the floes against the shore, as the tide drove them from their anchorage, and the hiss of the spray.

Will forced the dogs into the gale. Its fury answered the exuberance in his heart, and foot by foot he battled onward, straining his eyes for the familiar outlines of the Presqu' Ile peninsula. Within an hour he might see Jeanne! But he no longer knew where he was, and continued blindly, expecting each minute to see the straggling cabins of Bonne Chance come into view.

Suddenly he heard his name called thickly. He saw a man standing some distance away like a pillar of snow, waving an arm. As he approached, however, the man moved slowly away.

"Who are you? What do you want?" Will called.

At the same moment two other figures emerged out of the blinding storm, one on either side of him. He could not recognize their faces, but an instinct of danger warned him. He leaped back, slipped; flashes of fire scintillated before his eyes, and a river, roaring in his ears, bore him away.

This story will be concluded in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.

Of particular interest to everybody	A NEW TARZAN SERIAL BY EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS	Will begin early in the new year!

While Dorion Lives

by Victor Rousseau

Author of "The Eye of Balamok," "Draft of Eternity," "The Diamond Demons," etc.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CONTRACT.

ALEXANDRE and Eudore raised Will's inanimate body and carried it down the slope of the cliff to a little, disused quay, where the schooner was moored, followed by Duncan. On board was Angus.

"Pitch the damned spy overboard!" growled Eudore.

"Put him in the fo'c's'le. We'll throw him over in the middle channel, where he'll travel a long way before he floats ashore," grinned Duncan.

"We'll run him ashore on Cold Island and leave him there," said Angus. "My creature made me swear by the Virgin not to have him killed. He gave her a hundred dollars for taking care of him. Sheer off before this storm gets worse, and run up the jibs and mainsail."

The dogs, freed from control, had started in a mad race toward Bonne Chance, dragging the overturned sleigh behind them.

Acting upon his policy of taking the bull by the horns, La Rue called at Jeremiah's house on the morning following upon his seizure. He found Jeremiah lying like a log in bed. Yet there seemed to be intelligence in the eyes: they were not the glassy orbs of an unconscious man. He had already learned that Jeanne had returned to her uncle's house, and the news had given him immense satisfaction. Only Jeremiah could thwart his plans now, he believed, and he wondered, as he stood at the bedside and looked at the almost inanimate hulk before him, whether the secret of their quarrel and of the blow were hidden forever in that broken brain. How long, if not forever, would the dumb mouth remain his ally?

The spectacle threw him into a torture of apprehension. He knew that, unless death supervened, complete paralysis seldom lasted more than two or three weeks at most. Once Jeremiah gained the faculty of speech, his hopes were ended.

Mme. Angus and Jeanne had been at the bedside when the notary entered, but the girl, with a slight movement of her head in recognition, had left the room almost immediately. La Rue knew that the old woman did not understand a word of English. He resolved to ascertain whether any consciousness lurked behind the staring eyes.

He bent forward. "Listen, Jeremiah," he said. "You remember what we were talking about when you had your seizure, eh? Don't ever get it into your head that our friend's alive, just on the strength of that photograph you spoke about. That was a part of your delirium. I'm going to marry Jeanne. You understand me?"

He could have sworn that the flicker of a light which gleamed in Jeremiah's eyes was that of understanding and apprehension. It warned him to make haste with

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for November 27.

whatever he meant to do. La Rue withdrew from the house, bowing respectfully to Jeanne as he passed the parlor, where she was standing.

He called each day to inquire after the sick man, always respectful and unobtrusive. On the third day he ran up against Angus.

The acting chief of the clan was hanging round the house, conscious of his complete inadequacy to fill the job. Jeremiah had been the head and brains of the confederacy. He had promised that Jeanne's marriage to La Rue would restore the fortunes of the McGraemes, and he had obeyed his instructions implicitly, only to see Will Maitland calmly walk away with the girl, and depart for Quebec, apparently betrothed to her.

When Angus saw La Rue he came forward deferentially.

"Ah, *monsieur,* this is a great blow to us all!" he said, shaking his head. "Do you think my cousin will recover, M. Philippe?"

"Impossible to say!" returned the notary sharply. "If he does live, he will probably always be a cripple, perhaps an imbecile."

"Ah, *mon Dieu,* what shall we do? We are poor men. Perhaps one might obtain the bone-setter—"

"The bone-setter is not necessary, Angus." La Rue surveyed him thoughtfully, then tapped him on the shoulder. "You have a good head, Angus."

"Ah, *monsieur,* of what use is this when one can neither read nor write?"

"You must rely on those who can. You are now the head of the McGraemes. You must live up to your responsibilities."

Flattered, although he did not understand the latter part of the sentence, Angus waited deferentially for La Rue's next words.

"I shall be willing to advise you until your cousin recovers, if he does recover at all. Mme. Dorion is to become my wife before M. Maitland returns."

Angus's lips parted in his sour grin, displaying his projecting fangs.

"We can take care of the spy, *monsieur,*" he answered. "All Bonne Chance has sworn that there shall be no betrayal of our sealing fleet this year, few though our schooners be. But, *monsieur,* it is another thing to force an unwilling girl to the marriage altar.

"Besides, she is our kinswoman, and, though she has not acted rightly by us, still we cannot permit violence. And again, *monsieur,* the curé at St. Boniface would not marry her against her will."

La Rue heard Angus's little harangue with angry impatience.

"Fool," he blustered, "who spoke of violence? There will be neither marriage altar nor curé at St. Boniface. Is not our curé, M. LeGrand, in Europe, and does not the church, where there is no parish priest, accept a contract made before witnesses?"

"Ah, *oui, monsieur.* Thus many are married in the further parishes every winter. But in the spring they go to the nearest curé to have the record made."

"We'll leave that to Mme. Dorion," answered La Rue.

"She has consented, then?" asked Angus incredulously.

"She will consent, Angus, and you, if you know your duty toward your people, will assist me."

"Ah, M. La Rue, how often have I not spoken to her, telling her what her duty is! But she is stubborn as a little ass, *monsieur.*"

"And when the ass will not go, Angus, in spite of beatings, do we not tie the bundle of hay before his nose?"

Angus broke into his surly grin, which broadened as the notary described his plans to him.

La Rue clapped him on the back again when he had finished. "Everything shall come out right, and there will be more money than you have ever seen, Angus," he said.

On the next day, however, La Rue experienced an unexpected shock. Calling to inquire for Jeremiah, he found that the old man was able to move both arms. He was also undoubtedly aware of what was taking place about him.

La Rue only remained with him long enough to make sure that he was still incapable of any form of self-expression.

It had become a desperate race now between the return of Jeremiah's speech and Jeanne's coming of age. La Rue sought the girl in the parlor.

At his entrance she drew back from him in agitation.

"Mme. Dorion, I have to congratulate you on your uncle's improvement," said La Rue respectfully. "And I'm sorry for all that has been happening of late. I wanted to speak of it before, but I felt I'd been too much to blame. You and I used to be good friends. I should like you to feel that, if you can never look on me as a friend, you won't consider me an enemy."

She moved restlessly under his gaze. She did not know what to say, and she distrusted him profoundly.

"I wanted you, Jeanne, and I felt jealous and hurt when Mr. Maitland came on the scene. I wouldn't let him cut in and beat me. I'd known you all my life. Well, he beat me. And when it came to the point of separating uncle and niece I realized that I had gone too far. You don't say anything. I want to deal straight with you."

"You—you have my uncle in your power," she answered slowly. "You have a mortgage on this house as well as on the lands. You can turn us out when it falls due. You have your rights to protect."

"I want to protect them. I admit I played on the old man's fears, because I wanted you. I can't do it any more. And I stand to lose everything. The mortgage falls due in May. You come of age this month, don't you?"

"On the fifteenth."

"Well, you know that the mortgage doesn't amount to the paper it's written on, because your uncle had no right to mortgage your lands. I'm willing to turn it over to you, to destroy it, the day you come of age, if you'll sign a contract undertaking to pay me twenty thousand dollars in the event of the courts deciding that you own the Dorion lands.

"It's my only chance of getting anything back. You don't have to do it. I'm relying on your sense of fairness. After all, he's had the money, and it's a dead loss to me."

Jeanne looked steadily into his face, and the gaze that he returned was unwavering. She could read nothing in his eyes, but she distrusted him none the less.

"You understand, Philippe La Rue, that I shall never marry you?" she asked slowly.

"I understand. And you still have no faith in me?"

"How can I trust you, when you have persecuted me and betrayed my uncle, to get him into your power?"

"Perhaps I have done things out of love of you which I shouldn't have done."

"'Love!'" she repeated contemptuously. "I do not want to hear that word from you, M. La Rue."

"You needn't. But I have my own interests to look after. I want my money back. You don't have to pay it. Of course I never intended to prosecute your uncle. That was a bluff. It has failed. But I want my money. It rests with you. A simple act of justice, *madame*—and you can raise thousands on the Dorion lands. We hadn't sense enough to know their value. The Banque Industrielle will offer you a quarter of a million for those lumber rights."

Jeanne considered a while. "If I sign a note for twenty thousand dollars, it means that I am returning you your money and that you forego all claims upon my uncle."

"My money, with reasonable interest—yes, *madame*."

"You overlook the fact that M. Maitland is the owner of those rights."

"Mme. Dorion, he cannot hold them. The deed has been found, the original deed which shows that you are the owner. It cannot be contested."

He smiled inwardly at her look of distress and continued: "I did not tell you this. But your uncle knew. I am so sure of what I say that the contract will make the payment conditional upon the verdict of the court being in your favor."

She put her hands over her eyes. "Wait a minute! Let me think!" she said.

She felt her loneliness bitterly. To traffic in Will's lands seemed abominable,

though she felt sure that in this case he would approve. If only he were present to advise her!

"*Madame,* it is a simple act of justice to me!" pleaded La Rue.

"Very well! I'll sign your contract on the day I come of age,' answered the girl.

The days that followed were fraught with intense anxiety for Philippe La Rue. Jeremiah was recovering, without doubt. More than that, both sides of his body showed equal improvement. On the day before Jeanne came of age he could sit up in bed; but he was still unable to speak, and his rugged face betrayed neither recognition nor emotion when La Rue approached him.

So the race was won. Late on a cheerless afternoon the notary came in, bag in hand, and strewed his papers over the parlor table. Angus and his wife were called in as witnesses. He handed Jeanne the mortgage.

"If you will destroy this, Mme. Dorion," he said, "the debt will become one of honor and nothing more, until the new contract is signed."

Jeanne glanced over the mortgage in the waning light and slowly tore it into pieces, dropping them into the wood fire. La Rue began to read the new contract aloud. When he had finished, he handed it to her, and she looked through it. Then, at his direction, she affixed her signature, and the notary his. Angus and his wife placed their crosses as witnesses.

La Rue pushed the document aside.

"Here again, *madame,*" he said, indicating a copy beneath. "One for you, one for me. And this triplicate for the county records."

He handed Jeanne one of the copies, put a second in his pocket, and left the third on the table.

"I congratulate you," he said. "M. Maitland has lost his case. We have just heard. The decision was handed down more than a week ago."

Jeanne looked at him in dismay.

At that moment the grinning face of Jean Desmoulins appeared within the room.

"Ai, ai, M. Angus, you are wanted by Duncan and Alexandre!" cried the half-wit.

Angus started and looked at the notary, who turned to Jeanne. "*Au revoir* for the present, *madame,*" he said.

Angus's wife had already left the house for the night. The girl, standing beside the table, watched the two men go out. The significance of the news that La Rue had given her had hardly come home to her. It seemed to make no difference, but there had been something furtive about his concealment.

Vague distrust, never wholly extinguished under his plausible approaches, suddenly became merged in a presentiment of greater evil. She picked up the paper.

The contract was drawn as La Rue had proposed and read. She owed him twenty thousand dollars in six months' time on the security of the lands. Then her eyes fell on the copy.

But this was no copy. Drawn to the same length, so that the difference could not readily be recognizable in the gathering gloom, it was a marriage contract between La Rue and herself, signed by both, and witnessed!

Jeanne read it without uttering a sound. She let it drop from her fingers. A deathly chill crept up her limbs and seemed to constrict her heart like an icy band. He had the copy, of course. But this fraud meant nothing! She snatched up the paper, tore it fiercely into a score of pieces, and let them flutter upon the hearth like a shower of snow.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE RETURN.

IT was not La Rue, but Alphonse Belley, the storekeeper, who had first received the news that Will had lost his case. The mail-carrier, leaving St. Boniface a few hours ahead of Will, had picked it up from one of the McGraemes, who had pulled ashore from the schooner to exchange brandy for flour.

Belley was retailing the news late in the afternoon to a number of cronies and customers who had gathered in his store.

"So it appears that M. Maitland's days are finished in Bonne Chance," he said. "Well, he could not stand up for long against Philippe La Rue. Philippe La Rue is a devil, as we all know, but he is a *Canaven* like us, and the *Canaven* devil is better than the English devil."

Hearty approval greeted this dictum, especially on the part of Will's employees.

"He won't come back," continued Belley, encouraged by the demonstration. "He's got too much sense for that."

"If he comes back before our schooners get out of harbor, he won't live to carry any more tales to the Blanche!" shouted one of the audience. "Eh, Duncan is on the watch!"

"For my part, I'm glad to see the last of that M. Maitland, either way," said Poulin, the mill-hand. "Now we'll have a good master of our own race over us, instead of a foreigner."

"Yes, M. Maitland has done a lot of mischief here, not to speak of cutting down wages and growing rich while our families starved, and now we shall have a good *Canaven* master," said another hand.

"But the mischief's done," said Belley. "It won't be long now before you see the sealing company here. Just as soon as the ice goes out their steamers will be in port."

"And to think that Mme. Dorion should have fallen in love with the scoundrel!"

"That was where he played false. If he hadn't tried to take her from Philippe La Rue he wouldn't have got into so much trouble. Now M. Philippe has the lands and everything. Jeremiah has lost all."

"Eh, the great rascal of a Scotchman!" grunted Belley. "So Philippe La Rue will be the new *seigneur,* and Jeremiah comes down into the dirt! They say he had his stroke when M. Philippe's mortgage fell due and he couldn't meet it."

"Well, I must be going," said Poulin. "So long as M. Maitland pays out good money, I can't afford to lose it." He looked out. "*Bateche,* another storm!"

He stamped out, and the rest straggled out behind him. Belley went to the door, closed it, and, taking a broom, began to sweep the dust from the floor toward the trap-door of the cellar in one corner. When he had collected it, he opened the trap and brushed it down. Then he began to dust the counter.

He enumerated the bananas still remaining on hand, counted some rolls of cloth, and finally began to add up his sales for the day. He was in the middle of this when the door opened and Jean Desmoulins appeared, white with snow. A gust of wind blew a cloud into the store.

"Shut the door, imbecile!" shouted the storekeeper.

Jean obeyed, and went shivering toward the wood-fire burning in Belley's stove. Stretching out his hands, he warmed them at the blaze.

"Well what news hast thou?" demanded Bailey.

"Ai, M. Alphonse, M. Maitland has just arrived, and M. Angus and Duncan have gone to kill him."

"What's that you say?" demanded Belley. "Who told you this?"

"Ai, M. Alphonse, Duncan sent me for M. Angus at M. Jeremiah's house. M. Philippe was there, and Mme. Jean."

"Who told thee that they will murder M. Maitland?" asked Belley, striding softly toward him.

"Ai, M. Alphonse, I have heard it said. I never forget. And now there will be five hundred dollars for me, eh, M. Alphonse?"

Belley, whose face had suddenly gone purple, seized Jean by the shoulders and began shaking him to and fro with a pounding movement, causing the half-wit's head to vibrate from side to side like a marionette's.

"Imbecile! What is this about five hundred dollars?" he shouted.

Jean whimpered. "Ai, ai, I am a poor imbecile, M. Alphonse!"

Belley went on shaking him, and he was apparently so deeply engrossed in this pastime that he did not hear the door open until he was aware of the roar of wind and snow that burst into the store. Then he turned, to see a stranger standing before the counter.

"Shut that door!" shouted the storekeeper.

The stranger kicked it to with his foot.

Belley regarded him out of narrowed eyes. This blond giant was a stranger along that coast. He presented a singular appearance, for his skin, blackened, as if by exposure to intense heat and sunlight, had peeled in places, exposing a milk-white integument beneath, while in others it had acquired patches of protective pigmentation. That in itself was singular, but when the storekeeper caught the look in the stranger's eyes he leaped backward in terror.

"What can I do for you, *monsieur?*" he stammered.

The stranger laughed uproariously, and yet there was something in the sound of it that sent a chill through Belley's heart.

"*Eh bien,* it's my old shipmate Alphonse!" cried the stranger heartily. "And Jean, there, as I live! Thou wast a foolish boy in the old days, Jean! How hast thou fared since then?"

"Ai, ai!" screamed Jean Desmoulins. "It is M. Dorion! It is our *seigneur!*"

"Right!" cried Dorion boisterously. "Set out the bottle and glasses, Alphonse, and lock your store. We three will have a drink together, in memory of old times. It is not long I can stay, for I have business in Bonne Chance to-night—though indeed it may be here," he added seriously.

Alphonse Belley, trembling so that he hardly hold it, produced a bottle of brandy from beneath the counter, and three thick tumblers. He began tremulously to pour a drink for Dorion, but the man, grasping his hand, held it until the glass was full.

Then he raised the tumblerful of raw spirits to his lips.

"Here's luck to my devil!" he cried, and drained it at a draught. He set it down with a smack of satisfaction.

"Eh, Alphonse, why dost thou tremble and not drink with me?" he cried, clapping the storekeeper on the shoulder. "Drink, man, and Jean with thee!"

Belley poured out a tot for himself and another for the half-wit.

"Well, old comrades," cried Dorion, "there were the five of us in the old days, were there not? Thou, Jean, and I, and Jeremiah McGraeme, sailing together in the one boat, and thou, Alphonse, and Philippe La Rue in the other, and off to the sealing grounds. Changes! Great changes, Alphonse! I have learned of them along the coast.

"Jeremiah McGraeme has become a great man since my wife held the Dorion lands. And Philippe La Rue, he is a great man, too, *hein?* Those were great days, shipmates! And when we all landed on Miquelon, drunk, and the gendarme would have arrested me, and I killed him—that was a great deed, eh? And what saidst thou of that in Bonne Chance, Alphonse, *hein?*"

"We said that you had been drowned at sea, Emile," said Belley huskily. "We did not wish your wife to know what had happened to you. We all agreed on that story, and none of us has ever betrayed the truth—not even Jean here!"

"Thoughtful and kind, Alphonse!" shouted Dorion, slamming his hand down on the storekeeper's shoulder again. "But what if my little Jeanne believed me dead, and married again, *hein,* Alphonse?"

"She—she has not married," faltered the storekeeper.

"So much I know," grinned Dorion. "But when we fled from Miquelon, Jeremiah and I and Jean, who was it told our fellows in the next boat of what happened, *hein,* Jean?"

"I am a poor imbecile!" stuttered Jean Desmoulins, with flopping knees.

"So much we all know, Jean; and thou hast not changed, Jean Desmoulins. And therefore I bet my hat"—he slammed it on the counter, upsetting the glasses—"that thou hast not received thy share of that thousand dollars reward that the authorities of Miquelon offered for my betrayal, *hein,* Jean?"

"Ai, ai, he has not given me my five hundred dollars!" screamed the imbecile, pointing a long finger furiously at the storekeeper.

But Dorion already had Alphonse Belley by the throat, and the storekeeper was black in the face, and his tongue was protruding, and gurgling sounds came rattling from his larynx.

"So it was thou, old Alphonse, *hein?*" he roared, and suddenly released him and flung him back, laughing more loudly than before.

"Dost thou know, Alphonse, why I did not choke the soul out of thee?" he asked. He struck his breast. "It is because my devil here tells me that thou art not the man whom I am looking for. Who was it whispered to thee to sell me to the authorities at St. Pierre, *hein*, Alphonse? Jeremiah, my father-in-law, because he coveted the lands which would fall to his niece, my little Jeanne? Or my old friend Philippe La Rue, who was casting sheep's eyes at her? No, do not tell me, Alphonse, for thou art a great liar, and my devil here will tell me which of them it was when the time comes."

But for the present Alphonse Belley was beyond telling anything as he sprawled, gurgling, over a bolt of cloth.

"Ai, M. Emile," cried Jean, "have you been dead, then, that you have seen the devil? M. Alphonse and I saw you break from the gendarmes when they came to take you, and they shot you dead."

Dorion turned upon Jean and seized him in his powerful arms.

"I have been dead and in hell!" he cried boisterously. "Thou hast a good memory for a half-wit, *hein?*"

"*Ai, monsieur,* I forget nothing. It is only when M. Alphonse tells me to forget that I forget, because I am a poor imbecile. *Ai, monsieur,* pay me my five hundred dollars for betraying you!"

Dorion uttered a roar, and, unbuttoning his coat, dripping with melted snow, pulled out a huge, weather-stained wallet and counted out from it five hundred-dollar bills, which was all it contained. He flung them at Jean, who leaped at them and gathered them into his hands.

"Now," shouted Dorion, "I go to find the man who betrayed me, and also my little Jeanne, and my good devil shall tell me what to do!" He swaggered to the door. "*Bonsoir, b'hommes!*" he shouted. "We'll drink to my devil in hell together when I return!"

He was gone like the devil in the rush of wind that set the oil-lamp flickering. The whirl of snow that entered seemed in the half darkness like a wraith rushing into the store.

"Eh, shut the door, Jean!" coughed Belley. "Dost thou want that madman to come back and murder us? Put the bolt on! We sleep to-night together!"

Jean obeyed, chuckling. When he came back Belley had opened the candy-case and piled all its contents in a heap on the floor —nearly a score of boxes. With his hook he lifted down the remnants of the bananas and put this on top of them.

"These are the value of that five hundred dollars of thine, Jean," he said, taking the bills from between the half-wit's fingers.

Jean let them flutter into the storekeeper's palm, and, with exclamations of delight, sat down upon the floor.

"Listen, now, Jean!" coughed Belley. "We have seen nobody to-night—thou understandest? Poor imbecile that thou art, henceforward thou rememberest nothing of that time when we sailed with Emile Dorion for the sealing grounds!"

"Ah, *oui, monsieur,*" mumbled the half-wit, cramming his mouth with candies.

The storm was at its zenith as Dorion strode from the store and took the road along the cliff toward the neck. The fierce gusts swirled his cloak around him and threatened to blow him from his feet. He strode on through the gale until he reached the drop of the cliff that gives upon the meadows and the narrows of Presqu' Ile.

It was a strange night for any one to be abroad except by necessity, but a little group of men was gathered here, looking out uneasily toward the sea and muttering. At Dorion's approach they scattered as timorously as sheep, and then, as if ashamed, came crowding back upon him, half aggressively, too, and eager to scan his face.

Strange passions had been stirred in Bonne Chance that night, and the minds of these men matched aptly with Dorion's. At the apparition of the blond giant all idea of aggression died. He had lost his hat, and his hair fell like tow about his shoulders. The madness in his eyes made

him the embodiment of terror to the little group, and yet his voice was as smooth as honey when he addressed them.

"*Bonsoir, b'hommes!*" he shouted. "A fine night for devil's work, eh, *messieurs?*"

"What dost thou know, a stranger?" growled one of those whom he addressed. But another started forward and stared into the madman's face.

"Ah, *bon Dieu,* it is our *seigneur* Emile Dorion, come back from the dead!" he screamed.

There was an instant of intense scrutiny, and then the group had dispersed and was running along the road toward Bonne Chance as fast as its legs would carry it.

But Dorion had seized the speaker by the shoulders, holding him fast.

He studied the face of the terrified man attentively. "So it is thou, little Ulysse Savard!" he exclaimed. "And thou hast remembered me. *Ben!* Tell me, now, where is my little Jeanne?"

The man raised a trembling hand and pointed toward Presqu' Ile.

"So she still grieves for me, and has not married again?"

"No, *mon seigneur*—no, M. Emile," stammered the man.

"*Ben!*" shouted Dorion. "*Au revoir,* little Ulysse Savard! My devil—"

That was all Ulysse heard as he fled at top speed through the gale, to tell his comrades that the devil had come to preside over the obsequies of the English spy.

CHAPTER XXV.

WRECKED.

A LOW tapping at the door startled Jeanne from her tense absorption. The thought that it was La Rue, returned, roused her to a desperation of anger. She went quickly into the hall and opened it. But the figure that entered in the whirl of snow was that of Mme. Angus.

She came forward hurriedly in the dark and clasped the girl's hands in hers. "He is in danger," she sobbed. "I learned of it only a few minutes ago. I overheard Angus and Duncan talking. I had to come to you. I made Angus promise that he should not be harmed, but I cannot trust him. He was good to me, as you know—"

Jeanne caught at her arm. "Who, Rose?" she cried. "Not Will?"

"M. Maitland. I made Angus promise me—"

"Where is he?"

"He is coming into Bonne Chance by the dog-sleigh. They have planned to waylay him outside the village and take him aboard the schooner, so that he shall not betray the sailing of the fleet to the Blanche. Duncan said they would kill him, but I made Angus promise me he should not be harmed."

"Stay here with my uncle!" cried Jeanne. "I'm going—"

"Ah, *mon Dieu,* you cannot go in this storm!" cried Rose McGraeme. "They will stop at nothing—Angus and Duncan and the boys. They have followed him from Quebec. Half of Bonne Chance knows. They will kill you, too!" she wailed.

Jeanne had flung on her coat and crammed down the fur cap on her head. "Where is it? Where is the schooner?"

"Off the old wharf. What are you going to do? They will kill you, too, and then me, and every one who may try to help him. They are desperate. They have sworn he shall never betray the schooners again."

Jeanne shook her off, caught up her snow-shoes, and buckled the straps across her insteps. Unheeding the wails of the woman at her side, she flung the door open and plunged into the storm, taking the road toward the neck as fast as her snow-shoes would permit her. La Rue's trick was completely forgotten in the fear that gripped her.

Reaching the neck, she made her way across the dunes and frozen arms of water in the direction of the little, disused quay. The minutes seemed eternities; she prayed as she stumbled on that she might not be too late, and all the while she could see nothing but the track immediately ahead of her, and all the while the wind howled wildly and blew the snow into her face.

At length the outline of the little wharf loomed up before her. All about it the ice floes, loosened by the storm, ground upon one another, battering at the sides, and at the sides of the schooner, which Jeanne could dimly make out at the pier's end. She groaned and strained at the ropes that held her, and the wind howled through her standing rigging.

The girl kicked off her snow-shoes, climbed the side of the pier over the piled-up floes, and began to run along it through the deep snow that covered the warped, broken boards. Now she could see figures upon the schooner's deck, and one upon the end of the pier, casting off the stern rope. The bow rope had already been cast off, and the vessel was turning under the force of the tide.

As the other rope went free Jeanne leaped the widening interval, the man scrambled aboard and turned toward her. She found herself face to face with Angus. At the helm was Eudore; Duncan was hauling on the mainsail; Alexandre was running up the forejib.

Duncan, turning his head at the same moment, saw her. He leaped back with an oath, and the great sail came clattering down.

Angus, staring dumfounded, could only stammer:

"What are you doing here, Jeanne?"

"Where is M. Maitland?" cried the girl fiercely.

"He is not here? How the devil should he be aboard?" shouted Duncan, with a vicious scowl.

"How long do you think you have been permitted to use that language to me, Duncan?" cried Jeanne. "I asked where M. Maitland is."

"I don't know. In Quebec, I suppose," Duncan muttered.

"You are lying to me. He is on board this ship, and I am going to find him."

"Eh, Jeanne, have you lost your senses?" shouted Angus, who, as acting chief, could venture with more authority. "You are mad, girl! Put back!" he shouted to Eudore.

The tiller veered in Eudore's hands, and, as the ship careened, a great wave struck her amidships, deluging them all with icy water. Alexandre, who had run up the jib, came up, defiant and waiting upon his father's order.

The schooner, carried by the swirling tide beyond the pier, was drifting dangerously near the pack shore ice.

"Put back!" yelled Angus as the schooner righted.

"No, no!" shouted Duncan. "Put her head to sea! We'll be crushed against the pier! We'll take her with us, Angus. Put her in the poop cabin!"

Unconsciously he had given the girl her clue. Jeanne darted past him, eluding his attempt to seize her, leaped into the waist, and ran toward the fo'c's'le. Alexandre sprang to intercept her, stumbled as the ship rolled, and went sprawling. As the girl ran, she saw an ax lying beside a half-cord of wood that had been stacked amidships. She snatched it up and beat in the flimsy door of the fo'c's'le with half a dozen furious strokes.

Will was reeling dizzily in the middle of the tiny cabin.

Jeanne ran to him and thrust the ax into his hands. He stared at her, called her name.

She clung to him a moment. "Are you hurt?" she cried in his ear.

He pushed back his hair, matted with blood. She pointed into the ship's waist, where Angus, Duncan, and Alexandre were running forward.

Will began to understand. He stepped forward. Jeanne thrust herself in front of him. At the sight of the two the ruffians came to a perplexed halt. Jeanne's cries to them were drowned in the roar of the wind.

The schooner, driving with great speed under a single jib, had, more by luck than Eudore's steersmanship, negotiated the packed floes, and was heading for the open Gulf, pitching like a cork in the surging waves.

Each movement sent them staggering. Jeanne clung to Will, steadying him, and the short delay gave him a breathing space. The chill air of the Gulf revived him. At last he remembered.

Angus came forward.

"Eh, Jeanne, why do you interfere with us?" he cried furiously. "You always stood by your own till this damned spy came to Bonne Chance. He's taken all we had, and he's come back to betray our sealing schooners. Stand out of the way, and let us get at him."

"That's untrue, Angus!" shouted the girl. "You're the oldest man here. You've got the most sense. M. Maitland has never harmed any of us. And you know what it will mean to all of you if he is harmed."

"*Bateche!* You are mad, Jeanne!" yelled Angus furiously. "My home—my brandy—our schooners gone—all gone! You're a traitress. Get out of the way at once!"

Duncan and Alexandre were creeping forward.

"Get back!" cried the girl. "You've fought M. Maitland before this, when he had nothing but his fists. You'd better take care!"

They stopped, drew back, and stood whispering together.

Will slipped his arm around Jeanne. "I'm all right now," he said. "Go into the fo'c's'le."

But she persistently kept her place at his side.

"Put back into the bay, and this folly shall be forgotten!" she cried. "You know I'm one of you, Angus. I shall say nothing, nor will M. Maitland."

There was no response. Jeanne saw Duncan climb to the mainmast and haul on the sail again. It came up, fluttering, straining on the halyards, and at once the schooner bounded wildly forward, darting like a greyhound for the open Gulf. Presently Jeanne saw the three in conference upon the poop.

They meant to carry out their plans, but the respite had almost given Will back his strength.

He spoke in Jeanne's ear: "I was struck down in the fog and stunned. I remembered nothing after that, till I heard the door being battered in. I'm going aft to have it out with them."

"I'll come with you."

"Go into the fo'c's'le, Jeanne!"

She stood her ground obstinately. Just then they saw Angus coming forward. He stopped a few paces away and shouted:

"Eh, listen, then, Jeanne! We'll put you both ashore in the bay if you'll swear to say nothing about to-night. We'll be round Bout de l'Ile in a few minutes. What do you say? You swear it? And M. Maitland?"

A shadow leaped from the bow, hurling itself straight at Will, and knocking him down. It was Duncan, who had crept forward, unobserved in the darkness. In an instant Angus and Alexandre were at Will's throat as he tried to rise.

Jeanne flung herself among them, beating at them with her fists. Will rose upon one knee. Duncan's knife thrust at him, and pierced the fold of his mackinaw. Before the ruffian could withdraw it Will had brought the ax-blade down on his skull.

Duncan yelped once, and dropped. As he fell Will seized the writhing body, and, whirling it in his arms, drove Angus and Alexandre before him, along the waist of the ship.

Upon the poop they turned at bay. Will, dropping Duncan's body, hurled himself up the steps. Eudore screamed and ran from the tiller. Instantly the schooner leaped broadside to the waves. A huge sea broke aboard, and she careened until she lay with her starboard gunwale submerged.

Will was flung back, half stunned, into the waist.

Shuddering through all her timbers, the ship righted. Groping in three feet of water, Will found Jeanne clinging to the mainmast. He caught her by the hand and dragged her aft toward the poop cabin. Another sea burst over them, washing them to the poop steps.

Will dashed open the door of the poop cabin and pushed Jeanne inside. He ran up to the tiller and grasped it as it swung. The half-logged schooner came slowly about. He glanced around him. Eudore, half drowned, was clinging to the stern rail.

There was no sign of either Angus or Alexandre.

"Where are they?" Will shouted.

Eudore motioned despairingly over the waves.

"Take the tiller! Hold her while I bring down the mainsail!"

Will loosened the halyards and the sail came to the deck. The wild speed of the schooner lessened at once, though even her single jib was carrying her at a fast clip into the Gulf. To starboard was the bulk of Bout de l'Ile, with the great limestone arch.

Although headed apparently for the middle channel, it was clear that the ship was being sucked by the tide and driven by the wind toward the submerged fangs off the point, and only by a miracle could she clear them.

Will ran back to Eudore. "Steer the channel into the bay!" he shouted.

Eudore made some gesture. Will saw Jeanne at his side.

"There's a chance of clearing Bout de l'Ile and making the bay!" he cried into the girl's ear.

She slipped her arm through his, and they stood there, waiting. The deck was a mass of ice, their clothing stiffening into boards. Minutes passed. The snow-bound shore rushed by them. The storm was blowing over, but the wind blew steadily toward the shore.

They were directly off the point now, and the cross-currents appeared to hold the schooner motionless for a few minutes, though foot by foot she was drifting toward the lee shore. Now the little balcony before the limestone cave came into view, the long flight of steps, and the distant lights of Bonne Chance.

Eudore, at the tiller, worked frantically to win the channel between the lines of reefs, where the seas burst in hammer-strokes of spume. For a few minutes it seemed as if the danger were past, though the shore rushed by hardly a score of yards distant.

Now the reefs were all about them, the seas boiled, and the long combers lifted the schooner toward the rocks—or the calm waters of the bay.

Suddenly there came a jar, a scraping, rending sound, the vessel heeled, recovered, rode the tremendous surges, and, ripped from her port bow amidships, drifted, a sinking log, beyond the reefs toward the rocky base of Bout de l'Ile.

She was already half under. Will sprang for the jib and hauled it down. The tiller spun through Eudore's hands as the schooner grounded, and then, lifting herself, battered her broken bow against the granite base beneath the arch, and again, like some insensate suicide, beat out her timbers on the rocks. Then struggling more weakly as the level of the waves rose to her decks, she wedged herself beneath the arch and yielded her body to the surges.

Will caught Jeanne in his arm and stepped into the waves. As he emerged from the first contact with the icy waters he saw the wooden steps before him. He caught at them with his free hand, and clung there, and thus, buffeted, he gained his footing and drew Jeanne ashore.

Her eyes were closed, her head had fallen back on his shoulder. Her face was cold as death. Not stopping to revive her, Will lifted her in his arms and carried her, step by step, up the icy stairs.

At the beginning of the little rock-passage toward the cave he stopped, exhausted. Eudore rushed past him. He tried to call to him to bring aid, but his voice failed him. Gathering to him the last remnants of his strength, he carried the girl into the shelter of the stone chapel and laid her down.

He saw that she still breathed. He rubbed her frozen face and hands with snow. Their dripping clothes were again crackling with ice. To delay was fatal; at all cost he must bring help; but the lighthouse was not in operation, and the keeper did not occupy his cottage during the winter months.

He must leave Jeanne there, then, while he essayed the passage of the ravine. He would rest only a moment—he took the girl in his arms and drew her to him, so that she might not freeze to death while he waited for his strength to come back to him.

Then his eyes closed, and he lay at Jeanne's side upon the chapel floor.

Jeanne, roused from her faint by the sting of the snow upon her face, opened her eyes. She stared about her, saw Will at her side, and remembered all.

She staggered to her feet, and, wide awake, called to him and chafed his hands, and tried to awaken him in turn, and at last rose unsteadily upon her feet and stumbled to the chapel entrance.

She heard a footfall on the crackling snow, and came face to face with La Rue.

CHAPTER XXVI.

TWO SOULS PASS.

AFTER his conference with Angus, which lasted from the time they left Jeremiah's house together until they parted at the neck, where Duncan was impatiently awaiting his cousin's arrival, La Rue went to his house. At this crisis in his affairs he was conscious of a singular coolness and clarity of spirit; everything had been staked, and the issue was not in doubt.

Nevertheless, it would be as well to give Jeanne time to recover from the surprise and shock of the trick that he had played her.

He would go to her on the next day. If he knew how to handle women, he could count that the bold stroke would win him admiration in her eyes, and that she would make the best of her position. If she would not—well, she was his wife indubitably, by church and law, according to the contract reposing in his coat-pocket. And there was only old Jeremiah in the house with her. She would see reason.

He laughed over it as he ate his supper; but when his old housekeeper was gone the hounds of his passion leaped, baying, at their chains. Why should he wait even until to-morrow?

Jeanne would think no more of him—might even despise him; and at the worst there was only an old, crippled man and a girl.

Torn between desire and instinct, which bade him remain, he walked the floor of his study for a whole hour. He thought of the bitter blasts sweeping Presqu' Ile neck, and of the warmth within the cottage.

At last he put on his cap and coat, pulled on his high boots, and took the road toward the neck. Upon the opposite side of the street a little group of men stood huddled in sheepskins, and pointing out toward the invisible sea.

La Rue slunk quickly past them, unnoticed. He did not want to think of what their discussion was. Though he knew, he was not the moving spirit in the plot against Will.

As he stamped through the deep snow that covered the road, the warning instinct died in the face of his rising passion. He had waited too long, gone through too much to be balked now. When at length the McGraeme house came into sight he was striding with the easy assurance of one who has already conquered.

He opened the unbolted door. The parlor was unlit. Jeanne must be up-stairs in her uncle's room, where the lamplight showed through the drawn blinds. He made no particular ceremony about walking softly. Let her hear him; let her come down; it was his way of notifying her.

Nevertheless, he lit the parlor lamp and tossed off a drink of Jeremiah's brandy before going up-stairs. Jeremiah's door was half-open, but the old man was alone, for Mme. Angus had gone down to the shore in her anxiety and terror. La Rue walked in.

Jeremiah was lying propped up in bed, the great arms extended over the counterpane.

As La Rue entered he perceived the old man turn his head slightly toward him. The arms moved, but the face was expressionless, and no sound came from between the lips.

"Where's Jeanne?" La Rue demanded.

Jeremiah said nothing, but a somber light flickered in his eyes.

"Heard me, and lying low, eh, Jeremiah? Well, I've got her at last. I suppose she told you. She's signed a marriage contract with me in the presence of Angus and his wife. They witnessed it. A little bit of sharp practise, Jeremiah, but she

won't think any the less of me for that. And don't you worry your head about Dorion turning up. Dorion's a dream. Forget him!"

Jeremiah's eyes were a blaze of impotent fury. A sudden rage seized La Rue as he felt this unspoken anger burning upon him. He thrust his face forward into Jeremiah's.

"You've played a long, tricky game for those lands, old friend," he said. "I've beaten you. Better get used to the idea. Now, where's Jeanne? In her room, eh? I'm going to her."

Jeremiah's lips opened and closed. For the first time, spurred by intense emotion, his will forced itself into the channels of the dead nerves of the larynx, and a grunting sound came from his mouth. The big fists began to go up and down upon the bed like flails. The body heaved like that of a bound Titan.

There were three rooms up-stairs. La Rue turned into the one adjoining Jeremiah's; the lamp from the old man's table illuminated it, and a single glance showed that it was empty. La Rue crossed the hall and knocked at the opposite door. When no answer came he struck a match, turned the handle, and looked in. This room was empty, too.

He went back, furious. "Where is she?" he demanded.

The flail-like fists were still thrashing on the counterpane. Jeremiah's helpless wrath beat down the notary's rage. La Rue went out quickly.

Where had she gone? To Cawmill's house, perhaps, as he had learned she had gone on the night when she meditated flight with Will. He cursed himself for not having thought of that possibility. Still, there was the chance that she had taken refuge somewhere near by when she heard him enter. La Rue considered.

There was nowhere at the top of the house that could serve her as a hiding-place, but there were the kitchen and the stables. He went down, took up the parlor lamp, and carried it into the kitchen adjoining.

The girl was not there. He set it down and went out to the back. The stable was a little distance to one side of the house; immediately behind the kitchen was a weed-grown space, and behind this a mass of towering rocks, sprawling against the edge of the humped plateau behind, and riddled with caves.

The storm was dwindling. The moon appeared suddenly among the clouds, lighting up the scene. La Rue, standing irresolute, started violently as he saw a figure emerge, apparently from the rocks, and stagger toward him. Next instant he recognized Eudore, dripping with sea-water.

The man ran up to him, extending two palsied arms. "Eh, the fire, the fire!" he gasped.

La Rue caught him from the shoulders.

"Where do you come from? Where's M. Maitland?" he snarled.

"Eh, they're all dead but me, and he's in there with Jeanne," answered Eudore.

Despite the sudden blinding rage that took possession of him at the words, La Rue understood whence Eudore had come. There was a legend in Bonne Chance that the stone chapel at Bout de l'Ile, inaccessible from the Presqu' Ile road on account of the great masses of rock that ran out into the bay, was connected with the McGraemes' haunts by a natural tunnel. But the McGraemes had always known how to keep their secrets.

La Rue swung Eudore round violently in the direction from which he had come, and pointed. Under the compulsion of his grasp Eudore led the way, plunging into the darkness of one of the crevices in the hillside. Presently, as they progressed, they heard the thunder of the breakers, accentuated within the hollow of the rock chamber. In a minute more there came a glimpse of moonlight, and La Rue found himself within the chapel.

Eudore, released, darted back, moaning and shivering. La Rue went forward. Beside the entrance he saw Will lying unconscious on the ground. Jeanne knelt by him, and, at La Rue's appearance, the girl cried out and rose to her feet stiffly, pointing to Will. Then, recognizing La Rue, she started violently and drew back.

La Rue looked from one to the other. He bent over Will. He laid his hand upon his cheek. It was icy cold, but there was warmth in the hollow of the throat beneath the ear, and Will stirred under his touch and mumbled.

La Rue turned to the girl.

"Well, Jeanne?" he asked.

"Will you bring help, while I stay with him?" asked the girl simply. "I'm too weak." She leaned against the wall of the cave. "I'm afraid he's dying."

"I'll do anything in the world for you, Jeanne," answered the notary, with a sudden burst of passion. "It's all right now, isn't it? You'll come to me as my wife?"

"Never!" she returned. "If you're a man you'll go for help. His life will be on your conscience."

"I'll go; but I'll take you with me, Jeanne. Come!"

He caught her by the arm, but she dragged herself away.

"I'll never go with you!" Jeanne answered.

Deep in La Rue's heart a bitter hate was burning, kindling into him a fierce resolve to conquer this girl who defied him. It urged him to beat down her opposition with blows of his fists upon the frail and weakened body which housed her defiant spirit.

Madness of hate and madness of passion struggled in him, and blended into a single instinct of possession.

"*Maudit,* you're mine, Jeanne!" he shouted. "All's fair in love and war. You signed that paper, and you're married to me!"

Her voice was very weak, and her answer simple.

"Philippe La Rue, M. Maitland is perhaps dying. Will you not bring aid, or let me pass you?"

"Let him die! I'll save no English spies that come here to betray us, unless you swear to come to me as my wife. There's nothing can come between us now; we're man and wife; you signed that paper—"

He caught her shrinking body to him. She screamed and tried to elude him; she turned and beat his face with her fists. He swore, and, as she half broke from him and ran toward the chapel's entrance, caught her again and held her more tightly. She felt herself swooning.

Standing at the door of Jeremiah's kitchen, La Rue knew nothing of the man watching him from the rocks beside the Presqu' Ile road, nor that his entrance into the tunnel with Eudore was observed by one who had been born into the secret of the sea-path to the hills, carven by nature before she had made man to traverse it, and known to the Indians from immemorial time.

Dorion, crouching among the rocks, with eyes that saw everything, marked La Rue's journey.

Presently he descended into the road and went up to Jeremiah's house. The lamp, burning upon the kitchen table, illuminated the parlor faintly, but Dorion did not go into the parlor. The instinct which now dominated and controlled him told him that Jeremiah was up-stairs as surely as if he had been a tracking beast of prey. Noiselessly he went up and, without hesitating, entered Jeremiah's room.

Jeremiah, exhausted by his futile struggle against the bonds that chained his limbs, had fallen back upon the pillows. Despair was in his eyes, but the carven face remained immobile and expressionless.

Dorion stepped to the bedside and looked at him in silence. Steadily and unwinking the dumb man and the man with the dumb devil continued to watch each other.

Whatever messages were flashed from soul to soul, not a sound escaped either of the two men as they read each other's hearts. Dorion saw himself reflected in each of Jeremiah's eyes, beside the lamp. It was his devil that he was now nodding and smiling at, staring back at him from either pupil, and not Jeremiah.

He knew that this was not the man he was looking for. Chuckling softly, Dorion stepped out of the room and down the stairs. Then he went through the kitchen and took the road that La Rue had taken.

As Jeanne's resistance suddenly relaxed,

La Rue became aware of a figure in the stone chapel behind him. At first he thought that it was Will, arisen from unconsciousness. Then he knew.

There was a grin on the lips of the blond giant, and he was crouched like a panther in the gloom of the cave, his twitching fingers like talons ready for burying in his victim's throat.

La Rue's blood froze. A scream broke from his lips. He dropped his unconscious burden and staggered back, staring in incredulous horror at the apparition of the man whom he had believed dead long since.

He glanced shiftily to left and right, and then, turning quickly, he ran out to the balcony, with the intention of scaling the wooden steps and gaining the summit of Bout de l'Ile. But at the same instant Dorion leaped, not at La Rue, but so as to interpose his body between him and the rocky ledge that ran from the balcony toward the stairs.

La Rue leaped back, crouching in mad panic at the edge of the ledge.

"Let me pass! What do you want?" he shouted.

Dorion did not answer a word, but crouched too, watching him, with a fearful tension in the poised muscles.

"I know what you want," cried La Rue. "You think it was I who betrayed you to the gendarmes. It was Belley and Jean Desmoulins, and old Jeremiah, who egged them on, in order to get you out of the way and have Jeanne's lands."

He raved in his fear, but Dorion neither spoke nor stirred.

"I did my best to save you. I'll talk it all over with you to-morrow, and we'll settle who was responsible. I have proofs. We'll cross-examine everybody, if you'll come to my house. I swear I had no hand in it. Let me pass! Holy Name, he's a devil, he isn't a man!"

He stepped a little nearer, his eyes scanning the interval between Dorion and the mouth of the cave, Dorion and the low ledge of the balcony.

"If you're angry because you heard what I was saying to Jeanne, I—we thought that you were dead. How was I to know you were still alive when you'd been shot down in St. Pierre? And if you handn't died we were sure you'd been hanged for that murder. Of course, now you've come back, Jeanne's yours—"

"Not a word answered him. La Rue's heart was hammering in his throat. No he knew what Dorion's look portended. This was death that stood in his way. He could count its approach by seconds, could see the monster staring out of Dorion's eyes, preparing for its leap at him.

He ran to meet it. He hurled himself at Dorion with a loud, strangled cry. And Dorion's answering cry rang like shrill laughter above the whistle of the wind and the crash of breakers below.

They grappled in the mid-balcony. All the hate fanned by the years of his imprisonment had gone into the muscles of Dorion's arms. La Rue was no weakling, and terror had armed his own muscles as if with sheaths of steel; but he was like a babe in the hold of his enemy. Dorion's hands clutched his throat and bent his head backward, and back until it seemed as if the vertebrae would snap like brittle pipes.

As his head went back La Rue saw with inverted gaze that the summit of Bout de l'Ile was crowded with spectators. They came running down the wooden steps, shouting. La Rue saw all this as in a clear picture, and something within him, rising above his fear, calculated that they would arrive too late.

He saw it all, although his face was turning purple, his heels were drumming on the edge of the ledge, and his strangling screams, cut off by the wind, sounded no louder than the twittering of birds.

The spray of the waves leaped over them. The men who came running along the ledge, unable to intervene, saw for one moment the two men poised on the very extremity, where the balcony began. La Rue was bent backward in Dorion's arms and he had his arms about him. If the *seigneur* had meant to free himself at the last, it was too late.

They were gone in the whip of a huge wave that lashed the parapet, locked fast together.

Nothing was visible below but the seething and treacherous sea.

CHAPTER XXVII.

TOGETHER.

AS from a torture chamber Will emerged to consciousness of the sunlit room and the bed in which he was lying. He groaned as his slight movements sent that racking pain once more through his bandaged limbs. He opened his eyes and recognized Paul Cawmill seated at his side.

"Jeanne!" he muttered.

"Eh, she is better, M. Maitland. She will be permitted to leave her bed tomorrow, and you shall see her. You must lie still, *monsieur.*"

"Where am I? I thought—."

"In the house of M. Jeremiah McGraeme. You have been ill, after the shipwreck. You were badly frostbitten, *monsieur.*"

Will was too weak to question further. But he puzzled a long while over this. Only bit by bit was he able to reconstruct in sequence the events of the wild cruise. And his recollections ended with the sinking of the schooner.

He questioned Paul again that afternoon, when he felt stronger.

"Who took me off the ship?" he asked. "I remember jumping into the water—that's all."

"Holy Name!" exclaimed Paul. "Did you not carry Mme. Dorion up the stairs in your arms and place her in the chapel, *monsieur?*"

"You're dreaming, Paul."

"*Eh bien,* I dream. But still, it is necessary to lie still and not to talk, *monsieur,* till you are better."

Will was brought to acquiescence only by the positive assurances that he should see Jeanne on the morrow. All the day he had believed her dead, he had thought that Paul was trying to hide the news from him. He remembered nothing that had occurred after that leap with Jeanne. He never remembered, and it was not until he was well that he learned of Dorion's return and the death-fight between Dorion and La Rue.

He was all of a fever the next day until Jeanne came in. Her hands were wrapped in bandages, but she had not been so badly frostbitten as Will. She knelt down at the bedside, and he drew her face down to his breast, and for a long time she was content to lie there before raising her face to smile at him.

What he had to say was to make her miserable for two days thereafter.

"Jeanne, you know I've lost the lawsuit. You've won. You own the Dorion lands."

"Yes, Will," she answered mechanically.

Rose McGraeme had told her of the tragedy, but it was not necessary then for her to let Will know that Dorion's return had introduced a new complex into the situation, and as swiftly withdrawn it. The information had thrown her into a violent agitation. She had been spared the shock of seeing the last fight, and even La Rue's attack upon her in the chapel had left only a cloudy impression on her brain.

She had controlled herself after hearing the news from the old woman with a great effort, for Will's sake, and had shut her mind alike against the horror of it and the sin of rejoicing at her deliverance.

"I can't ask you to marry me now, Jeanne," whispered Will weakly.

She put her face against his.

"But you have asked me, Will," she whispered back.

"I've got to make a fresh start, Jeanne. I'm a pauper, just as your uncle foretold. How is he?"

"Better, Will," she said with a sigh.

Just then Paul entered, and she started up guiltily. Paul looked at the ceiling with an expression of so much discretion that the superiority of his attitude drove the girl from the room in confusion.

Paul came to Will's bedside.

"Ah, *monsieur,* he said, "if only you had permitted me to accompany you on board, this accident would never have occurred. Undoubtedly we should have succeeded in giving warning of the sealing fleet. Now they are gone, and the Blanche

I hope that the government will take a lenient view."

"Go ahead with what you have to say, Paul," said Will in a weak voice.

"Why, *monsieur,* I merely said that, had you permitted me to accompany you on board I could have saved the vessel. It was bitter news that Angus brought me, that I was to await you in Bonne Chance, and not to go to the rendezvous."

"So Angus told you that, eh? What else did he tell you?"

"He told me, *monsieur,* how he and Duncan had joined you in the service of the government, and that, to throw the people off the track, it would be pretended that they were to kidnap you aboard the schooner. Thus the Blanche would be warned before the sealing fleet had started, and a search would reveal the sealing implements aboard."

"So you still think I am a government spy, eh, Paul?"

Paul winked at him. "Ah, *monsieur!*" he said knowingly. "See now, *monsieur,* is it not true that, by mistrusting me, you have brought misfortunes upon yourself? There was the time when you came alone to Presqu' Ile to catch the smugglers, and were nearly killed by them. There is this time, when you should have permitted me to go aboard and save the vessel by my seamanship, instead of distrusting me. And now I am afraid that the government will be angry with you, *monsieur,* and "—to Will's surprise he burst out sobbing—"they will take you from Presqu' Ile."

"Paul," said Will, "you're worth your weight in gold as a man with a genius for coming to the most impossibly wrong conclusions. It is true that I am leaving Presqu' Ile."

"*Ah, monsieur,* so the government requires you here no longer?"

"I am not here for the government. How many times must I tell you that I am here to cut airplane timber on my own account?" asked Will in exasperation.

Paul tried to wink at him. "*Bien, monsieur!* And this airplane timber—why may it not still be cut?" he inquired. "Perhaps you do not know that Georges Savard has concealed many kegs of brandy—"

"That will do, Paul," said Will.

Paul hesitated, looked at his master mournfully, and then went out. Will did not see Jeanne again that day. On the next morning she was sitting up in his chair, awaiting her impatiently, when there sounded the shuffling of feet in the passage without.

A tap came at the door. To Will's astonishment there entered a deputation of six men, headed by Gingras and Poulin.

Gingras explained. "*Monsieur,,*" he said, "we have heard that you are going to leave Bonne Chance."

"Yes, Gingras. The government has decided that the Dorion lands are the property of Mme. Dorion. There is, then, no further work for me."

"That is what we have come to see you about, *monsieur.* We do not want you to go. Consider, *monsieur,* the advantages that you remove from us of Bonne Chance! No work—no wages—hunger! And then, *monsieur,* before you came, Bonne Chance had a reputation—very bad—for smuggling.

"Now you have driven these men away, and established work for us all. So we have talked it over, and we are agreed that, if you will remain, we will work for you for a dollar and eighty-five cents a day, until the times improve."

Will was touched by the naive proposal. He tried to explain the situation to the men. But it was clear that the idea that he was a government agent had now taken firm root in Bonne Chance again, and this time, as a supposedly successful one, he had the solid backing of the village.

The McGraemes were dead, the smuggling was at an end, the fleet he learned had cleared for the sealing grounds unmolested, and the next year's earnings were secure. Bonne Chance was now looking toward the steady job on Presqu' Ile, in place of the uncertain chance of jobs in distant lumber camps.

"If you will write to the government, *monsieur,* that we work for a dollar eighty-five," suggested Gingras hopefully, "perhaps they will permit the work to continue."

Will was almost compelled to order them

from the room. Yet, after they had gone, he fell to thinking. If only he could stay, perhaps as Jeanne's manager! But that would create an impossible situation.

She was strangely distant when she came in that afternoon. Paul, too, had been acting strangely all day. Will's nerves were stretched to breaking-point by his perplexities, and the pain of his injuries.

"You seem unhappy, Jeanne," he said. "Has anything gone wrong?"

She shook her head.

"Your uncle?"

"No, it is not my uncle," she answered petulantly. "Will you have some eggs for your supper?"

"I'm not thinking about my supper," answered Will, taking her hand. "What is the matter, Jeanne?"

She tried to draw her hand away. Her tears fell on it.

"Jeanne, there is something the matter. What is it? Why didn't you come back yesterday, or to-day until just now? It isn't what I was saying yesterday that hurt you?"

He drew her toward the arm of his chair.

"I was going to ask if you would wait for me, Jeanne. But I hadn't screwed up my courage to the point. It isn't as if I were a young man—I didn't want to bind you—"

"Will, let's be honest with each other," she returned. "I knew it was all impossible from the beginning. It was natural that you should think you cared for me, I suppose, when we were thrown together here so much, first by our enmity, and—then in the way we were. But I always knew that I was inexperienced, uneducated, not at all fit for you—"

"Jeanne, what are you driving at?"

"That was why I felt it was all hopeless. I am so willing to release you, Will. Did you suppose it would be necessary to persuade me, or to make excuses? Do I want to be the wife of a man who would be ashamed of me, and sorry all his life?"

Will caught her in his arms.

She did not struggle, but drew herself to the limit of his grasp and remained obstinately looking away.

"Now, Jeanne, dear, you'll have to explain," he said. "I'll never let you go until you do."

"I know," she said in a low voice, "all about that girl you were engaged to in Quebec."

Will got out of his chair. "You do, eh?" he asked in a quiet voice. He shouted in a voice of thunder, "Paul!"

Jeanne started, tried to break from him. "What is the matter, Will?" she cried. "You are not going to—to do anything to Paul?"

"Only wring his ass's head from his shoulders, that's all, Jeanne. Paul, come here immediately!"

"Will!" She turned toward him. "You mean to say that—it was all Paul's imagination?"

"Not his imagination, Jeanne. Just his malignant, asinine discretion. Paul, you might as well come when you're called, or else I'm coming after you!"

Paul's voice was shouting below. Jeanne clung to Will.

"Not a word—not a word of truth?" she gasped. "Don't hurt him! You are so strong! He didn't mean—"

"Will you marry me, Jeanne? You know I love you with all my heart; I meant to ask you to wait for me, but I can't do it or take chances with arch-asses like Paul around. Will you marry me? Quick? You scoundrel! I've been calling you—I'll kill him unless you say 'yes,' Jeanne."

"Yes! Yes!" she breathed quickly, as Paul came into the room.

"I thought you called me, *monsieur*," said Paul innocently, casting one of his discreet looks upward.

Will strode forward.

"I did, you—you—" He grasped Paul's hand in his. "I wanted to tell you what a good foreman I've got, Paul," he said huskily. "And tell the men their jobs will last as long as they want them. I'm going to keep right on the job, and there'll be work for everybody in Bonne Chance who wants it."

(The end.)

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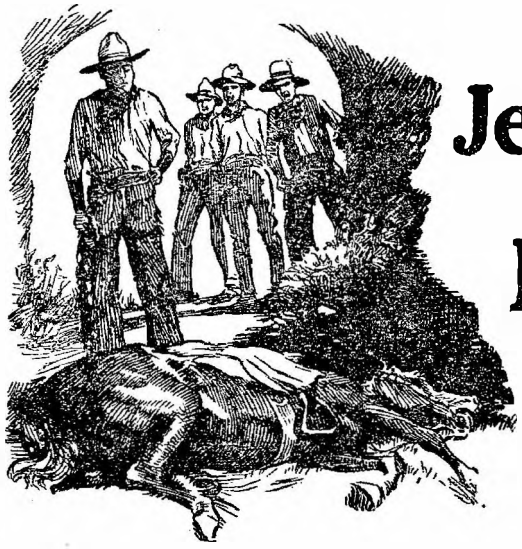


Jerry Peyton's Notched Inheritance

By George Owen Baxter

CHAPTER I.

THE BEQUEST.

WHEN the doctor told Hank Peyton that he was about to die, Hank took another drink and closed the secret inside his thin lips; but when, on the third morning following, he fell back on his bed in a swoon after pulling on his boots, Hank lay for a long time looking at the dirty boards of the ceiling until his brain cleared. Then he called for his tall son and said: "Jeremiah, I'm about to kick out."

Jerry Peyton was as full of affection as any youth in the town of Sloan, but the régime of his father had so far schooled him in restraining his emotions, that now he lighted a match and a cigarette and inhaled the first puff before he answered: "What's wrong?"

"That's my concern and not yours," the father said truthfully. "Further'n that, I didn't call you in here for an opinion. The doctor give me that three days ago, Jeremiah." He always pronounced the name in full; he characteristically despised the nickname which the rest of the world had given to his son. "I got you here to look you over."

He was as good as his word, but the only place he looked was straight between the eyes of Jerry. At length he sighed and turned his glance back to the

ceiling, a direction which never changed while he lived. "I'm about to kick out," went on the father, "and bringing you up is about all the good I've done, and, take it all around, I'm satisfied."

After a moment of thought he said to the ceiling: "You ain't pretty, but you can ride straight up. Answer me!"

"Yes," said Jerry.

"You talk straight."

"Yes."

"You shoot straight."

"Some say I do."

"You got a good education."

"Fair enough. But not too good."

"Ain't you got a diploma from the high school?"

"Yes."

"Then don't talk back. I say you're educated and mostly I run this roost. What?"

"Yes," Jerry replied.

"I leave you a house to live in and enough cows to grow into a real bunch—if you work. Will you work?"

"Is this a promise you want?" asked Jerry, troubled.

"No."

"Well, I'll try to work."

"I leave you one thing more." He fumbled under the bedding and drew out a revolver. "You know what that is?"

"The greasers call it The Voice of La Paloma."

"They call it right. You take that gun. Before you die you'll hear men say a lot of things about your pa—and mostly they'll be right; but afterwards you go home and pull out this old gun and say to yourself: 'He was a crook; he was a hard one; but he had plenty of grit, and he done for La Paloma that made the rest take water.' "

"I shall," said Jerry.

After a time the father said: "Look at my legs."

"Yes."

"The boots?"

"They're on."

"Good," said Hank Peyton. He added a moment later: "How do I look?"

"Like you'd hit the end of your rope."

"You lie," said Hank, "I can still see the knot in the ceiling." And forthwith he died.

When he was buried the old inhabitants of Sloan said: "Who would of thought Hank Peyton would die in bed?" And the new inhabitants, who were the majority, added: "One ruffian the less."

Around Sloan the government had built a great dam to the north and irrigation ditches were beginning to spread a shining, regular pattern across the desert. Very few of the cowmen took advantage of all the opportunities which water threw in their way; but a swarm of newcomers edged in among them and cut up the irrigation districts into pitiful little patches of green which no true cattleman could help despising; the shacks of Sloan gave way to a prim, brick-fronted row of stores; the new citizens elected improvement boards; they began to boost. Very soon Sloan was extended in all directions by a checkering of graded streets and blocks which the optimists watched in confident expectation. But old-timers were worried by floors so cleanly painted that spurs could not be stuck into them when one sat down; they scorned, silently, the stern industry and sharpness of the home makers; and many a cowpuncher was known to ride up the main street, look wistfully about him, and then without dismounting turn back toward his distant bunk house. For of the many faces of civilization, two were turned to each other eye to eye in Sloan, and the differences were too great for composition. For instance, among the cattlemen, law was an interesting legend which in workaday life was quite supplanted by unwritten customs; among the farmers and shopkeepers of Sloan,

law was an ally or an enemy as the case might be, but always a sacred thing. From that point of view, Hank Peyton was one of the most fallen of the profane, and therefore the townsfolk drew a breath of relief when they heard of his death.

It cannot be said that even the cow-punchers grieved very heartily; but they respected at least certain parts of his character, and above all they had an abiding affection for his son, Jerry. For his sake they were both sorry and glad, and it was generally understood among them that when his father was out of the way Jeremiah Peyton would shake up the old Peyton place and put it abreast of the times. They waited in vain for the signs of uplift. Jerry was willing enough to talk over changes and improvements with the wiser and more experienced heads among his neighbors, but when it came to tactics of labor he failed miserably, no matter how excellent his strategy of planning might be.

Sheriff Sturgis, who was the only county official to retain his place in the new régime, said: "The trouble with Jerry is that his dad sent him away to school for just long enough to spoil any likin' for work he might of had; but he didn't stay in school long enough to learn a way of sittin' down and makin' a livin'."

This was the general opinion, for after the death of Hank Peyton, Jerry drifted along in his usual amiable manner. He made enough busting bronchos in the round-up seasons to see him through the remainder of the year in idleness, and he picked up from his little bunch of cows a few bits of spending money. The cowmen excused him for virtues of courage and generosity, but the townfolk saw only the black side of the picture, and in their eyes Jerry was "plain lazy." They waited for the latent fierceness of his law-breaking father to appear as the fortunes of the son declined month after month. His personal appearance remained as prosperous as ever, but the townfolk noted with venomous pleasure that his little string of horses was gradually sold off until he retained only a few cow-hocked, knock-kneed mustangs, and one buckskin mare with the heart of a lion and the temper of a demon. It may be gathered that, by this time, Jerry had reached a point of argument between cow-puncher and farmer. The one faction held that he retained the buckskin because he loved her; the farmers were certain that he kept her only because of her viciousness and the fights which it gave him.

In truth, they could not understand him. Jerry was a tall, gaunt man with heavy shoulders, a pair of straight gray eyes, and a disarming smile; he was, indeed, a mass of contradictions. When he sat in silence he had an ugly, cold look; when he was animated he was positively handsome. The cowmen understood him hardly more than the farmers, but they had faith, which levels mountains.

All this time Jerry may have known that he was frequently the subject of conversation, though none, even of his closest friends, had courage enough to tell him what was said; but whatever he knew, Jerry was content to drift along from day to day, sitting ten hours at a time on his front veranda, or riding to town and back on the buckskin. From time to time the danger of approaching bankruptcy stood up and looked him in the face; but he was always able to blink the thought away—and go on whistling. Only this thing grew vaguely in him—a discontent with his life as it was, a subtle displeasure which was directed not against men but against fate, a feeling that he was imprisoned. In the other days he had always thought that it was the stern control of his father which gave him that shackled sensation, but now the first

of the month, and its bills, was as dreaded as ever was any interview with terrible Henry Peyton, drunk or sober. He was not a thoughtful man. Sometimes his revolt was expressed in a sudden saddling of the buckskin mare and a wild ride which had no destination; more often he would sit and finger The Voice of La Paloma.

It was an odd name for a revolver, for La Paloma means The Dove; but there was a story connected with the name. Once upon a time—and after all it was not so long before—a little man with a gentle voice came to Sloan, and because of his voice the Mexicans called him La Paloma. He was an extremely silent man; he hardly ever spoke, and he never argued. So that when trouble came his way he put his back to the wall and pulled his gun. In a crisis the first explosion of his gun was his first word of answer, and eventually the imaginative greasers called the weapon The Voice of La Paloma. After a time the reputation of La Paloma followed him to Sloan from other places. A Federal marshal brought it and then raised a posse to find the little man. They found him but they did not bring him back, and with that a wild time began around Sloan, in which the officers of the law figured as hawks, and La Paloma was a dove who flew higher still and knew how to stoop from a distance and strike, and make off with his gains unharmed. He kept it up for months and months until Hank Peyton crossed him. There was an ugly side to the story, of how Peyton double-crossed the outlaw, after worming his way into La Paloma's confidence, and sold him to the Federal marshal. Be that as it may, the bandit learned the truth before the posse arrived and started a single-handed fight with Jerry's father. When the marshal arrived, he found Peyton in the cabin, shot to pieces, but with the gun of La Paloma in his hand and the bandit dead on the floor.

It was small wonder that that story kept running through Jerry's head day by day as his inheritance melted through his prodigal, shiftless fingers. Before long, little would remain except The Voice of La Paloma, and whenever Jerry thought of that time of destitution he looked at the revolver and remembered the care-free life of La Paloma; there were no shackles on his existence. His commission to a free life was this little weapon, and for a signature of authority it bore eleven notches, neatly filed.

CHAPTER II.

THE HOME MAKER.

THE crisis drew near in Jerry's life; the people of Sloan almost held their breath while they watched developments. The mortgages on the old Peyton place were to be foreclosed and neither man, woman, nor child in the town expected the son of Hank Peyton to look quietly on while the land and the house changed hands. The men who held the mortgages had lawyers for agents; the lawyers had Sheriff Edward Sturgis; Sheriff Sturgis had a posse of good men and true at his call; yet for all that he was observed to wear a look of concern. The sheriff was not a student, but he had a natural belief in inherited characteristics, and he had known Hank Peyton when Hank was in his prime. Nevertheless, the storm broke from an unexpected quarter.

Jan van Zandt held one of the outlying alfalfa farms near the Peyton place, and one day he found Jerry's buckskin mare lying with a broken leg in his largest irrigation ditch; she had come through a rough place in his fence and slipped on a concrete culvert. Jan van Zandt sent a greaser to tell the tidings to young Peyton; in the meantime he got on his fastest horse, made a round of his neighbors, and returned with a dozen men at his back. They sat down

with shotguns and rifles near at hand to wait for Jerry.

He came alone and he came on foot, for there was nothing on his place except the buckskin that he deigned to ride. At first he paid no attention to the men, but sat for a long time holding the head of the patient, suffering horse before he shot her through the temple; only then did he turn to Jan van Zandt. Jan stood with a double-barreled shotgun in both big hands and from a distance he kept shouting that he knew he was to blame for letting the fence fall into disrepair, and that he would settle whatever costs the law allowed.

"You fool, do you think your money can buy me another Nelly?" Jerry asked. Then he went to Jan van Zandt, took the shotgun out of the big hands, and beat the farmer until he was hardly recognizable. The friends of Van Zandt stood by with their guns firmly grasped but they did not fire because, as they explained later, they might have hurt Jan by mistake.

Afterward Jerry refused to bring suit for the value of his horse; but as soon as Jan was out of bed he filed a suit for damages in a case of assault. And he won the suit. The cow-punchers rode in singly and in pairs to Jerry and offered their assistance against the "dirty ground hogs," but Jerry turned them away. He sold most of the furniture in his house and the rest of the horses to pay the fine; but with the money he sent a note to Jan van Zandt warning him fairly that Nelly was still unpaid for and that in due time he, Jeremiah Peyton, would extract full payment; he only waited until he discovered how such a payment could be made.

It was another occasion for Jan van Zandt to mount his fastest horse—he was quite a fancier of fine breeds—and this time he rode straight into the town of Sloan, thrust Jerry's note in front of the sheriff, and demanded police protection. The sheriff was a fat, shapeless man with a broken nose, little, uneasy eyes, and a forehead which jagged back and was immediately lost under a coarse mop of hair. His neck was put on his round shoulders at an angle of forty-five degrees, and as he was continually glancing from side to side he gave an impression of a man ducking danger, or about to duck. It was strange to see big Jan van Zandt lean over the desk and appeal to this man, and of the two the sheriff seemed by far the more frightened, his twinkling, animal eyes looked everywhere except at Jan van Zandt until the story was over.

Then he said: "You got some fine horses out there, haven't you, Jan?"

"The best in the county," Jan replied readily, "and if you pull me through this you can take your pick."

"You got me all wrong," the sheriff said. "I don't want any of your hosses. But if I was you I'd not feel safe even if I had six men with guns around me day and night. I'd get on my fastest hoss and hit straight off away from Sloan."

The big man turned pale, but it was partly from anger. "Are you the sheriff of this county, or ain't you?" he asked.

"Just now," answered the sheriff, grinning, "I wish to Heaven that I wasn't."

From any one else that speech would have been a damaging remark, but the record of the sheriff was so very long and so very straight that not even the farmers of Sloan had dared to think of displacing him. He was a landmark, like the old Spanish church in Sloan, and his towering reputation kept the gunmen and wrongdoers far from the town. The admission of Sturgis that he feared young Peyton, therefore, made Jan van Zandt set his jaw and stare.

"You want me to move?" he said at length. "You want me to give up my home?"

The sheriff looked at him curiously. Sturgis was not accustomed to these home makers, as yet; but he dimly realized that Jan van Zandt's hearth was his altar and that he would as soon renounce his God as leave his house.

"I don't want you to give up nothin'," the sheriff said. "I want you to take a vacation and beat it off. Stay away three months; and before the end of that time Jerry will be gone—the only thing that keeps him here now is you."

"Go away," repeated Jan van Zandt huskily, "and leave my wife and my girls out there—alone?"

"Good Heavens, man!" burst out Sheriff Sturgis. "D'you think Jerry Peyton is a greaser? D'you think he'd lay a hand on your womenfolk? I tell you, Van Zandt, the boy is clean—as my gun!"

"He's a bad man," Jan van Zandt solemnly said. "Sheriff, I've seen him as close as I see you now, and I've seen him worked up."

The sheriff noted the black and blue patches on the face of Van Zandt, but he said nothing.

"He's bad all through, and when a man is crooked in one thing he's crooked in everything."

"Listen to me," the sheriff said. "I've lived——"

"Right's right," interrupted Van Zandt stubbornly. "One bad apple'll spoil a whole barrel of good ones. That's true, I guess, and if it's true, then if there was ever any good in Peyton the bad has turned him all rotton long ago."

Sturgis looked at the pale, set face of the farmer with a sort of horror. He felt tongue-tied, as when he argued with his wife on certain subjects; and all in a breath he hated the narrow mind of Van Zandt which used maxims in place of thought, and, at the same time, respected a man who was determined to stay by his home even if he had to die there. The little, bright eyes of the sheriff looked out the window and followed a rolling, pungent cloud of dust down the street; in the narrow mind of the farmer he had caught a glimpse of certain rocklike qualities on which a nation can build. He sprang to his feet and banged his fist on the desk.

"Get out of here and back to your home," he said. "I've seen enough of your face. Peyton says he expects payment for his mare, does he? Well, he has a payment coming to him, I guess!"

"I'll give him what the law grants him," said Van Zandt, backing toward the door but still stolid.

"Aw, man, man!" groaned Sturgis. "You come out of smooth country and smooth people. What kind of laws are you goin' to fit to a country like this?" He waved through the window toward the ragged mountains which lifted to the east of Sloan Valley.

Jan van Zandt blinked, but he said nothing and he thought nothing; he saw no relation between law and geology. "Go back to your home," repeated the sheriff. "How do I know Peyton is going to try to harm you? I'm here to punish crimes, not read minds. Get on your way! What do I know about Peyton?"

"You told me yourself that if you was in my place——"

"But I ain't in your place, am I? What a man thinks don't count on a witness stand, does it? Legally, I know Peyton is a law-abidin' citizen."

"Sheriff Sturgis," said the farmer sternly, "leastways I've learned something out of this talk with you. You call him law-abidin'? I know he's young, but he has a record as long as my arm. D'you deny that?"

The sheriff swallowed. "Greasers don't count," he said. "S'long, Van Zandt."

He stood at the window, scowling,

and watched the big farmer mount his horse. It was a chestnut stallion, a full sixteen hands tall, clean limbed, straight rumped, with a long neck that promised a mighty stride. He made a fine picture, but what good would he be, thought the sheriff, in a twenty-four-hour march across the mountains? Or how would those long legs, muscled for speed alone, stand up under the jerking, twisting, weaving labor of a round-up. The chestnut was a picture horse, decided the sheriff, made for pleasure and short, easy rides, together with a long price. Jan van Zandt disappeared down the street, borne at a long, rocking gallop, and the sheriff turned his glance to his own little pinto, standing untethered, with the reins thrown over his head. The pinto had raised his lumpish head a trifle and opened one eye when the stallion started away with a snort; then he dropped back into his sullen slumber, his ears flopping awry, his lower lip pendent, one hip sagging. The pinto was six, but he looked sixteen; he appeared about to sink into the dust, but if a choice was to be made between that pinto and the chestnut stallion for a sixty-mile ride the sheriff would not have hesitated for a second in making his decision. He was so moved as he thought of these things, that he leaned out the window and cursed the mustang in a terrible voice, and pinto raised his head and whinnied softly.

CHAPTER III.

THE CRISIS.

THREE days went slowly, slowly, over the head of the sheriff. During that time he was as profane, as slovenly, as smiling as ever, and yet every minute he waited for the crash. His mind reverted to a period fifteen years before when Hank Peyton had been a black name around Sloan. There were two men of might in those days—Peyton and La Paloma—and only by an act of grace was Sloan rid of them when Peyton killed the more famous bad man and was himself so terribly shot up that he could never draw a weapon again with a sure hand. After that epic battle he had lived on his savage reputation alone, peacefully; but the picture in the sheriff's eye was the old Hank Peyton. Side by side with it he saw the son of the gun fighter, equally large, stronger, cleverer, and possessing one great attribute which his father had never known—a sense of humor. Hank had been all fire, all passion, but his son knew how to smile and wait—in fact, the sheriff knew that he was waiting even now to take the life of Jan van Zandt, and the suspense of that expectation was more terrible to him than the most violent outrage Hank himself had ever committed. Looking into the future, the sheriff found himself already accepting the death of Jan van Zandt as an accomplished fact, and his concern was wholly for his own troubles when he should have to take the trail of young Peyton; but sometimes a sinister, small hope was mixed with his worry—a hope that Peyton was waiting so that he could make his kill with impunity. After all that was the only satisfactory explanation of the long wait.

It was on the third day that the unexpected blow fell. Six men rode into Sloan. They raced their horses straight to the office of the sheriff, and from the window he smiled when he saw the horses mill about as soon as the masters dismounted. They had saved two minutes by racing, he saw, and now they wasted an equal amount of time tethering their nervous horses; for they rode the type of horseflesh that Jan van Zandt rode—blooded fellows with which they hoped to build up a fine stock for saddle and harness. "New horses, new men," decided the sheriff calmly, as he recognized Rex Houlahan,

Pete Goodwin, Gus Saunders, Pierre la Roche, and Eric Jensen. He decided that the blow had fallen when he saw the hulking form of Jan van Zandt himself in the background, and never was sight more welcome to the sheriff. The six men came for his door in a bunch, wedged in the frame, and struggled for a moment before they sprawled into the room. It gave the sheriff time to finish working off an ample chew of Virginia tobacco, for which he was duly grateful.

"It's happened," said Pete Goodwin.

"He's up and done it," said Rex Houlahan.

"The thing, it is finish," said Pierre la Roche.

They said these things all in one breath; the sheriff turned and blinked at Jan van Zandt to make sure that he was not a ghost. But he hated to ask questions, so he said nothing. Van Zandt worked his way to the front, and Sheriff Sturgis saw in his face the pallor of a coward cornered or a peaceful man with his back to the wall and ready to fight. He had never seen another man who looked exactly like that and it troubled him.

"Prince Harry——" began the big farmer, and then stood with his mouth working while the sheriff wondered what on earth the chestnut stallion's name could have to do with six armed men—"Prince Harry," continued Van Zandt, exploding, "the skunk has got him—and I'm goin' to get his hide! Peyton got him—Prince Harry."

"Killed him?" asked the sheriff, seeing light.

"Stole him. There's a law around here about hoss thieves, ain't there? Well, we're here to use it!"

"Young Peyton has a rope comin' to him," added Houlahan, "and we're here to use it."

"There's a law about horse thieves," admitted the sheriff with grim satisfaction, "but it ain't a written law."

There was a chorus of disapproval. It reminded the sheriff that there is one power more terrible and blind and remorseless than the worst gang of outlaws that ever raided a town, and that is a number of peaceful, law-abiding citizens who rise en masse for their rights. The sheriff lost all desire to smile.

"Gents," he said, "if I was to see with my own eyes young Peyton climbin' on the back of another man's hoss, I'd disbelieve my own eyes. Hoss-stealin' ain't up to his size. That's all."

Big van Zandt leaned over the deck, resting his balled fists upon it: "How d'you know?" he said. "Seems to me like you're too fond of this Peyton!"

"I got to ask you to take your hands off'n my desk," said the sheriff coldly. "You'll be messin' up all my papers pretty soon."

In spite of his rage, Van Zandt knew enough to obey.

"Who saw Peyton take the chestnut?" went on the sheriff.

"Who else would take him?" asked six voices. And the sheriff gave up all attempt to reason with them.

"Even if he ain't got the horse now," Van Zandt said, "it only shows that he's passed Prince Harry along the line to some of his friends in the hills. It ain't the first hoss that's been lost around here—and the others have gone the same way. Besides, where does Peyton get all the money he blows in around town? We have to work; he don't do a tap. I ask you, what does that mean?"

The sheriff looked into each face in turn and saw that he could not answer. He only said: "Boys, you may be right. I hope you ain't, but you may be right." There was a deep-throated growl in response, but they were somewhat pacified by this admission. "I ask you to do this: take the road down the valley and try to ride down the gent that took Prince Harry."

"They ain't a hoss in the valley that could catch him," said Van Zandt with gloomy pride.

"I got some money that would talk on that point," said the sheriff calmly. "But all I say is: Will you do what I want?"

"We'll go down the valley," said Houlahan, combing his red beard, "but who'll go up the valley? We got six here to go down the valley, but where's six to go the other way?"

"I'll go," said the sheriff, buckling on his belt. Their breath of silence admitted that it was a sufficient answer.

"And if neither of us get him?" they asked.

"Then," sighed the sheriff, "it's up to me to hit the trail. We'll start botherin' about that when the time comes. Now you better be gettin' on your way."

"But what if Prince Harry was taken across the hills?"

"Nobody but a fool would take that hoss through the hills," said the sheriff sharply. "He'd bust his skinny legs in the rocks inside of two mile. Now, get on your way."

He followed them through the door, watched them tumble into the saddle and then race down the street, shouting. Then the sheriff climbed into the saddle on pinto. He used neither spurs nor quirt to start his mustang into a racing gait, but pinto, as soon as the reins were drawn taut, broke from a standing start into a long, lazy lope, unhurried, smooth as the rocking of a ground swell. His head hung low, his leg muscles were relaxed, he seemed to fall along the ground, and he could keep close to that pace from sunrise to sunset. Sheriff Sturgis paid no attention to his surroundings for some distance out of the town. He was thinking of the man who took Prince Harry; if he were a man wise in horseflesh, he would keep far from the hills and go straight along the road. The chances were large that he would give his horse the rein for some distance out of the environs of the town; in fact, he would go at full speed until he had passed the forking of the roads, far up the valley —if he were traveling in that direction. Once there, he would be in sparsely filled range land where there were no houses within a day's ride ahead of him; and also where he would have small chance of getting a fresh mount. Realizing this, if he were at all familiar with the country, the thief would dismount and let his horse get his wind, preparing for the long grind through the foothills; but after the pause there was a great chance that the chestnut, winded by the hard riding and soft from the sort of work which Jan van Zandt gave him, would be stiff and almost broken down. The greatest difficulty before the sheriff was to decide on which of the roads the criminal would follow when he reached the forking. That is, granted that he took this direction up the valley.

His last doubt was presently removed from his mind, for coming to a stretch of road where the prints of horses' feet were few, and these only the tracks which followed squarely between the wheel ruts, the sheriff discovered new signs that made him dismount from his horse to examine them more closely. What he found was the print which a horse makes when it runs at full speed, the feet falling in four distinct beats, at about an equal distance from each other, and then a long gap where the last hoof leaves the ground and the body of the animal is thrown forward through the air. The sheriff watched these tracks with painful attention, and then, to settle any remaining doubts, he got into the saddle on pinto and spurred him into a hundred-yard sprint. At the end of it, he reined in the mustang and dismounted again. There were now two parallel tracks of a running horse,

but the differences between them were great. The first comer outstrode pinto by an astonishing distance, and in spite of the fact that the wind had drifted a good deal of sand into the marks, the indentations of the other horse were much the deeper. It was the track, indeed, not of a cattle pony but of a heavy horse which had enough blood to get into a racing stride; it was the track of a long-legged animal, and the mind of the sheriff reverted at once to the picture of Prince Harry and his long neck, a sign of speed.

Before he remounted, Sturgis looked carefully to his revolver; he even tried its balance, and after that unnecessary precaution, he climbed into the saddle again and sent pinto down the trail once more, at the long, lazy lope which held on through the morning, rocking up hill and down dale until they came to the forking of the road. There was no problem here. As though to help his pursuers, the rider of the long-stepping horse had taken the curve short—his prints lay on the side of the road, far from all others, and the sheriff, without letting pinto fall even into a trot, swung down the left-hand way toward the hills.

Two miles farther on the sign disappeared on the road, and the sheriff cut in a small circle which brought him to a group of bushes, and in the middle of this a spot of bare sand. There was not a single indentation on this sand, but the sheriff appeared to be greatly interested in it. He looked on all sides, and saw no other sign of shrubbery; then he dismounted, and searching among the brush he came upon a dry stalk broken across close to the surface of the ground. The wood was so rotten that it was impossible to tell whether or not it had recently been broken, so the sheriff turned and looked fixedly at the center of the sand plot. It showed no sign; there was not the faintest indication of a mound, and sufficient wind had touched the surface to cover it with the tiny wind marks, in long, wavy lines. But apparently the sheriff had reduced his problem to a point where the clew *must* lie in the sand of this little opening. He stepped directly to the center, dug his toe into the ground, and turned up a quantity of charred sticks.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRAIL.

He sent pinto back to the road, and now he broke from the lope into a gallop, still almost effortless, but nearly twice as rapid as his former gait; once he glanced back; but the sun was comfortably high—it was not far past noon. A full two hundred yards, or more, he had gone before he found the place where the pursued man had cut back onto the road again, and now the sheriff watched the tracks with a new interest. He found, as he had expected, that the gait was no longer a full gallop, but only a hand-canter, and Sturgis knew perfectly well that the long back and the fragile legs of such a horse could not stand the gait which was so natural to a cowpony. The rider must have realized this, for presently the marks of the canter went out, and in its place was the sign of a trot. At this gait the animal went along much better. There was an ample distance from print to print and the uniform size of the gap showed that he had still plenty of strength left. Or perhaps his strength was already far gone and the horse was traveling on nerve alone.

However that might be, the sheriff soon ceased to look at the tracks. Instead, he kept his gaze fastened far down the road, and wherever it rolled out of sight among the hills he sat straighter in the saddle and his search became more piercing. There were many places where a wary man could take shelter and watch a great stretch

of the road behind him; and if it were any one of this neighborhood, he would be sure to know the sheriff by his celebrated pinto. In that case a wise man would take no further chances, but pull his rifle and wait for a shot.

So the sheriff, as he went deeper into the hills, spurred the pinto to a faster gait; he looked back, now and again, to the road, and saw in two places a milling of many tracks where the pursued had dismounted to breathe his horse; and now he came swinging over the shoulder of a hill with a seretch of a full three miles running straight ahead of him. It was quite empty—not a sign of any living thing in all its distance, but the sheriff swung the pony around with a jerk and headed back behind the hill.

He had planned to catch sight of the fugitive within the next half hour of riding unless the sign he had read had lied to him, and this gap of empty road startled him. For it told him either that he had not read the tracks correctly or that the other had left the road; and if he had left the road there could only be two reasons for it. One was that he had decided on a long rest for himself and his mount, which was quite unreasonable at this period of the day; the other was that he had seen the sheriff following, and had recognized the bright coloring of the pinto. The latter reason was by far the best, and the sheriff acted upon it.

Leaving his pinto ensconced in a clump of trees on the far side of the hill, he skirted around the other edge. The road was a slightly graded cut on the side of a long, sharp slope, forested thickly, and the chances were great that the rider of the horse, if indeed he were a fugitive from justice, and if his mount were the chestnut of Jan van Zandt, would go either for rest or to spy on the pursuit among the trees above the road, where he could see everything and remain himself unseen. It was on this side of the road, then, that Sturgis prepared to hunt, but he paused before beginning, partly because of the danger which lay ahead of him, and far more because above all things in this world he hated to go on foot. It was while he stood among the brush at the roadside, summoning his resolution, and letting his bright little eyes rove everywhere among the trees ahead of him, that the sheriff saw a man step out of the forest and go swinging down the road not fifty yards ahead of him. He was so set for the work ahead of him, however, that he had amost dismissed the stranger from his mind and started toward the trees when something in the gait of the man made him pause; it was a hobbling gait, short steps that were uneven, and the sheriff recognized through sympathy the pace of a man who generally moves on horseback alone. More than this, he saw those strides gradually lengthen, as the walker swung into his work, and it convinced the sharp eyes of the sheriff that this was no random hunter, strolling over the mountains, but a man who had recently climbed from the back of a horse, whose leg muscles were not yet all straightened out. Not until he had noted all these facts did the sheriff catch the gleam of spurs, but he had already made up his mind. When he left his horse, he had taken his rifle with him; now he deliberately dropped upon one knee behind a shrub and sighted among the branches. With the stock squeezed into his shoulder and his finger curling on the trigger he shouted: "Halt!" It brought an amazing result. Instead of turning with both hands held high over his head, as is the time-honored custom on such occasions, the stranger leaped to one side, at the same time pitching toward the ground and whirling about on his face; so that he struck with only his left elbow supporting his shoulders, and in that hair breadth of time he had con-

jured a forty-five Colt out of its holster. He lay with the muzzle of the revolver tipped up and down balancing for a snap shot in any direction.

"Not so bad," called the sheriff.

The man with the revolver twisted to one side, and the revolver became rigid; for the echo from the hillside had made Sturgis' voice seem to come from the opposite direction.

"Drop it," continued the sheriff. "I've got a line on you, Bud. I've got your head in the circle, pal."

The other hesitated for a single instant, and then scrambled to his feet, tossing the revolver into the dust.

"Well," he said coolly enough, "what does all this mean?"

"It means that I want the other gun," said the sheriff.

"What gun?"

"Don't play me for a fool," Sturgis retorted. "First, turn your face the other way." He was obeyed. "Now shell out your other cannon."

The other produced a second weapon from somewhere in his clothes, and tossed it away. "All right," said the sheriff, stepping from behind the bush, "you can face this way, friend, after you've got those hands up high."

The hands went up slowly, and with equal slownes the other turned. Sturgis, with intense interest, saw that the fellow had to fight, apparently, before he could force his hands above the level of his shoulders and up into the region of helplessness. "If you want my money," said the stranger without undue nervousness, "you'll find my wallet in the left hip pocket."

"Thanks," said Sturgis. "Don't mind if I do. Get up them hands!" The arms of the other had, in fact, lowered a little as the sheriff came closer; but now he straightened them again and looked thoughtfully at Sturgis. He was in all respects a man of superior appearance, with a carefully tended mustache, kept clean of the lips, and a pale, rather handsome face with those square cheeks, somewhat puffy at the jowls, which betoken good living. Above all, he had that straight and penetrating glance which comes to men who have directed many others. He kept his hands high up while the fingers of the sheriff ran swiftly over him; he did not even quiver when Sturgis extracted a third weapon—it was a little, double-barreled pistol which hung under the man's shirt suspended from a noose of horsehair. Sturgis knew now why the man was so averse to getting his hands above his shoulders, for even if his thumb was as high as his throat he had still a chance to hook it under the little horsehair lariat and whip out the pistol for the two final shots. "My, my," sighed the sheriff, as he cut the string and pocketed the little weapon. "Kind of a walkin' arsenal, ain't you?"

"In this country, apparently," the other replied, "a man needs to be."

"Oh, we ain't so bad around here," said the sheriff. "For instance, we don't lift hosses regular." There was not a flicker of the other's eyes.

"Suppose you lead me where the chestnut is," he said. "All right now. You can take your hands down."

"Thanks," said the man of the well-trimmed moustache, and he brushed it with his fingertips, studying the sheriff. "For a hold-up man," he said, "you talk in a singular fashion. What chestnut do you refer to?"

The smile of the sheriff widened to a broad grin.

"I'm forty-five years old, partner," he said. "If I was two years younger I think you'd get by, but to-day you're out of luck. The seat of your trousers is all shiny, the way cloth gets when it rubs on leather, say. And they's a sort of hoss smell about you. I say, lead me to that hoss, and don't be aggravatin'."

The other shrugged his shoulders and gave up.

"It's not worth seeing," he said.

"Dead?"

"It was a show horse," said the stranger. His jaw thrust out and his face changed. "The first time in my life that I've gone so wrong in judging a horse."

"No stamina, eh?" murmured the sheriff, sympathetically. "No guts at all; well, I ain't surprised that you went wrong on him. When them hosses first come into the country they took my eye, too; then I seen what a day's work does to 'em and I changed my mind. But I didn't hear no shot; how'd you kill the hoss?"

"I couldn't risk a bullet," said the other. "Sound travels too far in this country."

"And instead?"

"A knife turned the trick nicely—through the temple, you know."

The sheriff opened both his mouth and his eyes. "You run a knife into that hossflesh?" he muttered, recovering himself. "Well, it's time we started back; sorry you got to walk."

"Not at all," replied the other, apparently unmoved by the hardening of the sheriff's voice. "I'm not going to walk, and I'm not going back."

CHAPTER V.

FENCING.

IT made the sheriff look again at his prisoner. "Tut, tut," he said good-naturedly, "you s'prise me, partner. What d'you figure on doin'?"

"Sitting down on that rock and talking to you."

"It'll get us back after dark to the town," said the sheriff, "but outside of that it's a hog-ear to me whether you walk back now or after we've talked."

They made themselves comfortable on the rock, each twisting around so that his face was to the other. "Now, what d'you want to do?" said the sheriff.

"I want your horse."

"Yes?"

"And I want you to take back to Sloan the price of the horse I've just ridden to death, along with the price of your own horse."

"Oh," murmured the sheriff mildly, "maybe you'll give me a check?"

The stranger did not smile. "Here's my wallet," he said. "You count it for me," suggested Sturgis.

So the thief unfolded the leather, and extracting a thick slive of greenbacks he counted over silently and slowly into the sheriff's hand five bills of one thousand dollars each and thirty more of the hundred-dollar denomination. "One thousand dollars for the horse," said the stranger, "one hundred for your horse, and six thousand nine hundred dollars to pay for your long walk back to Sloan." He raised his eyes from the count, retaining a few bills in his hand.

The sheriff laid the money back on his knee with a sigh. "Sorry," he said. "Naturally you're sorry that I should underestimate your dislike for walking," said the stranger calmly. "Accordingly, I hasten to correct the mistake," and he added to the little pack four more bills of a thousand dollars each. "Ten thousand nine hundred is the price of that walk back to Sloan. And now, if you'll pardon me, I'll take your horse and hurry along."

The sheriff sat with his shoulders bowed; he looked like a man over whom old age has suddenly swept, unstringing all his nerves, and he squinted up at the stranger with eyes of pain. "Sit down again," said the sheriff huskily. "I hate to say it, but you've no idea how I hate walkin'."

The other sighed; then he sat down and leaned a little closer. "I want you to take note of these things," he said, and checked them off on the tips of his fingers. "Did you ever hear of a horse thief with close to eleven thousand dollars in his wallet? Does it seem possi-

ble to you that a man might be making a journey in such desperate speed that he would change saddles from one horse to another without stopping to haggle with the owner of the second horse about a price? Finally, do you think it absurd and beyond reason that a man making such a desperate journey would, when it is completed, send back the price of the horse he had taken?"

"I'll tell you what," said the sheriff, "them three questions are ones that twelve men could answer better than one."

For the first time the stranger flushed. He sat back, gritting his teeth, and looked the sheriff between the eyes. "I have a check book with me," he said at length. "Name the price of that walk back to Sloan. It'll be yours."

"H-m-m," murmured the sheriff, "I'd a sort of an idea that it would come down to a matter of writing a check."

"Because," said the other earnestly, "you know that my check for almost any amount would be good." He clenched one hand into a fist while he talked, and the sheriff, looking down, wondered at the smallness of the hand, and the whiteness of the skin. "Besides," went on the stranger, "in your heart you're absolutely convinced that what I've told you is the truth; you know that I'm here on business only; you know from my appearance that I'm not a horse rustler; you know that I'm talking to you as straight as my money talks."

"Straighter, in fact," said the sheriff.

The stranger flushed again. "If you're offended because I've attempted to bribe you," he said, "I'm sorry. But I've most urgent need to get across those hills; I couldn't stop to be scrupulous."

"D'you ever notice," said the sheriff absently, "that when a gent starts elbowin' in a crowd most generally he starts a fight that everybody gets hurt in?"

The stranger caught his breath with impatience but said nothing. "It's that way about the chestnut hoss," went on the sheriff. "He ain't worth more'n a thousand dollars, that hoss that you turned into so much meat—with your knife! No, he ain't hardly worth more'n a thousand, but maybe he means more'n money to the gent that raised him from the time he was a foal. You see? Look at it another way. You grab this hoss and ride on expectin' to pay for him later. Well, the gent that owns this hoss finds him gone and right off he says that a gent near by is the one that done the stealin'. He's sure of that, because he knows this young gent hates him. Well, he starts out and rounds up a pile of ornery boys like himself and come boilin' down to my office bent on revenge. They go one way; I go the other. I have all the luck, it turns out, and suppose that gang of farmers misses the hoss, which they will, and comes back thinkin' a lot of hard things about the young gent that they first thought done the stealin'. Well, people take it kind of hard around here when a hoss it stolen, and when they got a suspicion they don't always wait for a jury; they go straight to Judge Lynch and get an opinion. You foller me, maybe?"

"I do," said the other, frowning. "You think there'll be a lynching party on account of this chestnut horse—curses on his weak heart!"

His face convulsed as he spoke, and for a moment the sheriff sat with his mouth parted over his next word, staring at the stranger. He seemed to see new things in the horse thief; as if it were the middle of night and a match had been lighted under that face.

"I got to tell you anoher side of it," said the sheriff. "Suppose the bunch of farmers don't lynch this gent I'm talkin' about, but they only muss him

up a lot and call him names. Well, he's the kind of a boy that takes hard names to heart terrible bad."

"If I'm not mistaken," said the stranger, "this young fellow won't use his gun more than once in your district. You're the sheriff, I take it."

"My name is Sturgis," the sheriff replied. There was no change in the horse thief's expression. "Yes, I'm the sheriff and my record is pretty long and pretty clean."

"I'm sure it is," the stranger agreed earnestly.

"But," went on Sturgis, "if all the gents I've ever taken was rolled into one, all their tricks, and all their speed with guns, and all their cool-headedness, and all their cussedness—if they was all rolled into one I'd rather tackle them all over again than tackle this same young gent."

The stranger scrubbed his chin nervously with his knuckles and then replied: "I begin to see what you mean—but I'd like to see this remarkable young man."

"Oh, he ain't so different," said the sheriff. "He ain't so different from the rest; he's just a split-second faster with his gun; he's just an inch closer to the bell with his slug; he's just a quiver steadier in his hand; he's just a dash cooler in the head. But," he sighed, "it's surprisin' what a lot of difference a few little things make when they're all added up. You see, this boy had a considerable pile of an inheritance, and he improves a lot on what he got for a start."

"That description reminds me of some one I knew," the stranger said musingly.

"Was it, may be, La Paloma that you knew?" murmured the sheriff innocently.

The glance of the other twitched across the face of the sheriff like the lash of whip and then back. "No," he said, "who was La Paloma?"

"But I'll tell you what," said the sheriff suddenly, "in spite of all the harm that maybe you've done by stealin' that hoss, I can't help lettin' my heart go out to a gent that knows how rotten it is to walk on foot."

"Ah?" murmured he other. Then he drew out a folded check book.

"Suppose," said the sheriff, "that I had some dice here, I might take a chance to see whether you take my hoss or whether you come back to Sloan with me."

"We could flip a coin," said the stranger.

"Too risky," murmured the sheriff. "If we even had a pack of cards we could get along."

"Ah," murmured the stranger, and instantly a black leather cardcase was in the palm of his hand.

"So," sighed the sheriff. "Kind of looks like you've took me up. What'll we play to decide?"

"Something short?" suggested the other.

"Sure."

"Anything you say will do with me," said the horse thief. "But wait a moment—why not cut for the first ace?"

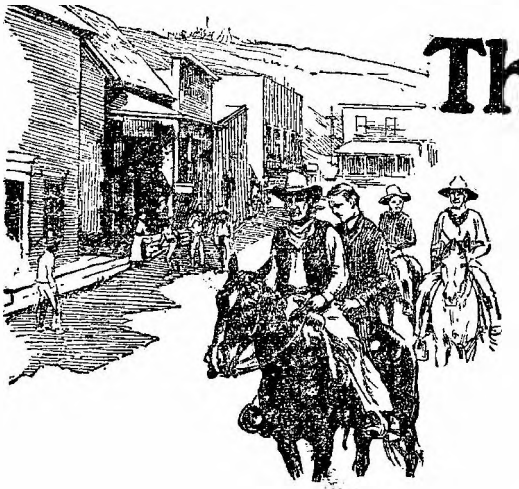
He broke off with a frown, for he suddenly discovered that the sheriff was smiling quietly, straight into his eyes.

"D'you know," said the sheriff, "that I been waiting for this minute for years and years?"

"What?"

"You was always a queer one," murmured Sturgis, "but still I can't understand why you'd ever come back here, Pat."

To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, out on Thursday, December 2d. As this magazine is published every week, you will not have long to wait for the next instaliment of this thrilling serial.



The Gentle Stranger

By Johnston McCulley

THE town of Bluerock blistered in the sun. The wind swirled the dust clouds in the one narrow, crooked street, pitch oozed from the plank sidewalks, heat waves danced across the range of a man's vision in endless black regiments; the air seemed stagnant.

Bluerock did not take a siesta officially, yet it was taking one this morning. The day before had been hot, the night had been hot, and this new day was hotter. Only a few men were on the street. Some sat in chairs beneath the awning at the one general store and dozed. Inside Dugan's place, Dugan was sleeping in a corner, and his one all-around handy man polished a glass as though the effort pained him.

Then, far out across the burning plain, came a little cloud of dust that did not look like a miniature cyclone driven by a gust of wind. It approached rapidly and assumed larger proportions. It rolled in toward the town, now faint because of a depression in the earth, now stronger because of a sudden swell in the terrain.

A few of the men before the general store opened their eyes and observed this cloud of dust, and one of them spoke.

"Somebody comin'; gang of cowboys or a ranch wagon."

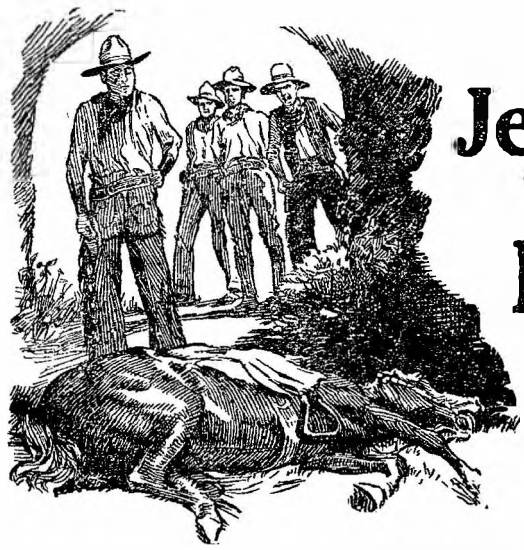
The statement caused no ripple of interest, beyond the thought in the mind of every man there that a human being was a fool to travel on such a day unless spurred by some dire necessity. Probably it was a ranch wagon coming for needed supplies. It was the middle of the month, far from pay day, hence no crowd of cowboys could be expected to descend upon Bluerock for diversion.

Presently a gust of wind heavier than usual blew the cloud of dust aside.

"It's a gang!" said the watcher before the general store.

The others gave him some attention now. If it were a gang, it might mean news of disaster. Possibly it was a posse in pursuit of some lawbreaker. Probably a cattle rustler had put in his appearance and was being run down. Maybe some belligerent foreman had discharged his men wholesale and they were coming to town to get rid of their sorrows and look for new jobs. The possibilities were unlimited.

The riders could be seen now, fully ten of them, and they were making excellent time, as though eager to reach the town. And suddenly they descended upon it in a cloud of dust, gal-



Jerry Peyton's Notched Inheritance

By George Owen Baxter

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

JEREMIAH PEYTON inherits a revolver called The Voice of La Paloma which his father had obtained from a rival bandit whom he had double-crossed. Although Jeremiah has kept the peace, the inhabitants of Sloan expect him to become some day as lawless as his father.

Disliking work, Jeremiah's possessions gradually diminish until he has left little else besides The Voice of La Paloma and a buckskin mare whom he loves dearly. Through neglect on the part of his neighbor, Jan van Zandt, the mare dies and Jeremiah gives Van Zandt a beating, and threatens to exact full payment later on.

When Jan van Zandt discovers his chestnut horse is missing, Jeremiah is suspected and a posse set out to capture him. Sheriff Sturgis goes alone and finally runs down the thief, who is not Jeremiah but a man for whom the sheriff has been looking, for many years.

CHAPTER VI.

REMINISCENCE.

THE silence which followed had an acid quality; it seemed to eat into the mind of the stranger and weaken him; the black eyes lost some of their brilliance, and presently he moistened his white lips, and whispered a curse.

"Don't do it," said the sheriff, shaking his head. "Don't talk like that, because it always makes me sort of uneasy when a gent cusses me—even an old acquaintance like you, Pat."

Then he added, after a moment, during which he looked almost longingly at the other: "Well, I guess we'd better be goin' back." He broke out in a different tone, that might have been called cheerful: "D'you remember that it was in a place about like this that we——"

"Wait." Pat gasped and reached his hand out toward the sheriff, but before it touched his fingers he relaxed and the arm remained suspended in mid-air. "It can't end like this!" he cried. "It can't end like this!" His whole body was shaking, but all at once he straightened out his glance, and his mustache stopped working and bristling. "You're waiting for me to break down, are you?"

The sheriff raised a deprecating hand. "A man like you break down? A scholar and a gentleman like you? Sure I ain't waitin' to see that. I'd be a fool, wouldn't I?"

"Ed, it all happened twenty years ago. It's dead."

"She's dead," agreed the sheriff, nodding.

The other groaned and clenched his fists.

"It takes about twenty years for a good wine to get ripe and all softened

down so's a man can enjoy it," said the sheriff calmly.

The horse thief appeared to be buried in thought. "Suppose I were to tell you a story of a fellow who was down and out—who'd lived like a hound while he was young—who straightened up and tried to be a man afterward——"

"Go on," broke in the sheriff. "You was always a fine talker, Pat," he added encouragingly. "You'd ought to make a good yarn out of it. Let's hear it, Langley."

"You know me too well to think I'd whine," said Pat Langley.

"Sure I do."

"I want you to see in one glance what you do if you take me into Sloan and drag up that other matter against me. Out in the West Indies on the island of St. Hilaire I have one of the finest plantations in the whole place; I have a wife and daughter." He drew a second little leather case from an inside pocket. "You'll see their pictures on one side of the card and the picture of my house on the other." He handed the case to the sheriff. "I want you to know that you'll be stepping into the happiest home in St. Hilaire and ruinning two lives besides mine. But if you'll drop this affair, Ed, you'll step through the doors you see in that picture and halve everything that's inside. If you don't want to be near me—and I don't suppose you will—you get half of my bank account. More than that. You can see my financial statement and make your own terms. I'm not offering this as a bribe. In the first place, I did you a great wrong; I want to make amends for that wrong, and the only way I can do it is to work on the financial end. At the same time, I want you to see that after I wronged you I realized what a hound I had been. I did go straight."

But the sheriff gave back the unopened leather case.

"I couldn't look into a woman's face just now, Pat," he said gently. But Langley paled as though he had gained a first glimpse into the mind of the other. A change came gradually over his face. The sheriff, watching in fascination, noted that change and dropped his hand for the first time upon his rifle stock; but always he had kept the muzzle directed at the horse thief.

Yet Langley only said: "Throw me the makings, will you? See if I've forgotten how to roll 'em."

The sheriff obeyed without a word and watched him deftly make his smoke and light it. When he had inhaled the first breath Langley seemed to find a new cheer. He raised his head and looked about him as he exhaled the blue-brown vapor slowly. "Not so bad," he said. "Better than a lot of the tailor-mades I smoke." He met the eye of the sheriff. "And now that I'm back in it," he said, "this same country isn't so bad. Cleaner air around here than we have in the islands." He drew a long breath and puffed it out again. "Well, when did you spot me first, Ed? I knew you the moment I saw you, but I depended on the twenty years and this mustache—like a fool! I knew you when I was putting my hands up and I hesitated about making a try with that little necklace of mine. Well, when did you know me first?"

"You're a hard man, ain't you, Pat?" said the sheriff quietly. "When it comes to the pinch, wife and child can go hang."

"You thought I'd weaken, didn't you?" He chuckled.

"It wasn't your face that told on you," said the sheriff, "though it gave me a bit of a shock. Made me start thinking. First of all, when you threw yourself at the ground. That made me guess—that old trick, you know. But all those things were hints pilin' up in the back of my head. Then I got my first real clew when you twisted your eyes at me when I mentioned La

Paloma. Funny way you have of glintin' at a gent out of the corner of your eyes, Pat. But what sewed the thing up in my mind was the cards. You always used to have cards with you, and if it came to a choice in a pinch you liked to cut for aces."

The horse thief looked calmly at him and tossed his cigarette butt away.

"Speaking of cards," he said, "I wonder if she knew that you'd played cards that night?"

The rifle trembled in the hands of the sheriff, but Langley did not wince.

"I was drunk," the sheriff replied.

The other chuckled: "We've all heard that stort of talk."

Sturgis began to breathe through his mouth, as though he had been running.

"To go back to the beginning," said the horse thief, "suppose you and I were to have an even break for our guns. Just you and me with nobody to look on. We take anything for a signal to start for the butts—say the next time that hawk screams. And the fellow who drops is left for the buzzards. If you get me—why, you did it making an arrest of a horse thief; if I get you, I take pinto along over the hills."

"I'd like the idea," Sturgis sighed. "Heavens above, how I been prayin' for it twenty years!"

"Good old sport," Langley said as he rose. "It's done, then?"

"Wait a minute. In the old days you was always a bit better with a gun than me, Pat."

"But you've had more practice lately."

"You lie," said the sheriff, without heat. "You practice with a gun every day of your life. You have to."

The other flushed, looked swiftly about him, and then saw that he was helpless.

"But aside from that," went on the sheriff, "I think the way of the law is a pretty good way, mostly. It gets at the insides of some gents in a way that powder and lead can't. Suppose I was to blow your head off. You wouldn't feel nothin'. I'd feel sort of better afterward, but what would you feel? Nothin'! But s'pose you get sent up for a little while—for stealin' a hoss. That wouldn't be bad. Not the prison, but after you got out St. Hilaire would have the news. I'd take care that they did. You're proud, ain't you, Pat?"

"I'd kill you," said the other thoughtfully. "I'd kill you as sure as Heaven when I was out."

"I don't cross no bridges till I come to 'em," the sheriff replied. "Besides, I know the warden of the State prison. Maybe he'd let me come up and pay you friendly visits once in a while. And then maybe I'd get so fond of havin' you where I could see you that I'd hate to see you leave. So I might want to dig back twenty years and get something else that would hold you the rest of your life. Or if I got tired of seein' you that way, I might even get something that would hang you, Pat." He bit off a large corner of his Virginia leaf and stowed it gingerly in his cheek. "You see how many sides they is to the thing, Pat?" he said gently.

"I see one thing," said the other, with equal calm. "Twenty years has drilled through your thick head and put some sense there."

"Well, the day's wearin' on. S'pose we start back. I hate to make you walk."

"Don't mind me," said Pat heartily. "I generally walk every day on the island, and I'm in pretty fair trim."

The sheriff climbed on his horse, and as he did so the other stepped to the side of the road, whistling, and leaned over.

"Stand up!" called the sheriff. The other slowly stood up and showed his teeth under the black mustache. He kicked the revolver away. "I almost had it," he confided to the sheriff.

"My, my!" murmured Sturgis, smiling. "Wasn't that a close chance, now? I'll tell a man!"

He motioned down the road ahead of him.

"Certainly," said the horse thief, "I always like to go first."

And he stepped out into the road.

"The same old Pat," the sheriff said reminiscently. "You was always prime company."

CHAPTER VII.

JEREMIAH, SON OF HANK.

THE things which the sheriff did not know about the farming element around the town of Sloan were supplied to him by a seventh sense. It all fell out as he had warned the horse thief. First the posse, led by red-bearded "Rex" Houlahan, swept like a storm down the valley. They rode hard and they rode well, and they had the fastest horses within two hundred miles of Sloan, except Prince Harry himself. In fact, the six were chosen men of courage, for in recruiting his posse, Jan van Zandt had not even applied to the cattlemen, knowing their answer beforehand, and of the farmers, these six were the only ones who cared to come within rifle range of Jeremiah Peyton. Jan van Zandt knew how to pick his men both for the horses they rode and for their personal grit; and one day he might sit in the State legislature for just such qualities as he showed in this crisis.

He wanted Prince Harry back. The horse was the culmination of a long labor of breeding that ran back through two generations of the Van Zandt family, and it would take another two generations to get him back; but the affair was more than the matter of one horse. It was the culmination of the ill feeling between the two main classes of population around the little town. To be sure, the majority on both sides remained quiescent. Of the farmers there were only the six; and of the cattlemen there was only Jeremiah Peyton; but if matters came to a showdown the entire populace was apt to rise in arms and a class war result. The imagination of the sheriff had not stretched as far as this, but the calculation of Jan van Zandt had. And he figured that in the ultimate struggle the odds would be with the farmers in about the same proportion—six to one. However, as far as the sheriff's predictions ran, they were correct. The posse rushed down the valley, flogging their spirited nags every jump of the way. And when they reached the end of the valley, where the foothills sprawled out to a flat and the muddy old Winton River went straggling into the desert beyond, they drew rein and looked about them. There was still no sign of a chestnut horse before them; and when Rex Houlahan looked down to the road, for he was the most western of the lot, he did not find a trace of a recent hoofprint before them.

There was a rumble in the posse, but few words, and they turned back up the valley. At the town of Winton they stopped for lunch—it was already afternoon—and lay about mumbling threats against the universe in general and thieving cattlemen in particular. In the afternoon they started on up the valley. No sooner had they taken the road than they discovered new grievances all brought upon them by the hound who had stolen the chestnut stallion. Every one of their horses was stiff and sore from the unusual hard work of the morning; their delicate limbs were meant for it no more than the legs of Prince Harry had been meant to stall off the dogged pursuit of the sheriff's pinto. Rex Houlahan's bay mare had been raised from a delicate foal like a child in the family; now she was desperately lame in the off foreleg and Rex went stamping down the road on foot, gnashing his teeth behind

his red beard, with the mare following him like a dog. Within a mile she was going chiefly upon three legs, her head nodding far down at each step, and Houlahan's heart was too full for utterance.

For some reason, none of the other five cared to break in before the big Irishman. They let him walk ahead, and they followed in a somber group. For five miles not a word was said, and then, without sound or signal, the whole procession stopped in the road; the bay mare lay down at once in the dust. As for Houlahan, he turned and cast one long look at his horse; then he noted that they were opposite the house of Jeremiah Peyton. In fact, any one with half an eye could see the master of the shack sitting on the front veranda, tilted back as usual against the wall. To be sure the chestnut stallion was not in sight, but as the posse had explained to the sheriff that morning, the absence of the horse proved nothing. He might have been passed on to compatriots in the foothills beyond thieving cow-punchers who well knew how to send horses along by subterranean courses and bring them out a hundred miles or more away to be sold innocently to the first high bidder. All these things ate into the hearts of the farmers as they sat the saddle, breathing the pungent alkali dust which the feet of their weary horses stirred up; and most of all the idle form of Jeremiah stirred them. Idleness in their Middle Western scheme of things was the all-surpassing sin. Then Rex Houlahan cursed once, softly, and started across the fields. The others followed him.

How it happened that Jeremiah Peyton, the son of "Hank" Peyton, himself the chief figure of many a tale of border war against the greasers, calmly sat on his porch without a weapon near while he watched six of his enemies come across his land toward him, no one in Sloan could ever imagine. Men were to scratch their heads over this mystery for days and days. The only explanation lay in the profound contempt which he felt for these dirt grubbers and "land hogs," as he had been known to call them to their faces. He did not even look up until they were close to the porch; and when he did look up he did not rise; he merely whittled on at his stick. First he looked at the tops of their hats, then he whistled to the sky, then he called negligently to an old yellow cur which skulked across the porch away from the strangers; last of all he appeared to notice the silent, stationary group which sat in their saddles, armed to the teeth, before his porch. Most of all, there was Rex Houlahan on foot, and nearest to him. Although the loss was Jan van Zandt's, Houlahan was the spokesman.

"Peyton," he said.

The boy looked into the face of the big man and smiled, but did not answer. It was a needless insult, and the hands of the posse gathered their weapons closer.

"Peyton, we've come for you," Houlahan said.

For the first time the meaning of the men came to Jeremiah Peyton. In truth, he had despised them all so heartily that up to this point he refused to let his reason tell him what the general silence and the guns meant. Even now as he stood up and stretched the muscles of his magnificent, lithe body from fingertips to toes, he felt that he could dispose of them all, his naked hands against their guns; but the puniest man in the world, if he is possessed of a rage which does not pour itself forth in words, will command the respect of the strongest man. Peyton looked again, grudgingly admitted that the six were picked men of their kind, and that they were dangerous.

"Evening," he said, running his eyes calmly from face to face. "Climb off your horses and rest yourselves."

"We'll rest when we're through with you," Houlahan replied. Up to that time he himself did not exactly know why he had led the way to confront Peyton, but as soon as he spoke the words struck fire in him. The growl of the posse behind him urged him on, and in another moment mob frenzy had them all by the throats.

"Particularly me," interjected Jan van Zandt.

Perhaps if Jeremiah had returned the smooth answer he might have turned away wrath; instead of that he saw the spark of fire in every eyes and deliberately chose to pour oil upon the flame.

"Before you're through with me," he said, smiling in his odd manner straight at the brown-faced farmer, "you'll be an old man—or buzzard food. Get away from that door!"

For Houlahan had slipped over until he was near the front door of the house, thus hemming the master of the place against the wall. As he spoke, he swept his hand behind him, to the hip, and seemed to close his fingers over something.

"The rest of you hound dogs," Jeremiah ordered, "get off my land before I drill you for disturbin' my peace!" And, in the midst of the crisis and his bluff, he grinned at his own joke.

They had scattered back like fire before wind. Every man was behind his horse or getting there as fast as he could, and Houlahan, with a moan of anxiety, reached one of the small wooden pillars which supported the roof of the veranda and seemed to be hiding there—hiding from the slug of a Colt forty-five behind four inches of rotten pine! Even now Jeremiah would have been safe if he had used this moment of confusion to leap to the door and into the house. That would have begun a battle of which the mountain desert would still be talking; but with his big boy heart swelling with scorn he stood there and laughed in their faces and waved them away.

Then Houlahan saw from the side that there was no bulge of a gun on Peyton's hip and he screamed in a voice gone thin and piping with exultation: "He's bluffin' without a gun! Take him alive!"

The posse waited for no second invitation. The alarm of the instant before had strung their nerves to the breaking force, and now that the fear of bullets was removed, they flung themselves from their horses and plunged at Jerry. He would have stayed there to meet them even at these odds, but he had that Western horror of being overmatched by physical odds, of being reduced to impotence by numbers. He sprang like a tiger for the door and Houlahan rushed to meet him with a wailing cry, like one who struggles in a lost cause. There was a base of bulldog in Houlahan; a driving blow met him as he came in, and the whipping knuckles of Jerry laid the cheekbone bare, slicing the flesh neatly away, but though Houlahan fell, he fell forward and clutched blindly with both arms. The arms wound around the legs of Jerry, and though he dropped Houlahan the rest of the way to the floor with a crushing blow behind the ear, the Irishman had done his work. Before Jerry could shake his feet clear and gain the door the five were on him. He swung about as the avalanche struck. He broke the nose of Pete Goodwin; he slashed wildly at Pierre la Roche and Gus Saunders; he sent Eric Jensen rolling away with his arms clasped about his midriff; and then Jan van Zandt came up behind Jerry, raised his forty-five like a club, grinning, and Jerry went down, inert.

After that, Jan stood guard over the fallen, with the muzzle pointed at the head of the cowman, while the rest of them picked up Houlahan.

Even after Jerry himself had recov-

ered enough to sit up and sneer at the revolver which Jan van Zandt pointed at his head, Houlahan was still the object of main interest. At length they patched up the gashed side of his face, though blood still trickled beneath the bandage which they had made from one of Jerry's sheets. But even after he had gained his feet, Houlahan came staggering, punch drunk, and wavered before Jerry, the son of Hank.

"Ah, man, ah, man!" Rex Houlahan said. "That was a wallop ye handed me!" He grinned a lop-sided grin at Jerry, and then seemed to realize for the first time where he was and what had happened. "Tarnation!" he gasped. "I thought I was back in Brooklyn at old Rinkenstein's saloon. Now you, get up on your hind legs." And he stirred the captive with the toe of his boot.

"The spur's the thing for that," put in Jan van Zandt, and though Jerry was already rising, he assisted by rolling the rowel of his spur across Jerry's leg. Little pin points of crimson began to show through the cloth, and the posse laughed.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TEST.

A MOMENT later they were silent, stunned, as they realized that Jerry had risen to his feet in perfect silence. Neither the touch with the toe of the boot nor the spur nor the burst of laughter had brought a word from him.

One by one they began to realize that, unless they killed this man, he would most infallibly kill them.

"Get a rope," Jan van Zandt ordered. It was not the first time in his life nor was it the last that he would seize the highest note of public opinion and give it a voice. A rope was found and a tree likewise and they brought Jerry beneath a promising branch. Of the six men, five, at least, were anxious to get the thing done with as quickly as possible, but somewhere in the depth of Houlahan a spark of revolt rose.

"Is this a lynchin', maybe?" he asked, as Jan van Zandt placed the noose over the neck of Jerry Peyton. "It ain't," he answered himself. "This is justice. It being justice, he's got a right to be heard. Ain't that the law for hoss thieves?"

"They ain't any law for hoss thieves," remarked Gus Saunders. "But make him talk, if you want to. It'll be amusin' to hear him lie."

"Sure," Houlahan said. "All right, Bud. Come out with the truth. Did you steal Prince Harry?"

The accused smiled in the face of the Irishman.

"Speak up," said Houlahan. "If you can prove that you didn't, which you can't, we'll let you go free."

He stepped back, astonished. "Are you goin' to let yourself swing without sayin' a word?" he asked. "Are you goin' to give up a chance to talk for your life?"

The glance of Jerry Peyton went from face to face in the group and they stirred uneasily. They knew that he was examining their features so closely that neither time nor beard could ever mask them from him. If his destruction had been a matter of mob pleasure before, it now became a cold duty. They looked at each other, and they found the same answer in every eye.

"But he's got to speak up," protested Houlahan. He touched his bandaged cheek tenderly and then went on. "If he don't want to confess, make him. Listen to me, partner, talk out and you'll have the weight of the crime off your soul. You'll die so easy you won't feel the rope hardly."

The same faint, derisive smile met him.

"Let me try him," Jan van Zandt offered. "The things he don't answer

we'll figure is answered 'yes.' You all take note of that because the sheriff may want to ask us some questions later on. Here, you!"

The eyes of the prisoner were focused far above the head of the big farmer, and now he caught Jerry by the chin and twisted his head. "Look me in the eye and tell whatever truth there is in your lying heart. You hate me, don't you?"

Not a muscle of Jerry's face altered.

"You see?" said Jan van Zandt. "He admits that he hates me—Jan van Zandt, a peaceful, law-abidin' citizen! That'll be remembered. Next: did a horse of yours get killed by accident on my place?"

He turned to the others. "He admits that a horse of his was killed on my place. Keep all this in mind because it's leadin' somewhere. Now listen to me, Peyton: Did you refuse to go to court like an honest man and get your price for the horse that was killed?"

His triumph shone in his bronze face as he noted to the posse: "You hear that? Now listen! Did you write to me afterward that you would get your own price for the mare? You did. They's other witnesses to that. Last of all: Did you wait till you got the chance and then steal Prince Harry, that's worth ten times anything your mongrel buckskin was ever worth?"

The smile of infinite contempt played again over the lips of Jeremiah. Jan van Zandt, with a sob of grief and hate, drew back his heavy arm and struck the prisoner across the mouth. It threw the body of Jerry back against the rope, but when he staggered erect again, though a white mark inclosed his mouth, there was still the ghost of the smile upon it. It was not the patience of the martyr; it was that sort of stifled rage which overwhelms a man and makes him cold. He found an unexpected intercessor here, for Rex Houlahan caught the arm of the big farmer and jerked him back.

"Don't do that again," he said savagely. "He's got his hands tied behind him, ain't he? He's helpless. He's goin' to be hung like the hoss thief that he is, but I ain't goin' to stand by and see him insulted. Not a man with a wallop like the one he packs." He grinned at Jerry with something akin to affection. "Nobody can hit like that unless it's born in him, Jerry. It's a shame you can't live to work in the ring. But there's one thing more, boys. We can't string him up until he's confessed. It ain't right, and I won't stand for it. He's got to say enough to save his soul—if it can be saved. Besides, we'll need more than dumb talk when the sheriff asks his questions."

"Make him talk, then," said Jan van Zandt, "but don't lay hands on me again. It ain't healthy, not by a long ways."

"I've laid hands on worse ones than you, son," said the Irishman as he bent his attention on the prisoner. "Lad, I give you the last chance. Will you talk or do we have to make you talk?"

And when Jerry remained silent, Houlahan gave directions swiftly and the others obeyed. They fixed running nooses in both ends of another rope, threw it over the branch, and tightened the nooses around the wrists of Jerry. One jerk brought him off the ground, his long body, with the arms above his head, swaying back and forth; he seemed gigantic. There were two men on one rope and three on the other. Houlahan stood in front of the prisoner and talked up to him; he had control, being the inventor of the expedient.

"Jerry," he said, "I see you're fighting hard. You'll stave it off for a while because your arms are strong. But pretty soon the muscles begin to crack they get that tired, and then they give way and the pull come under your armpits. Then you feel it down your ribs

and across your shoulderblades. Then it takes you in the joints of the shoulders and you begin to think your arms are comin' out of the socket. You're a heavy man, Jerry, and when your muscles give out, and your hands feel dead you'll have all that weight just hangin' on the tendons around the shoulder. Boy, don't be a fool. Talk up. Say what you done. Tell me the truth. Whisper it, if you don't want the rest of 'em to hear, and I'll never tell a soul. But you got to tell the truth before you die; you got to, or we'll keep you up there by the wrists until you yell for the pain of it!"

As he approached the latter end of his talk he grew more violent, raising his voice; but when he ceased there was still no response from Jerry. After that Houlahan stood under the motionless form and watched with his own face twisted into an agony of sympathy. Presently, the shoulders of Jerry slumped down, and all his weight rested with a jerk on the joint itself. His muscles had given away at last, and though it brought a groan from Houlahan, there was not a sound from Jerry. Houlahan began to whisper advice—telling Jerry how impossible it was to resist—begging him to give up and speak. Then the head of Jerry, which had hitherto remained proudly erect, toppled forward with another jerk and remained hanging low. From behind, he looked like a headless form. Houlahan threw his arm across his face. He went toward the men at the ropes.

"Jan," he begged. "Go take my place. I can't stand it."

And big Jan van Zandt went and stood under the body they were torturing. At the first upward glance he blinked and shrank back a step; but he came close again and looked steadily into the face of Jerry. He was so fascinated by what he saw that his own expression escaped from his attention. For some time the men at the ropes watched his change of face, and then, incredulously, they saw a smile come on the lips of Jan van Zandt. Houlahan cried out; with one accord the others slacked away and the limp form crumpled against the earth, the legs and arms falling into crazy positions, as though they were broken. The Irishman straightened the limbs; Jerry had fainted; and one by one the rest of the posse looked in his face and shuddered.

"They ain't a thing to do but wind him up this way," said Jan van Zandt, drawing his revolver. "He'll feel no more pain and we'll have done our duty. Stand away, boys, and turn your backs."

There was a whine from Houlahan as the Irishman came between. He was sobbing with rage.

"So help me," he said, "but I think you like doin' this dirty work."

"I got a duty as a citizen to perform," Jan van Zandt said.

"You got a duty to be a man."

"D'you mean to say you want this—to live?"

"Let the law handle him. Turn him over to the law."

"They'll get no evidence. He'll be turned loose; d'you want the son of Hank Peyton on your trail, Rex?"

"If they don't keep him in jail," said Houlahan firmly, "he won't be able to use a gun for two weeks with them hands, and we'll have a chance to think of what's next. Heaven knows I don't want Peyton on my trail, but I'd rather you burned me by inches than have that face hauntin' me the rest of my life. Boys, get out the buckboard, and we'll take Peyton in to the sheriff."

They had spent their first fury in the rush on Jerry; and for the blows he gave them they had tortured him to senselessness. Pierre la Roche and Gus Saunders hitched two of Peyton's own mules to the buckboard they found behind the house; they placed him in the body of the wagon. La Roche drove, and Houlahan sat in the wagon watch-

ing the inert captive. The others followed with the horse slowly, and before they reached the town of Sloan, Eris Jensen and Pete Goodwin had dropped back and tried to fade away into the darkness. But the rest cursed them back into the procession. No one would be allowed to dodge his share of the responsibility.

"Suppose he dies," Houlahan had shouted from the wagon, "d'you think I'm goin' to be the only one to take his body in?"

So they closed up after that, and taking that mysterious comfort which comes out of numbers in any crisis, they began to talk to one another about other things.

Finally the wagon reached the main street of Sloan. It was unavoidable. Before they had gone a hundred feet the word spread. Men, women, and children poured into the street. The word was taken up. The posse had caught the horse thief, and the horse thief was Jerry Peyton.

Men rode their horses beside the wagon and looked at the prostrate body within; then they stared at the faces of the posse and raised a cheer. Five minutes before the six farmers were beginning to drop toward despondency. Five minutes later they were traveling in the midst of an ovation. Voices in the crowd of townsfolk took up a shout for a lynching. They wanted it then, and in the main street of the village. But Rex Houlahan stood in the wagon with his red beard blowing across his throat and no one made an attempt to seize the thief. The wagon halted before the jail.

CHAPTER IX.

A CALL FOR SILENCE.

USUALLY mob scenes did not attract the sheriff. It was a silent tribute to the remarkable noise which the crowd set up this day before the jail, that Ed Sturgis himself came through the heavy door and stood at the top of the wooden steps. His hat was pushed far back on his head, allowing his unruly hair to pour beneath the brim and straggle almost to his eyes. It was always a sign of weariness when Ed Sturgis wore his hat in this way, and when he was weary he was not a pleasant man. The crowd was afflicted with the usual mob blindness, however; all it saw was the sheriff standing at the head of the steps with his hands on his hips, grinning down at them; and the mob gathered itself up in a big wave that washed up the steps and deposited six heroes all about Sturgis.

"They done it!" cried scores of voices. "They put one over on you, Ed. They got the thief; they got Jerry Peyton!"

An unusual phenomenon followed. The wave of noise was met, now, by a contrary wave of silence which began in the immediate neighborhood of the sheriff and spreading first to those about him, gradually worked its way over the hundreds in the street. Also a path opened before Sturgis down the steps and he went down through the opening with an acre of silent faces in the street tilted up to watch him. He climbed into the body of the wagon and was seen to bend over the body of Peyton. Then he stood up.

"Is 'Doc' Brown here?" A fat man pushed through the crowd and laid his hands on the edge of the wagon. "Take this boy, doc," said the sheriff, "and do what you can for him." The words carried distinctly up and down the length of the crowd.

"All right," said the doctor cheerily, "I'd as soon take care of a hoss thief as another. A case is a case."

"Who called Jerry Peyton a hoss thief?" the sheriff asked. He spoke gently, but once more his voice carried to the outermost edges of the crowd. "What fool called Jerry Peyton a hoss thief?"

No one answered; the six brave men on the steps remained tongue-tied.

Then Doctor Brown said: "Well, I'll be hanged."

"Take this wagon back to Jerry's place and half a dozen of you put him to bed," the sheriff ordered. "Doc, you stay with him." He turned and went up the steps and opened the door to the jail. "Come in, boys," he said, "I reckon I got room for you all in here."

They looked at one another; then they met the smile of the sheriff, and finally they trooped in single file through the door.

"Let me understand this," Jan van Zandt said, when they all stood in Sturgis' office. "You stick up for a thief —a hoss thief, sheriff?" His voice rose as he remembered something from a book: "You want to arrest us because we handled a crook? I tell you to look out, Sturgis. Maybe we didn't have no warrant for what we done; but we taught a lesson that was needed. And we don't need a warrant, because we're the voice of the people."

"You're the voice of a coyote," the sheriff replied sternly. "I recognize it by the whine. Don't talk back to me, Jan. Don't even look back to me. Don't none of the rest of you do nothin' but smile pleasant at me. All of you sit quiet like little lambs, which you are. Don't none of you stir a hand nor raise a head. Because I'm plumb fed up. I'm fed up so much that I'm puffin' inside and I'm lookin' for action."

He methodically made a cigarette and lighted it.

"Speakin' of hosses," he said nonchalantly, "they's a chestnut hoss lying in the woods up in Dogberry Cañon. It's been run through the temple with a knife because the no-good hoss give out and the gent that stole him wanted to get rid of all that useless hossflesh. Maybe you'd like to see that hoss, Jan?"

The farmer dropped his head into his hands and groaned. At another time such grief, and particularly for a horse, would have moved the sheriff, but now he let his eyes rest fondly upon Jan through a long moment, and then moved them lingeringly across five other faces.

"Well, boys," he said, "I think I've changed my mind. I ain't goin' to jail you. And they's a sad reason why: Jerry Peyton is goin' to get well."

The six quivered under the stroke. Jan van Zandt raised his head and gasped. "And when he gets well," said the sheriff sadly, "he'll be callin' on you to pay you some attentions. He's like the rest of the Peytons. He's like his father. He's thoughtful. I seen his wrists. It'll be four weeks, near, before he can handle a gun. Well, boys, I guess that's all. I wish you all four weeks of good luck."

Jim van Zandt parted his lips to speak; the sheriff leaped straight into the air, and, coming down, smashed his fist upon his desk. "Not a word out of you, you sneakin', man-slaughterin' coyote. Git out, you and your pack!"

The six in the same silence rose and put on their hats, and slunk through the door, and silently down the steps to the street. There they parted and the sheriff from a window watched them split apart and travel in different directions. After he had seen this, he turned and took his way through the office to the little wing of the jail where the prisoners were kept. There was only one man there; the sheriff took his way down the little corridor between the bars of tool-proof steel and the wall. He sat down on a folding stool which leaned close to the bars, and while he rolled another cigarette he looked with interest upon Pat Langley behind the bars. The latter lay in a vest and stockinged feet on his bunk, and though he was immediately aware that another person had come, it was some time before he laid down his newspaper.

The sheriff spoke first.

"I got some news that'll interest you," he said.

Pat Langley yawned deliberately. "Yes?"

"You mostly remember what I said the farmers would do to Jerry Peyton?"

"Is that his name?"

"Old Hank's son." The prisoner whistled.

"Well, they done it," said the sheriff.

"Strung him up, eh?" said Pat Langley, losing interest. "Did he pot any of them?"

"They must of got him when he didn't have a gun," said the sheriff. "They all had the signature of his fist, right enough. I could of told from a block away that they'd been talkin' to Jerry by the look of their faces. I disremember when it was I seen him arguin' with four greasers in the street one day."

"Does he make the yellow boys his meat?" Pat Langley asked scornfully.

"Mostly he don't pay no attention to 'em," said the sheriff. "But sometimes he gets his feet all tangled up in 'em, and then he just cuts his way out."

"In self-defense?" inquired Langley.

"Sure," grinned the sheriff. "Otherwise I'd of arrested him long ago, wouldn't I?"

"Of course," said Langley, smiling in turn. They seemed to understand one another perfectly. "But comin' back to the greasers," went on Sturgis, "they was all a husky crew and they took him with a rush while his back was turned and his hands was full of the makin's. It was a pretty sight to foller, if your eyes was fast enough to see all that happened. I disremember, as I was saying, most of the details, but toward the end I recall Jerry steppin' on the face of one greaser while he belted the other in the jaw. Pretty soon he come up to the door of the jail; he had all the Mexicans tied together. 'I hear you been havin' dull times in your boardin' house,' says he to me. 'So I been drummin' up some trade for you.' And then I got a good look at the faces of them greasers, and their own mothers wouldn't of recognized 'em.

"Well, that's the way the six farmers looked to-day," concluded the sheriff.

"But they hung him, eh?" said Pat, rising upon one elbow to listen.

"Nope."

Pat stretched himself out again, yawning.

"They only hung him up by the wrists," said the sheriff, "to make him confess, I guess. His arms are sure a rotten mess to look at just now. They hung him up till he fainted dead away. D'you ever hear of such foolishness?"

"Foolishness?" Pat questioned.

"Sure, to hang him up and then let him get away alive. Damned foolishness. And now," continued the sheriff, "what'll happen when the boy is on his feet and shoots Jan van Zandt full of holes?"

"Why, when that happens," said the man of the black mustache, "you'll have to go out and get Jerry Peyton." He sat up and laughed. "By heavens, I hadn't thought of that!"

"You got an ugly laugh, Pat," the sheriff said.

"When I read of your demise," said Pat, "I'll give you a tender thought, Ed. But do you know that this terrible Peyton of yours interests me? I wasn't a bad hand in a pinch in the old days."

"I'll tell a man," said the sheriff gently.

"And now," went on Pat Langley, "I feel a lot better. As a matter of fact, Ed, it was pretty clever of you not to try a hand-to-hand scrap of it—out there in the Dogberry Cañon. How did you tell I was in shape?"

"By your hands," said the sheriff.

"The rest of you is pretty fat, but your hands is as skinny and quick as they ever were." He stared fixedly at Pat Langley.

"Well," said Pat, "what do you see? Me in a suit of stripes or yourself eating Peyton's lead?"

The little animal eyes of the sheriff went up and down.

"D' you know, Pat, that I got a funny thing to tell you?"

"You're full of funny sayings," said the horse thief coldly.

"There you go," murmured the sheriff. "You always have tried to read my mind, Pat. And you always have read it wrong."

There was something sad about the voice of the sheriff that made the other man frown at him.

"Out with it," he said. "What's the funny little thing?"

"Well, ever since I laid eyes on you out in the road up there, I been tryin' to convince myself that I hate you, Pat, but I don't convince worth a cuss."

CHAPTER X.

BRAINWORK.

AS for Langley, he rolled off the bunk and coming to the steel bars of his cage he took two of them in his small, strong hands and looked steadily through the intervening space at the sheriff. He contented himself with that long, steady gaze, never saying a word. The sheriff blinked once or twice, but aside from that he met Langley with a sad, calm regard.

"For instance," said the sheriff, "when I brung you in I went down to write the charge agin' you onto the little hotel register that I keep for my guests. Well, somehow I couldn't write down the number that means larceny after your name. Couldn't do it, Pat. I couldn't even write down your name."

"Are you playing a little game?" asked Langley, and he pressed his face against the bars in his desire to look through the little eyes of Ed Sturgis and get at his mind.

"Me?" queried the other in surprise. "What sort of a game do I need to play on you now, Pat?"

It was quite unanswerable. This truth gradually became clear in the mind of Langley.

"I can even explain why you feel this way," he said with a sudden change of voice.

"You was always a great hand at explainin'," murmured the sheriff, but though Pat Langley shot one of his sudden glances at Sturgis he was able to read nothing in the bland face of his old companion.

"This is why," Pat said. "In the old days I did you a great wrong, Ed. You have kept that in mind all these years, you see. You've been hating me all this time and wishing and waiting for a chance to get back at me. Is that the truth?"

"I guess it's pretty close to gospel, old-timer."

"But down in your heart," continued Pat Langley, "all the time you weren't hating me so much as the thing I had done."

The sheriff blinked again. "I don't quite follow," he murmured.

"I mean this," Pat said hurriedly. "Outside of that one thing I did I was always square with you. I played straight. I backed you up in every pinch. You remember?"

"That's true."

"So all these twenty years," said Langley, "you've been concentrating to hate that one thing I did. It was a mean piece of work. I don't deny that, Ed, and not once during these years have I attempted to excuse it to myself."

"Go on," said the sheriff, and a little spot of white had come in either cheek. "Let's leave that go."

"Let that pass." Langley nodded.

"And when you saw me to-day it was a man you couldn't recognize. You found that you didn't hate that stranger you met in the road. It wasn't until you found out what his name is that you began to hate him. Is that straight, Eddie?"

It must have been to conceal his emotion that the sheriff looked down and placed his hand above his eyes. He was thinking, and it was some time before he could raise his head and look at his prisoner again. When he did so, it was to say: "Pat, you're right."

The other turned, and since he dared not raise his voice and, above all, allow the sheriff to see his face, he turned and walked to his bunk and stood with his back to the sheriff and his head fallen.

"What's the matter?" asked the sheriff cheerily, after a time.

"It's because I can't help thinking what a hound I was," Pat Langley said, choking. "And you—Ed—when all's done, you were the finest friend I've ever had."

"Tut, tut," the sheriff replied. "D'you mean that?"

"Do you doubt me?" cried Langley, whirling on his heel. "Now that I'm here and down and ruined—do you doubt me?" He waved to the bars, to the wretched bunk.

"Yes," agreed the sheriff, "sometimes the steel slats work through the blankets and sort of leave a pattern on a gent's back. Them bunks ain't what I'd recommend to anybody that likes to lie soft at night."

To this naïve speech the reply of the horse thief was another of the flickering, bright glances; but there was apparently no mockery in the face of the sheriff.

"What I'm chiefly sorry for," said Langley, "is that I've left you in another mess by this unfortunate episode of the chestnut horse."

"Yep," agreed the sheriff, "that's a pretty bad mix-up, all right. Tell me, honest, Pat, did you figure on sending back the price of that hoss when you got to the end of your trip?"

"So help me, I did," Langley said, and there was a ring of truth in his voice.

"My, my," said the sheriff. "You have changed a pile, Pat. Well, I'll tell you about this Peyton. I tell you I fear him, and I do. You remember his dad, don't you?"

"Old Hank? Of course. I had a run in with him, you remember."

"And came out on top. Yes, I remember. But Hank was a fast man and pretty accurate, and his son is a shade better. But why I fear him is because he has all my luck. No use runnin' foul of a man that has your luck."

"How did he get it?" said Pat Langley, with interest. "But to tell you the truth, Ed, you're a fool to fear any man under thirty. It takes a certain age to harden a man's nerve, and the boy could never stand up to you."

"Not unless he had my luck, I wouldn't bat an eye about him."

"H-m-m," Langley said. "That makes a difference, of course."

"It was just before I come to Sloan," the sheriff continued. "First place I landed when I went West was in Nevada, and I hit her when she was wide open and roarin'."

"I've always regretted missing those days in Nevada," and Pat Langley sighed.

"Sure, you would have been right at home," agreed the sheriff. Again Langley looked to discover proof of double-entendre, but he found nothing.

"I was some green," the sheriff went on, "in those days. I was all set up to find trouble. Knew how to shoot, I thought, and at a target I was some handy boy. So I got all togged up with a brace of gats and a frosty eye and went about with a chip on my

shoulder. Particular, I had one gun that was a beauty. It was a new model, just out of the shop, and she worked like she had brains of her own. In fact, it's a pretty old model for a Colt to-day, but in fingers that know their business it don't have to take a back seat to nothin' right up to this minute."

"I think I know that old model," said Pat.

"With that gun," the sheriff continued, "I felt like Hercules, and then some. And so one evenin' I run into a little gent in a saloon. We was playin' cards and I seen him palm a card once; then I seen him do it again. For that matter, they was a couple of the other boys that I was sure had seen it. But they didn't say nothin'. At the time, I wondered why; but I didn't stop to ask any questions about who this gent was. I just give him a call and then start for my gun. Well, Pat, he got me covered before I had my forefinger on the butt of my gun.

"He seen I was a kid and mostly fool, though, and he didn't feel much like action, I guess. Anyway, he let me off with a bit of advice, and he took away both my guns for safe-keepin', he said, to keep me out of trouble."

"Funny you never told me this story before," Langley said.

"When I knew you," said the sheriff, "I was still too young. The thing was too fresh in my mind, and I hadn't reached the stage when I could tell about the lickin's I'd had in the past. Now, I can grin about 'em."

"H-m-m," Langley said thoughtfully.

"But the point of that yarn ain't out yet. The name of the quiet gent that got my guns was La Paloma."

"The devil you say," murmured Langley.

"The devil I do say," said the sheriff calmly. "It was sure La Paloma, though he hadn't picked up that name yet. And that gun he got from me was the one he always packed later on. That's the gun the greasers called the Voice of La Paloma, he used it so handy."

"But what the devil has that to do with your luck leaving you, Ed?"

"Why, just this: The chap that got La Paloma—that was two years after you left—was Hank Peyton, you see? And Hank got the Voice of La Paloma and passed it along to his kid. So Jerry has my gun; and who ever had any luck trailin' a gent that had your own gun? It's more'n that, Pat. The kid puts an awful lot of stock in that gun. I figure he ain't practiced with anything else since he was knee-high. And if he didn't have it he'd be up in the air. You see how everything turns around it? He's got my luck. My luck is his luck. There you are, and when Harry Peyton bumps off the first of them farmers—I wish to Heaven that he'd get the whole crew of 'em at once, for my part! I got to go out on the trail of a gent that has all my luck pulling at his holster. I'd as soon jump over a cliff. I wouldn't be no surer of dyin' that way."

As he concluded this gloomy story his eyes dropped to the floor and remained there, studying the shadow. It gave Pat Langley a chance to lift his own glance and observe every detail of the face of the sheriff. He even permitted the faintest hint of a smile which might have been either contempt or scorn to touch his lips. Then he brushed this smile away and came close to the bars.

"Ed," he whispered.

"Well, Patty," the sheriff said absently.

"I have a little proposition which might interest you."

"Fire away, old-timer."

"You say you haven't put my name in the book?"

"I haven't."

"And no one knows that I'm here?"

"Not a soul." He looked quickly into Pat Langley's face. "What are you figurin' on, Pat?"

"On playing your game and mine with the same hand, old boy."

"Go on, Pat. You was always a hand at sayin' surprisin' things."

"Ed, you've already admitted that your old grudge against me is dead. I'm simply a burden on your hands here. Well, let me out of this mess. Give me a horse and a gun. I'll doll myself up in a mask and slide over to the house of this young Peyton, do the robber stunt, you see? Turn things upside down, and finally take his gun and bring it out to you. There you'll have your luck back and I'll have my freedom and a horse to go on my way. What d'you think?"

"I can't think," the sheriff said. "Gimme air!"

To be continued in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

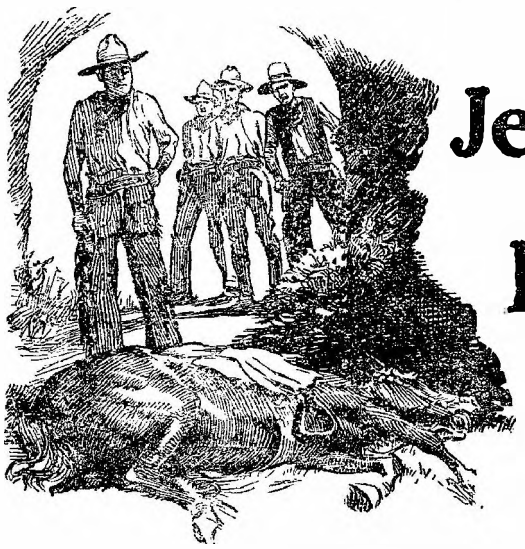
NORTH AMERICA MOUNTAIN RANK

NORTH AMERICA ranks third among the continents in the heights of mountains. Asia has Mount Everest of the Himalayas, which leads the procession with a height of 29,002 feet above sea level; South America has Mount Aconcagua, of the Andean system, which is 23,080 feet high. North America comes next with Mount McKinley in Alaska, 20,000 feet, and Kibo Peak in Africa, which is 19,320 feet, holds fourth place. Mont Blanc, Europe's highest mountain, is 15,782 feet high, which is more than a thousand feet higher than any mountain in the territory of the United States outside of Alaska.

WATER IN THE SALTON SEA REGION

THOUGH the science and industry of man have greatly reduced the region which on the earlier maps of our Western and Southwestern country was loosely called the "Great American Desert," and though the area of supposed desert laud was exaggerated, enough real desert remains to justify large studies in the methods of utilizing it and special studies of its water resources and its watering places, in order to make the journey across it safe for the traveler. "Water holes," many of which are separated from one another by a hard day's journey with team and wagon, are the traveler's only support. Travel in these parts has been attendant not only with grave inconvenience but often with serious peril because these holes have never been mapped, and no systematic provision has been made for their maintenance.

Years ago, George W. Parsons, a desert expert of Los Angeles, began a movement for the protection of prospectors and travelers on the arid desert plains of this country. Mr. Parsons' work was encouraged by the State of California, and later led to an appropriation by Congress. The United States geological survey has just issued a report on the Routes to Desert Watering Places in the Salton Sea Region, California. The region surveyed by this guide covers about ten thousand square miles and is situated in the southeast corner of California. It is about a hundred miles in length and breadth, and includes Imperial County and the most arid parts of Riverside and San Diego Counties. In addition to maps showing the roads and watering places, the guide contains road logs and brief descriptions of the watering places.



Jerry Peyton's Notched Inheritance

by George Owen Baxter

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

JERRY PEYTON inherits a revolver called "The Voice of La Paloma," which his father obtained from a rival bandit whom he had double-crossed. Although Jerry lives peaceably at Sloan, the natives expect him some day to become as lawless as his father.

His land being mortgaged, Jerry has little left besides The Voice of La Paloma and a buckskin mare of which he is very fond. Through neglect on the part of his neighbor, Jan van Zandt, the mare dies; Jerry gives Van Zandt a beating and threatens to exact full payment later.

When Van Zandt discovers his chestnut horse is missing, Jerry is suspected, and a posse sets out to capture him. Sheriff Sturgis goes alone and runs down Pat Langley, the thief, a man against whom he has had a grievance of long standing. The posse arrives with Jerry, whom they have beaten into unconsciousness. At the sheriff's orders, he is released, and medical aid is procured.

CHAPTER XI.

REVELATION.

IT was on the second night following this that the sheriff and Pat Langley rode out of Sloan and took the way down the valley. They cut across the fields, and came by a generous detour behind the house and farm buildings of Jerry Peyton. They had the clear mountain, starlike, to guide them, and even by that dull light they made out the dilapidated outbuildings; there were broken gang plows and worn out two-horse rakes standing about, silent tokens of Jerry's complete failure as a farmer. They dismounted beside a big barn, and when they passed the open door they could see the stars through gaps of the roof. The big haymow was empty; and the long row of stalls on either side of the mow contained not a single horse or even a mule. Pat Langley noted this and shrugged his shoulders.

"Makes me feel like the devil," he muttered to the sheriff. "Hate to see a place go to ruin. I remember when the Peyton place was a comfortable little farm. Old Mrs. Peyton was a wonderful cook, too; and now look at her kitchen!"

That wing of the house presented a roof which sagged far in.

"You got a tenderness for houses that you never used to have," commented the sheriff. "Maybe that comes out of the coin you've made in St. Hilaire."

The other made no answer; he was taking stock of the place rapidly.

"I don't see your point in not giving me a gun with teeth in it," he said angrily to the sheriff. "Suppose that young devil in there can use either one of his hands—he'll punch me full of

lead when I shove this empty bunch of iron junk in his face."

"He can't raise an arm, let alone handle a gun," said the sheriff. "He can't even feed himself. The neighbors have to come in and take care of him like a baby."

"Ah, that's it! Then I'll have some of these handy neighbors about when I slip in?"

"Not a one. They'd leave him before now."

The sheriff felt the glance of the horse thief feeling for him through the starlight, discontented with the vague outlines of the face he saw.

"I leave it to you to warn me in case any one comes," said Pat Langley.

"The old sign," said the sheriff. "You can depend upon that."

"Well, here goes," and lifting his hat a little, a curtain of absolute dark rushed over the dim face of Langley.

The sheriff whispered: "Are you nervous, Pat?"

"Nonsense," answered the other. "Nervous? I'm enjoying every minute of it!"

"And it won't bother you none to go in there and take that kid's gun away from him?"

"Why should it?" Langley retorted. His tone had changed since the mask covered his face; in fact, there was a new atmosphere around the two men.

"I mean, him bein' helpless," murmured the sheriff. "It won't make you feel like a skunk to take his gun away when he ain't got a fightin' chance, will it?"

The other chuckled almost silently.

"Listen to me, old boy. I left my scruples back in St. Hilaire. This is a party for me. S'long!"

And he disappeaerd around the side of the house. The sheriff, after a moment, made a few steps in pursuit, but then he came back to the horses and stood at their heads, lest something in the night should make one of them whinny. He began to rub pinto's nose nervously, and whisper into the ear of Langley's horse. Yet there was not a sound from the direction of the house. Once the thought came to the sheriff that Langley might give over the attempt to rob Peyton and go away into the night, but on second thought he knew that the other would not risk an escape on foot. The horses caught the man's wish for silence and stood without stirring as they listened into the night, and the silence gathered heavily about them. Then something that was not a sound made the sheriff turn; he saw his companion once more at his shoulder.

They swung into the saddles without another word and headed across the fields at a trot; as soon as a comfortable distance lay behind them, they let their horses have their heads and went at a wild gallop; halfway back to Sloan they stopped of one accord.

"Well?" the sheriff asked.

The other ripped away his mask and tore it into a hundred shreds; then he tossed the balled-up remnants into the dust.

"Not so simple as you'd think," Langley said. He shrugged his shoulders to get rid of some thought. "He's a bad one, well enough, that young Peyton."

"Made a try for you?"

"Oh, no. He sat in his chair and couldn't lift a hand, just as you said, but he got on my nerves. Can you imagine a fellow who sits perfectly still and follows you with his eyes while you run through his stuff?"

"I can," said the sheriff, and for some reason his voice carried a world of meaning.

"The kid was cool enough," said the other. "I went through his wallet—it was in the table-drawer. 'Help yourself,' says young Peyton. Cheery smile he has, isn't it?"

"Yep. He's a fine lookin' gent."

"I took the coin. Only twenty bucks, at that, but it would have looked queer if I hadn't taken it. I told him I was sorry to do it, though; but being broke —he just nodded at me. 'That's all right,' he says."

"Ah," sighed the sheriff. "You spoke to him?" He did not seem displeased.

"Of course," said Langley. "But he changed his tune when I came to his gun rack. I ran through the stuff and found The Voice of La Paloma. Rum name for a gun, eh? I knew it by the make and by the nicks that were filed into the butt. 'Just a minute,' says the kid. 'You don't really want that gun, I guess?'

"'Why don't I?' I said.

"'You don't understand,' says the kid. 'That gun used to belong to my father. It means a good deal to me. The gun you want is the new Colt that hangs next to the old pump-gun.'

"'Don't jolly yourself along,' I said to him. 'I know the make of a gun, and this suits me to a T.'

"For a minute I thought I'd have a bit of trouble even with that handless man; he leaned forward in his chair. 'You shouldn't do that,' he said. 'Don't take that gun!' From the way he spoke, I had a ghost of an idea that he had twenty men behind his chair ready to grab me. I had to blink at him, and his face wasn't pretty. 'If you're so set on it,' I said, 'I'll leave the money, but I've got to have this little cannon.'

"'Then,' says friend Jerry, 'you're a fool.'

"'So?' I said to him.

"'Because if you take the coin, and anything else you see here, I'll let it go. But if you take that gun I'll follow you.'

"You won't believe that it gave me a chill to hear him say it? You know me, Ed?"

"I know you well enough," said the sheriff dryly, "but I believe you got the chill."

"I did, all right. 'How'll you get my trail?' I asked the kid. 'You don't know me. If you live to be a hundred you'll never know my name, and you'll never see my face. Tell me how you'll follow me, partner.'

"He didn't bat an eye. If he knew anything, you'd think he'd keep still about it, eh? Not Jeremiah. He came right out with it in a way that didn't particularly help my nerves. 'I know your height,' he says, 'I know your weight; I know you have black hair with a touch of gray in it and you're about forty-five years old; you have a heavy mustache—the mask bulges out around your mouth; and your eyes are black. More than that, I know your voice and I know your hands. Those hands alone would give me a clew. They'll leave a sign I can follow. So take my advice, partner, and put that gun back in the case. Because, if you take it, I give you my word of honor that I'll never rest or draw a free breath till I've run you down and killed you like a hound.'

"That was a mouthful for a helpless kid to say to me, when I had a bead on him, eh? I don't ask you to believe it, but just for a minute I had a feeling that I'd like to tell you to go hang, put the gun in the case, and take a chance on running across country on foot. Of course I didn't do what I felt like doing. And here's The Voice of La Paloma."

He extended the old revolver and the sheriff took it and bent his head over it; then he balanced it in his hand.

"Seems like I still recognize it," he said.

He examined it, made sure that it was loaded, and then turned the muzzle full upon his companion.

"Now," he said, "sit tight and listen to me while I talk."

The other stared.

"Well I'll be——" he murmured.

"Easy, friend," interrupted the sheriff. "Don't move that gun out of your holster. Good!"

"What's got into your crazy head," said Pat Langley after a moment, "is more than I can make out. If you're going to double cross me, go ahead. I'm not fool enough to make a break when you have a bead on me. Want my hands up?"

"No. Do whatever you want with 'em. And use your ears to listen to what I've got to say. I didn't know you then, Pat, but the minute I heard about the way you run a knife into that hoss, it turned me agin' you. And after that, I didn't like the way you tried to bribe me, Pat. Still, I didn't see how low-down mean you could be till later on."

Langley sat with his head canted, nodding. "It's odd," he said, "that an intelligent man like you, Ed, can live nearly fifty years without increasing his vocabulary. Go ahead."

"No, I ain't clever, Pat. But I was clever enough to see that I was in a mess on account of you stealin' the hoss and Peyton gettin' beat up for the same thing. I saw Peyton make his kill after his wrists got well; I saw him go plumb wild; I saw Sheriff Sturgis go out to get him and get drilled full of lead tryin' to do it.

"You see, I ain't clever, Pat, but I seen all that, and I thought I'd see if I couldn't make a combination and get out of trouble. Here you were in jail. If I got bumped off I could hear you laugh. There was Peyton, getting well for a scrap later on. I wondered if I couldn't get rid of both of you. Well, I played stupid. You bein' a clever gent, I just gave you a lead, and you worked it all out for me. The lead I give you was that cock and bull yarn about The Voice of La Paloma. Pat, I thought you were sure fooling me when I saw you swallow that yarn."

Langley nodded again. "I begin to see light," he said calmly.

"Still," went on the sheriff, "I didn't see my way clear out until you told me yourself that you'd make the dirty bargain. You'd go out and take that gun from a kid that couldn't help himself. Honest, though, Pat, I hated to think they was such a yellow-hearted skunk in the world as you are! But you done it. You made the plan and then you went right ahead and took the gun. And now, partner, you're fixed. Far as I'm concerned, you're free. I got no holts on you. You can ride as far as you please. And as far as the kid is concerned, I'm rid of him, too. He ain't goin' to do no killin' in my county. No, sir. He'll hop on a hoss as soon as he gets well, and he'll never think of nothin' until he finds his dad's gun agi'n and gets it back."

"I see," said Langley coldly. "You'll point out the way to St. Hilaire to him?"

"I'd ought to, I guess," said the sheriff, with a sigh. "But I won't. I like to see a rabbit get a fair start before a hound catches him. Well, Pat, I give you a start off from here to St. Hilaire. And you better use it. Because water ain't goin' to stop young Peyton when he hits the trail. He'll nose you out, old boy, and he'll finish you, a long ways off from Sloan."

"He's free to follow," Langley said. "If the young fool is keen enough to trail me to the West Indies from the border, I'll almost regret that I have to shoot him. But, in conclusion, I have to admit that you've improved your method since the old days, Ed. You were always a bit of a coward when it came to facing me, but in those times you hadn't enough brains to think of sending a substitute after me. So long, old boy."

"Well," called the sheriff after him, "I kind of expected you'd get in the last word. Ride hard, Pat."

CHAPTER XII.

THE CLEW.

DOCTOR BROWN, besides attending to his patient, kept six anxious farmers apprised of his condition through daily bulletins which were followed with painful interest by the farmers and their wives and children. Their relatives, also, came to read the bulletins of Doctor Brown. With groans of distress they noted the day on which the doctor sent word that his patient was for the first time able to use a spoon. And later still that he was able to work with a very sharp knife and put enough pressure on the edge to cut his own meat.

That was gloomy news to the six. Without waiting longer Pierre la Roche sold his farm, packed his belongings, and huddled wife and family aboard a train headed for parts unknown.

Then came the day when it was known that the bandages had been finally removed from the wrists of the sufferer and it was only a matter of time before he would have complete use of his fingers and arm muscles. These terrible tidings swept Pete Goodwin and Eric Jensen and Gus Saunders out of Sloan and carried them away to parts as unknown as those which had received the family of La Roche. There still remained Rex Houlahan and Jan van Zandt. Rex held out until Doctor Brown advised his clients that the big cow-puncher was exercising every day, and his exercise consisted largely in faithful practice with weapons. Then Rex Houlahan disappeared from the ken of man. The sheriff rubbed his hands together, and that night he slept well for the first time in six weeks. But when the morning came he found that Jan van Zandt still remained. It troubled the sheriff, this incredible stupidity. He went out and told the prospective martyr some home truths about himself, but Jan van Zandt merely stared at the sheriff and grew a little whiter about the mouth; he refused to leave. The other farmers formed what might be called a protective association, but for some reason they failed to invite Jan to join. Indeed, no one wanted to be seen in his company, or pose as his friend. Over Sloan and all the valley lay the fear of Jeremiah.

The creditors, at about this time, hurried affairs along. They foreclosed, and the shuddering population of Sloan were informed that out of the sale young Peyton had secured only enough funds to buy for himself a fine new revolver, a reliable horse, and an outfit of clothes and food suitable for a long and hasty trip on horseback. On the next day, he took a room in the hotel. On the next day the doctor let it be known that his patient was completely restored. On the next day the friends and relatives of Jan van Zandt came to call upon him, pressed his hand, muttered a word of farewell, and left him hurriedly.

And the morning after that, Sloan wakened with astonishment to learn that Peyton was gone from their midst, whither no man knew, and that Jan van Zandt still drew the breath of life!

The sheriff collapsed when he heard the news, and then he set about hunting for the clews. All he could learn was that young Peyton had made inquiries about a man in the neighborhood of forty-five years of age, a hundred and seventy pounds in weight, five feet and ten inches in height, black hair, and bright, black eyes, and a heavy mustache. And he had appeared interested in Sid Ruben's account of a man who answered that description. Sid had passed him in Dogberry Cañon on the way toward Tannerville, apparently. The sheriff ran inadvertently upon this unimportant bit of news; he was observed to go back to his office singing, a little later, and before the day was over

Jerry Peyton was forgotten in the routine of Sloan's busy life.

And the town of Sloan was forgotten by Jeremiah Peyton even more completely. Between his knees he had a mud-colored gelding whose savage eye had pleased him long ago in the corral of Sam Wetherby; in his holster was a gun which had fitted into the palm of his hand like the grip of an old friend; on his feet were shop-made boots, at forty dollars; on his heels jingled new spurs; around his neck was a bandanna handkerchief of the finest silk and of a screaming crimson; in his pocket a wallet bulged more or less comfortably; between his fingers the reins slipped to and fro as he kept the feel of the mustang's head; and in his heart was the glorious knowledge that he was free! The mud-colored gelding carried all that he owned in the world; there was no weight of possessions to take him back to any place; he was like a ship with anchors cut away, blowing for a distant port as he galloped down Dogberry Cañon that morning, and he felt as a sailor, long land-locked, feels when a deck heaves under his heels again, and the wind cuts into his face. The stranger with the small, white, agile hands was his goal; there were other ports which he must touch before the voyage ended, Pierre la Roche, Jan van Zandt, and the others, but he pushed these into the background of his mind. He had an oath which would keep his helm steadily toward the man of the mask and carry by all the others until that port was reached.

He had picked up one more important detail, the color of the horse on which the stranger rode when he left Sloan, and with that added fact he had little trouble in picking up another step of the trail at Tannerville. No one remembered the man with the white hands, it seemed, saving Dick Jerkin, the gambler. He had sat in with this man, it appeared. The stranger had given his name as Owen Peyne and he played a stiff game of poker. Dick dropped a couple of hundred in an hour's play and was about to lose more, according to the luck, when a fortunate call dragged him away from this expert, who seemed to read the cards.

So far the trail was simple, for in the direction of Dogberry Cañon, Tannerville was almost the only stop out of Sloan, but beyond Tannerville the towns multiplied. Jerry cast a circle around Tannerville and after three days of hard riding and much talk he came on the clew again. This time the name of the stranger was Bert Morgan, and Peyton smiled when he heard it. For it proved that the man with the agile hands had remembered the threat which Jeremiah spoke; now he was covering his trail. It was in the town of Benton that Jerry found the trail again and beyond Benton, of course, lies a wilderness; so Jerry cast a line from Tannerville to Benton, and projecting the line straight ahead, he struck into the desert and went by compass.

The compass brought him to a jerkwater town a hundred and fifty miles from Benton, and in this town of Lancaster the sign of the stranger completely disappeared. No one had ever heard of either Morgan or Peyne; no one knew of a rather stocky man with gray-streaked hair and a heavy mustache who spent money freely and gambled for high stakes. So Peyton, in despair, vented some pent-up wrath on a restaurant which served him a stale tamale, and leaving a wreck behind him he went on across the desert, somewhat soothed.

The stranger had not been in Lancaster; therefore either Lancaster was peopled wholely by fools who could not remember or else the stranger, also striving to leave a difficult trail, had skipped this link in his journey. So it seemed to Jerry, and traveling still by compass he went for three more days

across the desert until he reached a town which consisted of a crossroads store and three shacks. There they knew neither Morgan nor Peyne, but they were very much acquainted with a gentleman named Harry Wister, who had left one staggering wreck of a horse, bought another regardless of price, and then shot off into the desert again. All this was six weeks before and Peyton thrilled through every long, hard muscle when he thought of the speed of the stranger. For a hold-up man he was a most unusual criminal; he squandered money like a drunken millionaire, and he rode like a demon.

In Sandy Waters he found news of the third change of horses and a white-handed gentleman named Peters; six weeks ago he had gone through, with a two-hour stop. By this time Jerry had heard the face of the man described so often that he almost knew the well-fed cheeks and the bright eyes, and the white teeth which showed when he smiled. Then, five hundred miles from Tannerville, he reached the western and northern limit of the trail. It went out as completely as if the stranger had ridden into running water.

To say that Peyton was discouraged would be to put it far too mildly; but when a man has worked for thirty days at one affair he will not give it up too lightly. Peyton took out his spite in a street fight. These affairs with fists were something he rarely indulged in, but bumping up against a bunch of half-drunken, savage Scandinavians gave him his chance. It was from every angle a glorious affair. For half an hour the ears of Jerry were filled with a roar of strong language volleyed at him from five mouths. They were all strong men; even when they fell they would catch at him and almost drag him down, and Jerry had fought like a wolf among dogs, leaping and striking and leaping clear; and so at length, with one eye closed, Jerry shook himself to make sure that he was still holding together, cast one glance at the five disfigured Danes, and then staggered into the little hotel, content.

He slept for twenty-four hours after that. The deputy sheriff, who came to make inquiries about the fight, looked at Jerry as he lay asleep, went through his belongings, and then left, declaring that a man who could sleep more than twelve hours had a clear conscience. The Danes, though beaten, were not altogether discouraged. They mustered their forces, and as soon as Jerry was out of sight of the town they gave him a flying start on his journey back to the South and East; but Jerry was feeling too happy to be vindictive. He shot horses instead of men, and when the informal posse had melted away, he went blithely on his course.

He had before him ten days of riding in circles from town to town; and then, at last, he came upon no less a hero of the green-topped table than Snowy Garrison. Snowy had come across Jeremiah years before, when Jerry was hardly more than a boy, except to those who knew him, and after a slight falling out they had shaken hands and departed one from another, sworn friends. On this second meeting Snowy was bulging with prosperity. He had a suite of rooms in the hotel—for this was Chambers City—and a little negro to call him in the morning and put him to bed at night. Also he had a roll of money that choked his valise. And to Jerry he imparted the tale of a stranger who had come to Chambers City with a bright smile and agile fingers. Of how the stranger had gathered three stable citizens together and taken their money with oiled ease, extracting the savings of years painlessly. Then he, Snowy Garrison, proposing a game, was struck dumb to find a man who knew neither his name nor his widespread repute. His nerves were so shaken by thus discovering the

meagerness of mortal fame that he straightway lost three thousand dollars in three gloomy minutes. The play of the stranger finally recalled him to his better self, and, at twelve o'clock sharp, the stranger declared that his cash was gone and wished to know if a check would be acceptable. Snowy then peered at the well-fed cheeks of the stranger and declared that a check would be a very acceptable tribute. So they continued to play until dawn; and the next day Snowy found himself in possession of a series of little yellow slips of paper, each with: "James P. Langley, St. Hilaire, W. I.," written across the back. And every check was upon a New York bank.

"And when I put 'em in for collection," added Snowy Garrison, "darned if they didn't get cashed in—all of 'em!"

"Some millionaire out for an airing, maybe," said Jerry. "Well, if I had the kale that some of those gents have, I'd get as close to nature as I want in Central Park."

"You're talking for us both," declared Snowy with emotion.

"But what did he look like, this fellow?" said Jerry, who had fallen into the habit of asking about the personal appearance of every one since he took this empty trail.

"Middle aged, middle height, medium weight," said Snowy, "but what I noticed first was his hands. They was so small and white, you see?"

Long, lean fingers closed over the wrist of Snowy and burned the flesh against the bones with their grip.

"Spit it out," said Jerry, "was his hair black?"

CHAPTER XIII.

SOUL TALK.

INFORMATION was not all that Jerry obtained through Snowy Garrison; he also sat in at an honest game of black jack, with Jerry's forty-five in view on a near-by chair to discourage any tricks from Snowy. And the honest game replenished Jerry's pocketbook, so that, the following morning, he found himself aboard a train with two tickets to New Orleans, an entire compartment for himself, and a bottle of yellow Old Crow. His first impulse was to open his wallet, and in it he discovered more money than he had ever seen there before; accordingly, hearing voices outside the compartment —for Jerry had never ridden in a Pullman before—he summoned the speakers by beating upon the metal door with the butt of his gun. The voices outside stopped; and then a negro popped his head to see how matters stood.

From him Jerry ascertained a few details from the blank of his memory. He learned that he had appeared in the train with a companion, both hatless and without luggage. He discovered that his companion had wept feelingly over him, placed twenty dollars in the hand of the porter, and assured him that he must put his dear brother, Mr. Jerry Peyton, off the train at the West Indies. It was from this porter, also, that Jerry learned many other important facts which influenced his future. He heard that in St. Hilaire people would probably be wearing most white at this time of the year, and that spurs, in that island, would be an unnecessary part of his outfit. So when the train reached New Orleans, Jerry outfitted himself in whites and bought his first pair of canvas low-cut shoes, a straw hat so flexible that it could be rolled up and put inside a little cane tube, and a ticket for St. Hilaire. In due time, having passed through a season of white-hot sea and then a sea whipped by a hurricane, Jerry found himself seated on the veranda of the American consul's house at St. Hilaire growing acquainted with a pungent gin disguised in little glasses of milk and getting the feel of a new air.

The consul's house sat on the brow of a little hill with its face toward the sea, "and it's back on St. Hilaire, thank Heaven!" as the consul said shortly after Jerry had presented the bottle of Old Crow to him.

At this Jerry stood up and looking down the length of the side veranda he could see all of the town of St. Hilaire. Five big hills, like five stubby fingers, went up beyond the town, shutting out the view of the rest of the island, and St. Hilaire lay in the palm of the hand. At first glance it appeared to be merely a smear of green—a bright, shining green such as Jerry had never seen before—but presently he discovered under the trees a number of little houses which followed the course of streets. They were not streets laid down with any plan. They must have been constructed by engineers who worked on the system of cattle making a path, and, weaving heedlessly from side to side, following always the low ground. If Jerry had taken a coil of rope, shaken it loose, and flung it sprawling in the dust, the pattern it left would have been a fair representation of the plan of St. Hilaire. Looking more closely, Jerry could see some of the houses quite distinctly, particularly a few on the edge of the town nearest him, and he saw that the slant light of the sun shone quite through them. They were more like lean-tos thrown up for the night than lifelong habitations.

"Still," said Jerry, "I kind of like the color of that green stuff, and speaking personal, if I were to own this house of yours, I don't think I'd sit out facing the sea."

He apparently struck a vital spark in the consul with this last remark. "Color?" said the consul. He started to stand up in turn, but changing his mind he merely sat forward in his chair and waved generously along the shore line of the bay.

It was a graceful little harbor, an almost perfect horseshoe, with one spot of white in the center where the waves smashed into foam on a bit of coral reef. The points of the horseshoe were low, sandy bars, thrusting out into the sea. The sand was very white, and the consul called Jerry's attention to it. "It's the sort of white," he declared, "that can't be painted. It's the sort of white that—that a painter uses for the brow of a woman."

At this the cow-puncher gaped, but the consul turned to him with a broad grin. "Have another drink," he said, pushing the bottle across the table.

The astonishment passed from Jerry's face as the consul kicked an inverted dishpan by way of a gong and bellow to an agile little negro for ice.

"Have another drink," said the consul, putting some of the ice into Jerry's glass, and spinning it expertly with a spoon held between two fingers, "and don't mind me."

Jerry accepted the drink and after he had had it modified the strength of the remark he had intended making.

"Maybe that white is all right," he said, "but still it's too close to the sea to suit me."

The consul leaned back in his chair, and looking first at Jerry and then at the sea, Jerry was sure that surprising words were about to issue from the consul's lips. He was correct.

"Too close to the sea?" echoed the consul, speaking solemnly. "Why, sir, the sea was placed there by God for the express purpose of bringing out the color of that sand spit. And the white sand spit was placed there by God to bring out the profound blue of the ocean."

He sipped his gin and milk and appeared to contemplate either the picture before him, the gin, or his own remark. He was not more than two years older

than Jerry, the latter thought, but his hair was already so gray that it would be silver before long. His face would have been noble had the flesh not puffed a little too much about the eyes; also the eyes, though large, were smeared with mist, and only now and then the vital spark showed through. Jerry was so busy watching that face that he forgot to reply to the last remark of the consul.

"It is, in fact, a composition," the other continued. "It's a planned bit of work. The sea, the white sand, the sky—you observe——"

"Wait," Jerry interrupted. "I agree with what you say about the sand and the sky, well enough, Mr. Rimshaw, but why the dickens can't you leave out the sea?"

"You object to the sea?" asked the consul sadly.

Jerry scratched his big head and considered.

"The sea," he finally decided, "is like a bucking horse that never hits the ground." Unconsciously he laid a hand upon his stomach. "The sea," he began again, but could say no more.

"The sea," said the consul, in such haste that he drank only half of his glass, "is the only part of nature where the mind of man is free to expand limitlessly. The sea——" he paused in the midst of his exordium, so absent-mindedly that Jerry was barely in time to reach across the table and direct the stream of gin which the consul poured into his glass instead of upon the floor.

"Say," said Jerry, "maybe you're a painter yourself, in your off hours? Sort of work at it on the side?"

"Sir," the young man said soulfully, "I am an author."

"The devil you are," cried Jerry, amazed.

"The devil I'm not," replied the other, with some force. "If I'm not an author what would you call the writer of six plays, three novels, and countless essays, short stories, and verses?"

"I'm not arguing," Jerry said calmly. "I'm just wondering. If you're an author, what are you doing down here?"

"Studying human nature in the raw," replied the consul readily.

"Have another drink," Jerry said, pouring out one. "I sure like to hear you talk. In the raw, eh?"

"And waiting to find an intelligent editor," continued the author. "You'd be surprised, sir, if you knew how cramped the foreheads of our leading editors are. To me, it is shocking."

"Too bad," Jerry said consolingly.

"You can't understand," the author went on, "until you've learned by experience which costs so many pangs of the heart; and so much hard cash spent on paper and postage," he added. "Since I was nine, sir, I have been pouring my heart out on paper. And after a life of labor the editorial brain of the English speaking world condemns me to a hole like St. Hilaire. I ask you, sir, what would you do in a case like mine?"

"Cut out the booze," replied the cowpuncher instantly, "and get into training."

He was astonished to see the author turn sharply in his chair with a broad grin. "That's sound advice," Mr. Rimshaw commented. "After you were in training what would you do?"

"Sir," said Jerry suddenly, stiffening, "I sort of gather that you're smiling."

"Do you?" said the consul.

"Are you smiling with me or at me?" Jerry asked coldly.

There is a certain tone of voice which brings men up standing with as much surety as the rattle of a snake or the snarl of an angry dog.

The consul blinked. "With you, of course," he said, soberly.

"I sort of had my doubts, that's all," Jerry replied, and leaning back in his

chair, he regarded the author with a hungry eye.

"You were about to give me some advice," the author said.

"Oh, yes. Well, if I were in your boots, I'd grab a horse—I mean a boat—and I'd buy a through ticket to the dugouts where these editors sit around."

"Ah?" said the author.

"Then," the cow-puncher continued firmly, "I'd go in, with a story under one arm and a gat under the other, and find out what he meant by wastin' my money on postage."

"Do you know what would happen?" questioned the author.

"I got an idea," said Jerry blandly. "What d'you figure?"

"You'd never be able to get in to see the editor!"

"Wouldn't I?" said Jerry. "Well, well!" And he grinned openly at the consul.

"And if you did," said the author, "and started any fancy talk, the editor would have you thrown out."

"Which?" asked Jerry, his eyes widening.

"Thrown out."

"With what?" Jerry queried.

"With their hands," said the consul, frowning at such stupidity, "and they'd speed you on your way with the ends of their boots."

"My, my," said Jerry gently. "They must be rough men."

The consul turned squarely about for the first time. The mist gradually stirred from across his vision and two keen eyes looked squarely into the face of Jerry.

"Well," said the author, "what the devil are you doing down here?"

"I'm just touring about, studying human nature in the raw." Jerry grinned. He added: "I'd an idea you'd come here to live."

"Well," said the consul, "the population of St. Hilaire is about twenty thousand and two, and you'll find about two people that's worth while in the place. One of them is yourself; modesty prevents me from naming the other one."

CHAPTER XIV.

POKER TREES.

SIMPLE," said Jerry, "direct, and to the point. But then I'd like to get the gent in Chambers City who hoisted a flag over St. Hilaire and said it was the best island for its weight that ever stepped into the Atlantic."

"Who was the bird?" said the author.

"Name was—what the devil?—I forget. Middle-aged chap with gray hair and glasses."

"Respectable?" asked the consul.

"Sure, I won some money from him."

"And he steered you for St. Hilaire? Well, I'll tell you. If you have the price of a ticket home, grab the next boat."

"H-m-m," said Jerry, stirring the ice about in his glass. "So far St. Hilaire isn't so bad; don't see much wrong with it except the long drive to the gate."

"What did he say about it?"

"Oh, I don't know. Said it was full of trees and people and money."

"What kind of trees?" asked the consul quickly.

"Poker trees," said Jerry, with innocent eyes.

"Ah!" the author grinned. "I see. Well, there are plenty of poker trees. I have one myself that's not so bad. But taking them all in all the poker trees that you can climb don't produce fruit that's worth picking; and the ones that are worth while are all fenced in."

"I'm some fence climber," Jerry assured him.

"Social fences," the consul and author continued. "Kind of people who give you a cold smile and tea once a year. Oh, this is a devil of a fine place, this St. Hilaire. But speaking of poker, I——"

"How high do you run?" asked Jerry coldly.

"H-m-m," the consul uttered thoughtfully.

"Business is business," said Jerry.

"Oh," the consul replied, "I see. Well, I guess you don't want to talk to me. But I'll give you the layout of the joint. Personally, I'd like to see somebody break down a few boards and get through the fence; maybe some of the rest of us could get through the hole."

"Is it worth while getting through the fences?" asked Jerry.

"Dear, innocent Jerry Peyton," the consul remarked. "Is it worth your while? Let me tell you a few facts. There are exactly three hundred and thirteen thousand acres of workable land in St. Hilaire; and the land that can be worked is so rich that all you have to do is sit and smile at it to make things grow. Matter of fact, the hard work is only to make the right things grow. If you can beat the weeds you have a fortune by the throat. Well, this land is cut up about as follows: A hundred and thirteen thousand acres are held by five thousand land owners, about twenty acres to a shot, and they're all prosperous little farms, at that. Which gives you an idea what the land will do. Then there's another class of farmers—about fifty altogether, and among them they own the rest of the three hundred thousand acres. You figure that out for yourself. Fifty into two hundred thousand is four thousand acres apiece!" As he said this he covered his eyes with his hand and shook his head sadly. "Four thousand acres breaking their hearts growing stuff for you while you sit back and curse the foreman for not doubling the profits so you can have two steam yachts instead of one!"

A sort of horror fell upon the face of the consul. He went on: "But that's not all, dear friend. Tarry a while. Of the fifty, forty of 'em have a hundred thousand of the acreage. The other hundred thousand are divided among ten grand moguls, ten little princelets with ten thousand acres apiece."

"What do they raise on this land?" asked Jerry.

"Anything they think of planting. Coffee, sugar, tobacco—God knows what all; and the only things they don't grow are the things they've forgotten to plant. Those ten little kings own the rest of the island. They work together in a clique. They control the forty because they control not only the market but the social affairs of the island. And through controlling the forty they control everything. Suppose I should offend one of the ten? In twenty-four hours wheels would begin to spin in Washington; twenty-four hours after that a nasty little note would be on its way to me—or maybe a a cablegram."

"Speed burners, eh?" Jerry interjected.

"Money's no object, of course. By degrees they're eating up the forty smaller fellows, and they're edging out and taking in the little holdings of the five thousand. Give them a few more years and they'll have the whole island under their thumbs."

"And the fifty are the poker trees?" Jerry asked, leaning back in his chair and caressing his lean fingers, never thickened by harder labor than the swinging of a quirt.

"With fences," the consul added, and he looked at Jerry with attention.

"I wonder," said Jerry, "if you know the names of the fifty?"

"I might be able to get a list," the consul replied without enthusiasm. He drummed his fat finger tips against the top of the table. "In a way," he continued, "any one who acted as a sign post and pointed me on in my journey would have to be considered in. Peyton, I see that you are a fellow of intelligence. This is a devil of a job, and I don't get many asides."

The cow-puncher waved his hand.

"Frankly," the consul continued, "have you enough money to put up a front that will carry you through the fences?"

The fingers of Jerry wandered beneath his coat and touched the butt of his forty-five. "Between you and me," he said, "the best thing I have is a friend who'll back me for all that's in him."

"He'll plunge with you?"

"To the limit."

"He's a strong one?"

"I've never been able to faze him," said Jerry.

The consul drew out a fountain pen and an envelope and began to write on the back of it.

"Names?" said Jerry.

"Trees," said the consul.

"Suppose you begin with the top of the gang and work down—just offhand; I like to pick things by the sound of 'em."

"Sure. Well, there's the De Remi family. Old French crowd and the cream of social doings in the island. Then I suppose you could bunch in order the Franklins, the Ramseys, the Parkhursts, the Van Huytens, and the Da Costas. They're all old stuff in St. Hilaire. There's a newer set, too, that figures in with the old gang: the Quests, the Gentreys, the Langleys, and the Pattraisons. That's the list of the upper ten. They're the Five Hundred of this joint, plus the guardian angels, and the ruling hand. They're the ones I have to kotow to"—his face darkened—"and they're the ones who pat me on the back and send along the good word—when they think to do it. I make myself handy for them—sort of errand boy, you know, between them and Washington—and now and then they ask me up to tea and tell me to drop in any time. You know?"

Jerry had never been to a tea, but he had learned, among other things in his brief and rather crowded life, that most valuable of all conversational assets, the ability to use a timely silence. He said not a word, and the consul felt that he was wholly comprehended.

"Suppose you begin at the bottom of the list," said Jerry. "This Pattraison outfit?"

"They and the Quests and the Gentreys and the Langleys," said the author, "are a new fry on the island. Of course they're big guns compared with the small land owners, but after all, the Pattraisons aren't the last word. You know? Old Henry Pattraison is a card. He was a brewer, they say, before he sank a big wallop of an investment in St. Hilaire; there's a sort of custom here of forgetting the past of a family and judging it purely by its St. Hilaire record, but a brewer was a bit strong even for St. Hilaire's customs. They frowned him down, for a while; but after a while they forgot about his past and remembered that he had one of the best estates in the island and that eventually his heirs would be among the social leaders. Couldn't keep 'em from it. So they took in Mr. Pattraison. Also, he's a hearty old soul, clean as a whistle and game to the core."

"That sounds all right to me," said Jerry. "Now the Langleys."

"I put them down in the lower flight because they're newcomers like the Pattraisons," the consul went on. "As a matter of fact, Langley himself was in bad odor for a time. As I said before, people are judged by what they do in St. Hilaire, not by what they did before. Nobody knew what Langley was before he came here, but he pulled a bad one before he'd been long in the island. He got a small holding in the hills—all the central part of St. Hilaire is hilly, you know—and then before the people knew it he had grabbed almost all of Guzman's property, and to-day old Don Manuel has just a clump of trees and a smile to live on. It's a long story—the

one they tell about the way Langley cut in on Don Manuel Guzman. Anyway, he got the land, and the De Rime crowd wouldn't receive him for a long time afterward.

"Then Patricia came out. You know the way a girl does? One year she's a skinny kid, mostly legs and elbows; the next time you see her she's in blossoms and knocks your eye out with a full-grown woman's smile. Well, Patricia bloomed like that and she's an extra fine flower. St. Hilaire took one look at her and then fell all over itself being nice to the whole family. James Langley wasn't overwhelmed. Not by a long distance. He's a frosty sort of chap, anyway; never speak to him but I come within an ace of calling him Sir James, you see? Well, he saw that Patricia was the biggest social power in St. Hilaire. He had the young men of the island in the palm of his hand. No matter what their parents wanted to do, their sons were sure to break away and come to the girl—and she's a beauty, man! So Langley sat back and watched and let the first lot of 'em bark their knuckles against his doors without opening to them. Finally he let them in one by one, and he let them in in such a manner that to-day he's the social dictator of St. Hilaire. I suppose old Mrs. de Remi—Madame, they call her—runs him close when it comes to a pinch, but, all in all, Langley is the king. Mrs. Langley isn't a forward sort; but her husband has the big ace in Patricia and she can be played every day. Nobody has a successful party unless she's there; nobody thinks the landscape is complete unless her face is in the offing. You see? The De Remi crowd itself is helpless against a girl like that. They may regain part of their prestige after she's married, but if her father uses his head and marries her off to one of the first-flight families, he'll still be the dictator."

"It looks as if the Langley crowd would be a good one to get by the heel," said Jerry carelessly.

"They would well enough, but look sharp there. Langley is a fox. And there's only one word in that house—James Langley!"

"To the devil with him, then," Jerry said coldly. "Let's go on to the next best bet."

CHAPTER XV.

THE HOUSE OF LANGLEY.

BEFORE night, Jerry had a map of the island; before he went to bed he had studied out all the main features, and above all, he knew every approach to the house of James P. Langley. His plan, like the plans of most intelligent men, was eminently simple. He would go straight over the hills, enter the plantation of James Langley, shoot his man, and come straight back to the harbor. There he would hire one of the big launches which he had seen gliding about the harbor and go for the mainland—or for one of the larger islands to the east where there was room for an able-bodied man to hide. With all this arranged in his mind, he undressed, bathed, and retired for a perfectly sound sleep.

In the morning he was awakened by a light weight striking his chest. He sat up and saw a bright colored bird sitting on the foot of the bed looking at him without alarm. It was only a sugar bird, on its eternal quest for insects, but Jerry could not know this, and to him there was something preternatural in the wisdom of the little head tucked to one side and the eyes that glittered at him without fear.

"If you've come to advise me, partner," said Jerry to the bird, "fire away."

The bird flew to the window sill and looked back at him.

"If it's action you want," said Jerry, getting out of bed, "I'm all set." And when the bird at once darted through the window into the open air outside, a

thrill went through Jerry. He felt that the omen was good, and at once he began to sing. He was singing again when he left the little, shabby hotel after a breakfast of strange fruits and abominable coffee, and hired a horse for the day. That a man should go with music in his heart to kill another may appear unforgivably callous; but, in Jerry's code, it was established so firmly that an insult to his dead father must be avenged with death, that to shrink from it would have been to him what a denial of God is to most men. He accepted a stern necessity; and though the horse was saddled with a pad which was a novel form of equitation to the cow-puncher, and, though the revolver irked him beneath the rim of his trousers, yet he sang as he rode because he was nearing the end of his quest.

Jerry was so happy, now, that he noted only the fine road before him, and the glossy brilliance of the tropical foliage on either side of him. Sometimes the sun set a whole field of it flashing so that he was almost blinded, but aside from such times, or when a strange new scent struck him, Jerry paid as little heed to the country through which he rode as if it had been the old familiar way from the ranch to Sloan.

So he came to a great stone fence that ran out of sight on either side, and staright before him was the end of the road, blocked by an iron gate of towering size. On a pillar beside the gate these words were deeply carved in the stone: "Langley Manor." And it struck Jerry with a sense of fatal significance that the end of his trail should be the end of a road as well. A negro boy came out and opened the gate unquestioningly to the white man; Jerry tossed him a quarter and went through onto a winding gravel way which wove leisurely from side to side, fenced with enormous palm trees. Then he saw before him a house with a mighty façade, and twelve pillars of bright stone going up the height of two stories, in the center, about the portico. There were other columns, on the wing entrance. That was where vehicles drove up, he saw. And for a single instant Jerry wondered if he had not come all this distance on a wild-goose chase—for how could the owner of this great estate possibly be the holdup artist who had taken his father's gun in malice, some three months before?

Imagination rarely took a violent hold upon Jerry's mind, however. Presently he gave his horse to another negro boy—there seemed a limitless stock of them moving about—and spoke to a formidable porter at the front door—a white man, who felt the dignity of his position. He made way immediately for Jerry and took his hat. Then he asked for the name.

"Tell Mr. Langley," said Jerry, "that I wish to surprise him. When he sees me he'll understand why I don't want to be announced." He continued, smiling broadly upon the other: "Don't even describe me to him." Then, chuckling openly: "In fact, it would spoil the whole business if you tell him what I look like!"

The guardian of the door bowed as one who disdained such boyishness, and having bowed Jerry through the door into the largest room Jerry had ever seen, he disappeared. The cow-puncher made sure that he was alone in the room—it required a full moment to sweep the big floor space and be certain—and then he stepped to the curtain through which the servant had gone. Behind the edge of it he saw the other going unhurriedly up the stairs. And such stairs! They wound out of the level of the reception hall with the dignity of a swerving river. They invited one's eye up, slowly, and when the glance had traveled for a distance up the stairway it was easier to look up to

the ceiling of the reception hall and appreciate the loftiness of that apartment. As for the room in which he then stood, Jerry now looked about him only long enough to locate a hidden place from which he could command the doorway unseen. There were three which answered the purpose nicely. He chose a great tapestry which a draft from the open window was already furling back at one side. Here he could stand and see everything that passed through the door; yet he would be perfectly concealed. He would call out the name of Langley as soon as the latter entered, step out as he did so; and when the master of the house turned, he would give him time to go for his gun first. So much Jerry decided as he stood behind the tapestry. Then he began to listen to the silence of the house.

It was so intense that a foolish fancy came to him that his approach had been noted, the servants and the master warned, and now by scores they were softly creeping up to surround the room in which he stood. Yet, a moment later, he realized that it was only the size of the place and the thickness of the walls that cut off the sounds of kitchen life and housecleaning activities which to Jerry were inseparable from the conception of such a dwelling. He thought, now, of the immense importance of the life which he was about to end. It was the power which had built the wall against which he leaned. was the hand which hung the tapestry before him; it was the will that ordered this very silence. If that life were taken the whole fabric would crumble. That big domestic who had gone with such leisurely dignity up the stairs, how he would leap as he heard the shot which killed James Langley! What uproar would rush into this room; and after that a quiet, with only one or two women near the dead body——

Such thoughts as these unnerve a man. Jerry stopped himself and reversed the direction of his mind. He recalled again how he had pleaded with the robber not to take The Voice of La Paloma; he saw again Hank Peyton making the weapon a death gift to him. And just as his mind had reached that flinty hardness, there was a soft step. He looked, and saw a middle-aged man with black hair and a pair of shiny black eyes standing in the door of the apartment, looking about with a frown of bewilderment. Beyond a shadow of a doubt this was the man. He raised a hand to his thick mustache, and the hand was of womanish slenderness and pallor.

"Langley!" called Jerry, and slipped out from behind the tapestry.

His own hand was hanging in mid-air, ready for the lightning reach for his gun; but the master of the house turned without haste and faced him.

"Get out your gun," said Jerry, keeping his voice soft. "I'm here for you!"

The hand of the other stirred, and Jerry's leaped to the butt of his weapon —and then he saw the hand keep on rising until it was stroking the square, rather fat chin. "He'll deny that he knows me," said Jerry to himself.

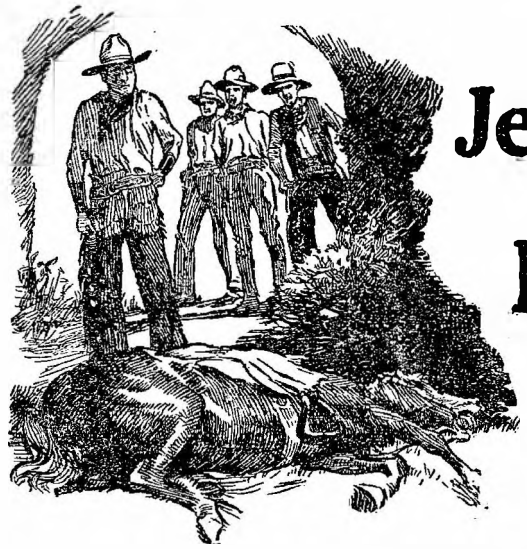
At that moment the master of the house remarked: "So it took you three months to get here, eh?"

"Look," said Jerry, and he glided a step closer, "I'm giving you a square break. You've got a gun on you. Get it out. You can make your move first; I'll allow you that much."

"Tut, tut," the other replied. "Three months of travel and still hot for more road-work. My dear boy, you're a perfect demon when it comes to energy."

"I'll count three," said Jerry. "I know you've got a gun, and I'm going to make you use it. When I say 'three,' if you don't draw, I'm going to shoot you down like a hound. You've got nothing else coming to you."

To be continued in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.



Jerry Peyton's Notched Inheritance

by George Owen Baxter

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

JERRY PEYTON inherits a revolver called "The Voice of La Paloma," from his father. Although Jerry keeps the peace at Sloan, the natives expect him some day to become as lawless as his father.

His land being mortgaged, Jerry has little left besides The Voice of La Paloma and a buckskin mare, of which he is very fond. Through neglect on the part of his neighbor, Van Zandt, the mare dies; Jerry gives Van Zandt a beating and threatens to exact full payment at a later date.

When Van Zandt discovers that his chestnut horse is missing, Jerry is suspected, and a posse sets out to capture him. Sheriff Sturgis goes alone and runs down Pat Langley, the thief, a man against whom he has a deep-rooted grievance. The posse later arrives with Jerry, who is unconscious from their ill treatment; he is released, and medical aid procured.

While Jerry is recovering, the sheriff concocts a plan whereby peace will be maintained at Sloan. Langley is to rob Jerry of The Voice of La Paloma, hand the gun to the sheriff, and then flee to his home in St. Hilaire. The sheriff knows that Jerry will go after the man he thinks has his inheritance and, in this way, vengeance will be diverted and Sloan will be rid of a shady character. Jerry leaves Sloan as anticipated, and traces Langley to St. Hilaire, where he gets the drop on the thief.

CHAPTER XVI.

JEWELRY.

HE counted slowly, and the white hand merely moved from the chin to the mustache. The bluff did not work. It did not even begin to work.

"No one looking on at this scene," Langley said, "would ever be able to believe that you're the son of old Hank Peyton. "I'll tell you what, Jerry, men aren't what they used to be. You haven't the nerve to shoot a man in cold blood."

Jerry had seen many cool men in his day—he was fairly cool-headed himself—but he looked on Langley, now, as he might a superhuman creature.

"We'll go into the little room behind you," said Langley. He came to the door and waved Jerry in ahead of him.

"Thanks," said Jerry. "You go first."

The host smiled and went straight to a chair. "Sit down," he said, waving to another.

"I'm easier standing," said Jerry.

"Yes, it does make it clumsy to get out a gun—sitting down—unless you know the trick," he added tauntingly.

Jerry flushed and, accepting the challenge, he drew the chair squarely before Langley, and with its back to the wall. He sat down on the very edge of it.

"Very well done," said the other approvingly. "I won't offer you a smoke, however," he added, "because I always

feel that smoking with a man is like eating at his table. It's rather hard to treat him as an enemy afterward."

Jerry watched, and his eye was as sharp and steady as flint. "Get into your talk," he said. "Get on with it. But if you've touched a button or anything like that, if you've sent a high sign for some of your guests to come flocking around me, remember that I'll get you before they can get me, my friend!"

The host tipped back his head and laughed and laughed and laughed. Jerry watched, fascinated, as the fat throat puffed and shook.

"Dear me," James P. Langley said as his merriment subsided, "I almost like you for that, my boy. You've been reading quite a bit of trash, I see. Buttons to press and trap doors, too, eh? Come, come, you're too old for that."

"All right," Jerry said, leaning suddenly back and smiling in turn at the other. "I'm not in a rush. If this is the game, I'll play it this way."

"Oh, I don't put you down for a fool," Langley replied at once. "You've done two things very well. First, my trail was a hard one to follow. I suppose it was the gambler in Chambers City that tipped you off?"

Jerry shrugged his shoulders.

"You don't need to be reticent on his behalf," said the other, and the well-trimmed mustache bristled a disagreeable trifle. "I know that's the only place you could have learned what you wanted to know. You got him to talk, eh?"

"Also, I won quite a stake from him," and Jerry smiled.

"That's item number two for you, then," said Langley. "The third thing is that you're right about the gun. I have a revolver with me. I always have, in fact."

"And you sit like a cur and hear me browbeat you, eh?" said Jerry.

The host grew pale to the eyes.

"It's hard to stand abuse," he said. "But I'll have to."

The fighting devil in Jerry welled up into his eyes and ran back to his heart, twice; a cold sweat was standing out all over his body, and he was shaking before that was over, but he had kept from drawing his gun.

"It's hard, isn't it?" the other remarked. "But I've known very few men in my life who could kill in cold blood. You think you can and your nerves are all set for it, but when it comes to meeting the other fellow's eyes you weaken, eh?"

Jerry sat very still and thought. Every ounce of mental strength in his brain went into the effort.

"Langley," he said, when he had finished the struggle, "I think you're not straight; I think you're a crook."

The other lighted a cigar and puffed at it, then held it poised as though he were listening to an entertaining story.

"I think you're a crook," said Jerry, "and a lot of little things along the road to St. Hilaire have just about convinced me of it. But there's one chance in ten that I'm wrong. I'm not reserving anything. You did a yellow thing back at Sloan. You got me when I was helpless and you took something from me. If you can explain that away, I'll get up and say good-by and never look at your ratty eyes again. That's square, I think. Now explain."

The older man squinted through a mist of smoke. He looked up to the ceiling and then down at the floor. "That's a square opening for me," he said. "But I can't take advantage of it. All I can say is this: The only big mistake I ever made in my life was in rating a very clever man as a fool. You see, I treated the man as a fool, and he took me off guard. Gad, it seems impossible that I could have done it, now that I look back. He twisted me around his finger. The result is, the clever man put me in such a position that I

can't explain how I happened to take your father's gun. It's impossible. I could tell you a story, but then you'd ask questions, and your questions would blow up the tale."

He puffed again at the cigar thoughtfully.

Jerry raised his left hand and brushed it across his shining forehead without obscuring his sight. "One thing more," he said. "If you give me back the gun, I think I can call the game off now. I'll not try to think it out."

But still the host shook his head.

"I've just been thinking of that," he said, "but the clever man saw through even that chance. I can't give the gun back to you."

"Then," said Jerry, "as sure as the sun's going to rise I'm going to drill you, Langley."

"Tut, tut," said the other. "You've already had your chance and you've failed. I know your mind, lad. I've stepped into it. You can't pull a gun until the other fellow has made the first move. Now, if I were to go for my revolver, I'd get it out, and I'd get it out before you had yours halfway to the mark. I'd kill you, my son; but when you were dead what earthly good would it do me? None whatever, and, instead, it would do me a tremendous harm. You see, large things are built on small, and if I were to kill you, this entire house would topple about my ears."

That whiplash flicker of his eyes went up and down the body of Jerry Peyton and then burned into his face.

"Nothing would please me more," went on Langley, "than a moment alone with you out in the mountain desert—say somewhere near Sloan, where a community is not so shocked by manslaughter. Unfortunately, we are some three thousand miles and more from Sloan." He paused and sighed. "And we are on the island of St. Hilaire, where man-killing is looked upon not as a vocation, but as a sin. You've no idea what a great difference that makes. For instance, if you were to be irritated past the point of endurance—if, I say, you were to do the impossible and draw your gun and shoot me—a dozen telephone messages would be sent out instantly from this house, and then the messages would be repeated at the farther end, so that in five minutes the entire coastline of this island would be watched and guarded. Every boat would be inspected to make sure that you were not on it, and little launches with machine guns mounted 'on 'em would slide up and down the coast to see that you didn't drift to sea."

He had talked so long that the cigar had almost gone out, and he now prevented this evil by puffing rapidly; his head appeared, presently, through a dense cloud of smoke, the eyes glittering at Jerry.

"You see," went on Langley, "this might be called a coöperative system of society. Do you follow that?"

"I'm followin' you so close, partner," said the big man, and he stretched himself in his chair, "that I'm wearing callouses on your heels. Go on."

The host looked at him with singular respect and cold observance commingled; he was thinking of the long, powerful body of a great cat, stretching with sleepy eyes, but incredibly alert at the same time.

"In this coöperative system," continued Langley, "we all work together to make it uncomfortable for the criminal. We don't consign all our legal interests to the hands of one sheriff, as they do at Sloan. Instead, we all step in and catch the disagreeable member of society and exterminate him with no more compunction than one would step on a snake."

"Me being the snake," said Jerry ungrammatically, and grinned.

He was met by a flash of white teeth.

"I'm glad you understood so well," Langley went on. "For you are here

in the midst of a net. It might be said that you rest on the palm of the hand of society, and if you bite the skin which holds you, the fingers will close and crush you out of recognizable shape. But, on the other hand, suppose that I were to shoot you down. In that case the danger would not be nearly so great. I would be kept under surveillance, to be sure; but I could readily escape from actual physical danger. On the other hand, a vital blow would be struck at the foundation of my work and ambition. I have said that if I kill you this house will tumble about my ears. And I mean this almost literally. I am not a mild man in a crisis, and the people of St. Hilaire would not endure another outbreak on my part. I should find my social position destroyed, the prospects of my family irretrievably ruined, or, at the least, the work of many years blown away in one puff of wind."

He lowered his voice toward the close of this speech until it became no louder than the murmur of a bee buzzing inside a room on a bright, still day. There was also the hidden anger in this murmur; it carried the hint of a sting.

"You're a bright man," Jerry said dryly. "You're too bright, almost. But you can't hold up. You can't stand the gaff. Suppose I pick a time when you have a lot of St. Hilaire's social knockouts around you; suppose I step up and call you hard, insult you in front of the gang. That'll make you go for your gun, eh?"

There was that same mirthless flash of white teeth, the same bristling of the precisely trimmed mustache.

"In many ways," said the rich man, "you are a child, Peyton. If you did that, I'd simply denounce you to the police as a madman and have you locked up."

"You'd be disgraced, though," said Jerry. "They'd see you're yellow."

"Not at all," said the other with meaning. "Whatever people may privately think of me in St. Hilaire, my courage, at least, has been placed beyond question. Come, my boy, look about you and see how complete the net is. I speak without passion and without fear of you; your position is impossible; therefore, look about you, admit the fact, and withdraw at once."

With one long, inward glance Jerry obeyed and saw that, as Langley had said, there was no escape. But being brought up against an impenetrable wall, his anger rose. It was a wall of words, after all; it was an obstacle created by the talk of this cool fellow with the glistening eyes. And in his helplessness Jerry let his glance rove. He then saw, close to him, a writing desk of ebony. It was one of those rare bits which are carved elaborately, and yet the minute carving is made subordinate to the line of the piece; the slender legs were yet strong enough and they rose from an adequate base; one would not be afraid to rest the weight of his elbow upon that desk. It was polished until, though it stood in the shadow, it glimmered, as though shining in the content of its own beauty. On the smooth surface lay a paper knife; it was silver, with a handle roughened by emeralds set into the metal, and on the surface of the dark ebony there was a reflection, a white streak for the silver and a green light for the emeralds—so that the knife seemed to be floating. Upon these two things of beauty Jerry stared; for to him they reconstructed the whole fortune of the rich man and signified more than the rest of the house. The desk, carved like a jewel, the paper knife, a jewel indeed, left carelssly upon the surface of the desk—Jerry calculated absently that the entire value of the main street of Sloan would not duplicate that paper cutter. He looked up to Langley and sighed.

"It looks to me," he said, "as though you're right."

"Good," the millionaire said. It was a great mistake, that satisfied nod, for no man, and particularly no young man, likes to have his conclusions taken for granted. But Langley was victorious, he felt, and now he rushed on foolishly: "Of course, I'll see that all arrangements are made for your trip back, and it will be a pleasure to refund the money you have spent on this unfortunate excursion; in fact——"

"The devil!" said Jerry with infinite disgust.

It made Langley open his eyes.

"I said it looked to me as though you were right," said the big man, "but I'll be hanged if I'll go on the looks of it. I can't plug a man who won't pull a gun. You're right there. I can't make you fight by insultin' you in public. Well, there's still some other way I can hit you. I don't know how it is, but I'll find that way; and I'll make you come to me foamin', Mr. Langley; I'll make you come to me like a cow bawlin' for her calf; I'll make you come ravin' and beggin' for a chance to get a shot at me; I'll make you want to do murder, m' friend." He leaned a narrow, hard fist on the surface of the writing desk. "'S a matter of fact, Mr. Langley, I don't think that's anything new to you!"

So saying, he straightened, and backed with long, light steps through the door. Langley watched him, interested, and then noted the swiftness and ease of the sidewise leap which carried the Westerner out of sight behind the wall. There was an ominous grace about his actions that made Langley think, not for the first time, of some big, half-tamed panther, playing in his cage. But the bars against which Jerry Peyton spent himself were the bars of civilization. While he thought of these things, Langley picked up the paper knife from the ebony desk and looked at it curiously. The hard fist of Jerry had rested upon it, and it was sadly bent; the jeweler would have to look at it.

CHAPTER XVII.

SENOR GUZMAN.

THE negro boy before the house of the master had the reins jerked from his hands, and he had barely time to catch a silver coin that was flung to him while Peyton vaulted into the saddle. The little negro was used to seeing expert riders mount, but something in the manner in which this stranger flung himself through the air and landed lightly in the saddle on a horse that stood a good sixteen hands and a half, made the boy gape; he remained gaping while Jerry jerked the horse from a standing start into a full gallop with a merciless twist of spurred heels; then horse and rider shot off down the road and the shadows of the palms were brushing across them.

It was not the road by which he had come to the house, and Jerry did not care. He went blindly at top speed until the rush of wind against his face had cooled his blood sufficiently for him to begin thinking. In the old days, when he felt after this fashion, he used to jump into the saddle on the buckskin. She took part of the mad humor out of him with her bucking, as a rule, and he spent the rest of it hunting for trouble with the first man he met. Around Sloan men were astonishingly accommodating when it came to providing trouble; but in this infernal island—— He brought the poor horse to a stand with a wrench on the reins that almost broke the poor brute's jaw, for through the tree trunks just ahead of him he made out the flash and blue shimmer of the sea. It was everywhere about him, then. It was crowding into his back yard, in fact. He sent his trembling horse out onto the brow of the hlil and looked down where the surf came boiling on the beach and then slid back

to the deep places. It leaped in tricky currents, and he saw what had been a smooth place before suddenly involved in a deep whirl that sucked the foam under and then threw it up again. To Jerry water meant, on the whole, nothing more than the sleepy old Winton River, and he looked on the ocean with disgust. He remembered, too, the way the ship had ridden the waves, bucking until one's stomach commenced almost to float. So he hated this blue ocean and its green margin; above all he hated it because it drove back into his mind the memory that he was helpless—that he could never escape if he shot down Langley. As if to complete his picture of isolation, as if purposely sent to drive him to a frenzy, a long, low-lying launch sneaked into view around the end of the promontory and glided across the bay. How could he escape from such a seagoing greyhound as that?

He found his horse shaking again; and then he discovered that the animal was terrified because he had ridden so close to the edge of the hill, where the soil crumbled away and dropped in what was almost a cliff to the sea. At the sight of his horse's fear all the mad, sullen child boiled up in Jerry, all the hate that he felt for Langley and the sea and the fate which had sent him to this accursed island. He spurred the gelding until he stood straight up, with a groan, and then struck on all fours in full gallop. He strove to swerve inland, but the iron arm of Jerry wrenched his head over and made him race along the very verge of the cliffs. Sometimes the ground gave way under his pounding hoofs. Sometimes his hindquarters sagged as a miniature landslide commenced and threatened to suck the horse over the brow of the hill, until the gelding was tortured into a hysteria of fear as strong and as blind as Jerry's hysteria of rage. He ran, now, where Jerry guided him. He went fearlessly along that crumbling cliff edge. He even strove to swerve and leap into the abyss when the yell of the cow-puncher rose and blew tingling behind him; but the man kept him true to his course, not a foot allowed on the danger side of it and not a foot allowed toward safety. He kept on until Jerry felt the forelegs pounding, felt the hindquarters sag, and knew that the gelding was almost spent. All at once his own passion left him. He swung the gelding over to a firm little plateau and brought him to a down-headed halt. For a moment the panting of the horse lifted him slightly up and down in the saddle. He himself was panting, now that his rage had been converted into weariness; and when he slipped off the horse and remorsefully patted the flanks of the gelding, he would have given a great deal, indeed, if his prank had remained unplayed.

It was at this moment of depression that he looked over the croup of the horse suddenly, and saw an old man standing on the hilltop above him with folded arms and watching him solemnly. Indeed, his pose was one of almost affected dignity and reserve. He held his hat in his hand, so that it came under one elbow, and the wind was lifting the misty white hair, which he wore rather long for an ordinary man. He stood with one foot advanced in that position of self-control and balance which the world for some reason has connected with that nervous, active genius, Napoleon. For the rest, there was no semblance at all between this man and the conqueror. He was of an attenuated leanness and very tall. Even from this distance Jerry could see that his head was small and his nose large; there was about him a sort of cruel dignity and scorn—it made Jerry think of a bald eagle surveying his kingdom of the air from a crag. He was almost surprised when he saw the old man shake his head in disapproval and be-

came aware that this majestic figure was watching him. Because the other stood with head uncovered, Jerry instantly swept off his own hat and bowed.

Among the maxims of Hank Peyton, uttered when he was drunk but observed whether drunk or sober and impressed even upon Jerry's infancy with brutal force, was the following: "They's three things you got to sidestep and handle with a long rein: an old hoss, an old man, and a woman." There was a little white scar which showed over Jerry's eye when he flushed; it marked an occasion when he was a very small boy and had spoken back to his mother; Hank Peyton had promptly knocked him down with the butt end of a loaded blacksnake. That lesson of courtesy was never forgotten by Jerry; and if he was ever tempted to forget, the scar reminded him. So he stood with his broad-brimmed hat in his hand and waited for the older man to address him.

As for the other, he stood for a moment surveying Jerry, and finally came down from the hilltop with a long, sure step surprising in so old a man, and as dignified as his standing appearance.

"Good morning," he said. "I am Manuel Guzman."

"Sir," said Jerry, "I'm glad to know you. My name is Jeremiah Peyton, and I hope I haven't been riding over your land."

A cloud came on the brow of the old man, and Jerry remembered what he had heard from the author.

"When you passed that point," said Don Manuel, "you entered my estate."

"I'm sorry," said Jerry.

The old man was silent; and a sense of guilt came to Jerry. He felt as if he had been spied upon and a weakness observed.

"I am sorry for your horse," the other replied calmly. "You are a wild rider, Mr. Peyton."

Rebuffs were bitter food for Jerry. He had to waste a frown on the ground before him before he could look up and meet the eye of Señor Guzman calmly. And then he was surprised to see a smile gradually spread over the lean face. "For my part," said the Spaniard, "I keep away from my horses when I am angry. Or perhaps it was the horse itself that angered you?"

"The hoss is a fool hoss," said Jerry gloomily. "Look at him! Winded already and his spirit about busted."

"By a ride on the edge of a cliff," said the old man, smiling more broadly. He looked narrowly at Jerry. "I thought you were going into the sea when you rounded that point."

Jerry looked back. The point was marked by a great bowlder of red stone, and between the bowlder and the sea drop there was only a meager footpath. Jerry shuddered.

"Did I ride around that rock?" he asked.

The old man was silent again and appeared to be thinking of other things.

"You must come up to my house with me," he said, "and sit down for a time. Your nerves are upset." Jerry hesitated. "And I have some whisky you shall taste, if you will."

"Lead the way," Jerry said instantly. "I'm so dry"—he paused to find a sufficient word—"that my throat crackles every time I draw a breath."

The Spaniard chuckled and led the way over the hilltop from which he had just descended. It gave an unexpected view of a low, broad valley, covered with a thick green crop on this side, and where it went up toward a range of hills beyond Jerry could see the regular avenues of an orchard. "Once," the Spaniard said, pointing, "that land to the hills was in my estate. However, I have still land enough. Follow me, sir."

And he took Jerry down the slope and up again until they reached a pla-

teau densely covered by a growth of gigantic palms and trees almost as tall. In the center of this little forest there was an opening, where they found the house. It was built solidly of sawn rock, a single story sprawling around a patio with the usual fountain in the center. There was an arcade about the patio, and the stone floor, newly washed, was unbelievably cool to the eye. It was a green rock, worn deeply in places. Here they sat down in the shade, facing each other across a little table. The chairs were never meant for comfort; at least, though the rigid backs may have fitted the form of the don, the larger body of Jerry overflowed them. He forgot the chair, however, when a barefooted negro in white cotton jacket and trousers came pattering out with a tray, and the whisky and ice and seltzer were arranged between them.

"Are you staying long in St. Hilaire?" Don Manuel asked.

"You put me down for a newcomer, eh?" Jerry replied.

"No old inhabitant rides as hard as that," said the Spaniard, "at ten o'clock in the morning. In the morning and the evening—oh, they are reckless enough; but at ten o'clock the day begins to fall into a sleepy time and every one yawns and drowses."

"Then," Jerry added, "you make an exception, señor?"

"With me it is different," said the old man. "I carry whip and spur within me; and in a way, sir, you might say that I also gallop along the edge of a cliff."

He sighed.

"To your happiness, señor."

Jerry bowed, and they drank together.

There is a period after liquor has passed the lips of two men when they sit and look at one another and can read minds. This brief moment stole over the old man and the young, and they sat regarding each other solemnly. The white-clad negro had brought a basket of fruit and knives, but Jerry refused it.

"I don't know how long I shall stay," said Jerry, reverting to the last question. "As soon as my business is over, I leave."

The Spaniard smiled again in his wise way.

"And yet, señor," he said, "when I saw you careering along the hills, between the sea and the sky, one might say, I made up my mind that you were a prisoner in St. Hilaire."

"A prisoner?" repeated Jerry slowly.

"To your interests here," replied the Spaniard coolly. "A prisoner rebelling, however, against his captivity. I can remember a day," he went on, "when I rode very much as you rode along the hills, and I cared very little whether my horse fell into the sea or remained on the dry land."

He pushed the whisky bottle toward Jerry as he spoke, but the latter sat, turning the bottle slowly.

"I can almost tell you why you rode that day," said Jerry.

"Señor?" queried the old man.

"You had spoken to Langley, eh?" said Jerry.

He saw the other quiver under the shock.

"Because," went on Jerry hastily, "I've just finished talking to the same fellow."

Don Manuel had raised the glass toward his lips, but now he lowered it again, untasted. An inspiration came to Jerry. He filled his own glass and poised it.

"I think," he said, "that there is a real reason for us to drink together. Once more, to your good health, señor."

Don Manuel looked long and earnestly at the American.

"I drink," said he, "to the kind fortune which has sent me a man."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE KEY.

THE casual visit of the morning was extended until noon, and when the noon meal passed there was a lazy warmth in the air which forbade travel; when the evening approached the Don showed Jerry through the house, and, stopping in a room where the windows overlooked the sea, he said: "This is your place, sir, until you leave St. Hilaire. "It was impossible to refuse hospitality offered in this manner. Jerry made up his mind that he make his refusal later on; but then came the dinner; and after they dined the night dropped about them and Jerry began to talk. The words flowed almost without his knowledge, and before he knew it he had laid his heart bare to Señor Guzman; he had told of the first meeting; he had told of the pursuit; he had told of the scene in Langley's study; and, finally, of his unquenchable determination.

They were sitting in the patio, and after the story was done the Spaniard remained silent for a pause of embarrassing length, looking up at the stars. Finally he went into the house and returned with a candle. He placed it at the other end of the long court, so that the flame was merely a slender eye of light, tilted sidewise with its halo by the steady pressure of the northeast trades, which blow day and night unceasingly over St. Hilaire. Don Manuel came and stood behind the chair of Jerry; the young man turned and looked up, but, with his hands on the muscular shoulders of the American, Don Manuel said, preventing him from rising: "There is a tale going the rounds," he said, "that at ten paces Señor Langley can snuff a burning candle; yonder candle, now, is about twice that distance, I think."

"Ah?" said Jerry. And as he spoke he whirled in the chair. He did not rise, but the gun leaped out of his clothes and exploded—the flame of the candle leaped and went out. "Confound!" Jerry said at the end of a moment of silence. "Too low or I would have trimmed it."

But the Spaniard went down and picked up the candle and came back carrying it in both hands. He stood, then, peering down at Jerry as though the candle still burned, and by its light he studied the stranger. "I am out of practice," said Jerry, flushing, "but with my gun in shape and a bit of work to——"

Don Manuel raised a compelling hand and went into the house. When he came out again he said, without prologue: "It is because you have no way to touch the man's nerve, is it not?"

"How can I touch him?" Jerry replied sadly. "Can I get at his property. Can I threaten him in any way? If he had a son, I might manhandle him; but I can't hit a man forty-five years old."

An air from an opera which had been popular twenty years before Jerry was born came whistling from the lips of Don Manuel. He sat with his chin in his hand. At length the music stopped short. "Go to bed and sleep, my son," he said finally. "For you must get up with me at dawn, and then I shall show you the key to Señor Langley's heart."

"We're going to his house?" asked Jerry sharply.

"You must trust me," said the old man with a marvelously evil smile. The bitterness of half a life was summed up and expressed by that smile. "Be prepared, for in the morning you shall see the key to his heart."

From the first meeting it had seemed to Jerry that he sensed a base of rock in the nature of the Spaniard; and now he knew that misfortune had not taught him or bowed him. He was as rigid as he had been in the pride of youth,

and in the place of the warm blood of the young man his veins were filled with acid hate. Yet evil is usually more imposing than good; Jerry saw, when he lay in bed looking into the dark, that the only reason he had spoken to the Spaniard and told the whole story was because he recognized subconsciously the unholy fire in Don Manuel. He trusted to that fire now. And in this trust he fell into a profound slumber.

Once, it was a dreamlike thought, he seemed to part his eyelids slightly and look up at the form of the Spaniard in a robe of white, shielding a candle so that little of its light touched the face of the sleeper, but a bright radiance fell on Don Manuel. Jerry shuddered —in his sleep; when he next wakened the hand of Señor Guzman was on his shoulder. "Get up," said the host. "Here is a bathing suit which will fit you. You must be thoroughly awakened, so plunge into the tub of cold water that waits for you. When that is done, put on the bathing suit and come into the patio."

It was impossible to deny those eyes, so bright under their wrinkled lids. And before Jerry was fully awake he had gone through the routine which the host prescribed and stood beside him in the patio. Don Manuel looked over his guest with an almost painful attention—as a trainer, say, looks over the trim muscles of an athlete—then he nodded as one who knew men. "Come," he said simply, and led the way from the house and over a terrace of grass to a hilltop which overlooked the sea. The sun had not risen. To the east, over a gray mist along the horizon, the tints of the dawn were rolling up the sky; and one cloud, high above the rest, was burning with red fire. It sent a stain of crimson across the sea toward the two on the cliff.

"Well?" said Jerry.

"Are you cold?" said the Spaniard. He himself was wrapped in a heavy cloak.

"No," said Jerry Peyton. Indeed, the air was as mild as a spring noontide.

"Look down to the beach."

It was a drop of a hundred feet, at least; a long, white stretch of sand lay before him, and along its margin the waves rolled, broke into sudden lines of white, and then slipped swiftly up the shore.

"What's next? I see the beach."

"Patience."

It was odd to see the old man assume command. He paid not the slightest heed to Jerry, but began to walk up and down. The northeast wind sent his cloak flapping every time he turned to the end of his pacing. For the rest, he seemed to be looking up into the eye of this wind more than any place else, and a ghostly feeling came to Jerry that the Spaniard was about to receive a message out of the empty air. He, also, began to scan that horizon, and he started when Don Manuel stopped in his pacing and pointed suddenly down at the beach.

"The key to Señor Langley," said he.

And Jerry, looking down, saw a girl galloping a horse along the beach. She wore a light cloak, which blew behind her, and a scarlet cap covered her head. The blue coak, the red cap, the cream-colored horse—she was sweeping along the beach like a gay cloud out of the sunrise. A clawlike hand caught the shoulder of Jerry and dragged him down behind a rock.

"She mustn't see you with me," said the Spaniard. "Not now."

"Is this part of the job you plan on, partner?" said Jerry coldly. "Spyin' on a girl?"

The cream-colored horse stopped, and the girl, dismounting, threw away the cloak, slipped the shoes from her feet, and ran down the beach toward the sea. Jerry sat up, and when the

Spaniard turned to him he found that the boy's face was scarlet, and a white line showed above his eye.

"Did you get me up before sunrise," said Jerry fiercely, "to spy on a girl?"

The Spaniard blinked and then smiled.

And in spite of the lessons of his father, in spite of the scar on his face, in spite of that fine Western scorn of anything connected with duplicity where women are concerned, Jerry looked again. It had been merely a causeless shock, he decided, as he watched her run along the beach and saw the skirts of a gay bathing suit fluttering about her. As he looked, the water was struck to white about her feet, and then she dived under the surface. As the wave rolled swirling to the shore the Spaniard smiled again at Jerry.

"That is the key to Señor Langley," he said. "That is his daughter, Patricia."

For a time Jerry stared at him stupidly. "Listen to me, partner," he said coldly, when he had finished his survey of that ancient, evil face. "I come from a place where bad men are pretty fairly thick, but bad men around women don't flourish in those parts. They wither away sudden. They get cut off at the root. You see?"

Don Manuel made a slow gesture, with both the palms of his hands turned up.

"Señor Peyton," he said, "you are not wise. I point out to you a way in which you can make Señor Langley come to you as you wish, raving, with his gun in his hand, and you insult me for pointing out the way." He leaned over and laid a bony hand on Jerry's arm.

"Do not say it," Jerry murmured, the flush gradually leaving his face.

"That is much better, my son," said the Spaniard. "Now hear me calmly. You will go down to the beach. You will swim. When you come on shore you will be close to Señorita Langley. She will speak to you; you will speak to her. You will tell her your name. She will tell you her name. Is there any harm in that?"

"It looks straight to me," said Jerry cautiously. "What's it lead to?"

"To much," said Don Manuel. "It leads to everything we wish. She will go home and remember you. You will be easy for her to remember."

"Me?" said Jerry, wide-eyed.

"Peyton is a simple name," said the Spaniard hurriedly.

"That's straight enough," murmured Jerry.

"And when she goes home she will tell her father that she has met you. Now, the Señor Langley is a stern man in his home. His word is law. Ever since she has become a young woman, the girl is used to hearing her father say, 'Receive this man,' and she receives him, or, 'Do not smile on this man,' and she makes her face a blank before him. There is always a reason. Such a man is too poor, too rich, or one is of the good blood and another is not. There is always a reason, and the girl obeys, for her heart has not been touched. Do you understand?"

"I partly follow you," said Jerry, frowning with the effort.

"A woman is like a blossom," the old man continued, watching the eyes of the American. "For a time she is hulled in green. And after that the green opens and she is stiff petals—a bud. But then, all on a day, a bee touches the bud or the wings of a moth dust across it or a leaf falls on it, and then it opens in that one day and lets the sun come into its heart. It is all in a day; and all in a day a girl steps into womanhood. Is that clear, señor?"

"I see something in it," admitted Jerry cautiously.

"But the Señor Langley does not see it," said Don Manuel. "He is the cold

Northern race; his heart is ice; he cannot see the heart of a woman. But I am a Guzman, and I know. Old men and poets know women, my son, and I am a very old man."

"Go on," Jerry commanded sternly as the Don paused.

"We return, then, to the moment when Langley orders her to see this stranger she has met on the beach no more. He gives her a reason—she is not to make friends with every nobody she meets. Pardon me, señor."

"That's all right," said Jerry heartily. "I can see the old boy's face as he says it. Go on."

"She understands that this must be so. Yet she is thoughtful. For when she mentions your name she sees her father start. It is a little thing—a lifting of the eyebrows. You see? But the girl sees it; she says, 'My father knows this man before.' So she asks her father to inquire about you and find out your past. Perhaps he does it; perhaps he tells her a lie. He dare not tell her the truth, and if he tells her a lie, who will know it is not the truth?"

"Wait a minute," said Jerry. "You don't know this Langley. She'll never guess it's a lie."

"I am an old man, and I know women," persisted Don Manuel stubbornly. "She will know it is a lie, and also, she has the blood of her father in her and she understands. So she sits in her room and thinks. For one, two mornings she goes to another beach; but there is no good beach in St. Hilaire but my beach. She cuts her feet on the coral; she wades up to the ankles in slime and mud; and she thinks of the hard, clean, smooth sand of the beach of Don Manuel. It will be so!" He paused. "Also, she may remember you; you are different from the others, my son." So on the third morning she says to herself: 'What harm in going there? My father need not know. The man is not a viper.' So she comes on the third morning to the beach of Don Manuel."

"I follow all this," said Jerry. "Nobody likes to swim on a muddy bottom."

"You understand swimming, my son?"

Jerry thought of the place where the Winton drops into a wild series of cascades. Once he had gone down those rapids, swimming. "Yes, I swim a bit," he replied.

The Spaniard nodded. "That is still better. So she comes back, remembering how you swim."

"But what the devil does that lead to?"

"Everything. The apple of discord is thrown into the family of Don James! And the girl has kept a thing from her father."

"I don't like it," said Jerry sullenly. "I—I don't like that idea."

"Wait! The apple of discord is thrown into the family. And now the girl sees you every morning; for every morning she swims to keep the blossom in her cheeks that all St. Hilaire wonders over. Ah, I know! Also, she is come to the time. It is not far distant." He nodded, and his little, evil eyes glittered into the distance. "She knows the bees which buzz in St. Hilaire. She keeps her petals closed. They are nothing to her. But she hears a new sound. It is a lean wasp, fierce, swift, silent, strange. She opens her heart to it!"

"Partner," said Jerry with concern, "this early mornin' air must be going to your head. What the dickens are you talking about?"

"You shall see. The day comes when the girl goes to her father again and speaks of you. Then he has been disobeyed, and the madness comes over him. Have you seen him in his madness?"

"No."

"Ah, ah," murmured the Spaniard, "you have much to learn of Don James. Well, you will see it. But now go down to the beach. Go down, my son."

"And in the end?"

"In the end he will know that he has been disobeyed. He will seize his fastest horse and rush to my house. There, I trust, you will not be hard to find."

"Partner," said Jerry, "I begin to get your drift. He'll come ravin'—he'll come for the showdown?"

"He will come and shine like a flame—like the flame of a candle in my patio, señor."

But Jerry Peyton was already on his feet and going down the sandy slope of the hill toward the beach.

Don Manuel kneeled and pressed his face close to the rocks as he saw the lithe, muscular figure break from a walk to a jogging trot, and from a trot, as a sudden feeling of exultation came over him, into a full racing gait. A rock rose in his path. He hurdled it with a great leap and went on, his bare feet spurning the sand into little jets behind him. The old man clutched both hands to his heart.

"God give me grace!" he whispered. "Let her see him now."

His prayer was answered. She rose from the sea, shaking the water out of her face, at the same time that Jerry struck the shore. Two strides brought him up to the knees; he shot through the air, disappeared under the heaving front of a wave.

Don Manuel rose and walked stolidly toward his house.

"It is enough," he said; "she has now seen a man."

CHAPTER XIX.

DAWN.

AS for Jerry Peyton, the slope of the hill face had given such impetus to him that he forgot the girl, he forgot the scheme, he lost himself in the joy of speed, and when he slipped under the wave he came up with a long, powerful overhand stroke that shot him through the water. He had never swum in salt water before, and his swimming muscles, hardened to the work of fresh rivers and lakes, now whipped him along through the heavier, more buoyant, ocean. Also, it sent a tingle across his skin. He gave himself to his work. When a wave heaved up trembling before him, he dived and came up in the calm water beyond. Past four lines of waves he swam, and then turned and made leisurely back for the land.

If it was pleasure to swim in the face of the sea, it was marvelous to have the big waves pick one up, unaware, and be thrown bodily toward the land. He came with a crawl stroke, now, rioting in the speed, and with foam about his shoulders; a mass of water lifted around him and tossed him up—when he came down, his knee struck sand. He staggered up the beach, panting, and there he saw the girl, with one hand on her hip and dabbling one foot in the water. He came from a land where the girls have no fear of men, and yet he was unprepared for the directness of her eyes and the fearlessness of her smile. He was striding through the surf, tingling, when her glance stopped him. His broad chest was working like a bellows, filling with that pure morning air, and then her glance stopped him.

"That last wave nearly tumbled you on your head, didn't it?" said the girl.

"Did it? I don't know. I was having too good a time to see. Never swam in the ocean before."

"You let 'em take you and float you," said the girl, "and you can ride 'em in—like a horse, almost."

He had stopped panting enough to look more closely at her now. He saw that her eyes were black, but they had not the glitter of her father's eyes. He

was deeply grateful for that. He had an odd desire to step back so that he could throw her into a perspective and see her clearly—as if she were a mountain. He was surprised by the small, cold touch of awe; something that the Spaniard had said was true—something about flowers between the bud and the blossom.

"Show me how, will you?" said Jerry.

"Of course. Come on."

They went into the water side by side. "Who are you?" asked the girl.

"I'm Jeremiah Peyton."

"I'm Patricia Langley. Come on, here's a bully wave!"

He was amazed by the ease with which she cut the water. Her round, active arms plied the water just ahead of him, and he held back to watch. She stopped in a rocking trough, treading the water. "How far out shall we go?"

"As far as you like," said Jerry.

"Oh, I don't care. I never get tired in the water."

"As far as you like," he repeated, treading water also.

"But there's the Long Reach," she said.

A wave obliterated them, but when he came up again he followed her gesture and saw a white streak out to sea. "What's the Long Reach?"

"I don't know exactly. Some kind of a cross-current or something like that. It forms from the mouth of the cove, several times a day, and then goes swirling out to sea. If you get caught in it, it's all day with you. Takes you miles and miles out. Billy de Remi was caught in it—poor Billy!"

The top of a wave spilled over her as she spoke. She came up laughing, and then struck out.

"You say when you want to turn back," she called back over her shoulder, and then the red cap was submerged as she struck out with a driving crawl stroke.

He could see that she was challenging his speed, and she slid through the water with remarkable rapidity; but half a dozen strokes convinced Jerry that he could overhaul her when he chose. He drifted back, and then cut in around her and drew up on the side of the white line of water. Once or twice, as she turned her head for breath, her eye caught his and she flashed a smile at him; but on the whole she was strictly serious business.

She headed straight out to sea, and now Jerry could hear, louder than the noise of the surf behind them, the rushing of the white waters ahead of him. The girl also heard them, but she went straight on, lifting her head clear, now and then, to gauge the distance. An odd thought came to Jerry that she was testing him in this manner, and with a few hard strokes he pulled up even with her.

She came up, treading water, at that. She was white, but her eyes danced and she was smiling. "Shall we go on?"

"Just as you say," said Jerry, and smiled back.

She cast one gloomy look at him and immediately struck out again. Now the sound of the waters ahead filled Jerry's ears, but he kept even with her, and a little ahead, until an arm of boiling water reached out at them. They were swept far from their course and close together. Over the sound of the rushing he heard her cry; then she turned like an eel and hit out for the shore. It was a full minute of hard labor before she made headway. The current came foaming about her neck and made a wake behind her shoulders; once she turned her head and cried again to Jerry; but he, swimming with comparative ease close by, made no effort to aid her.

They were clear of the danger as suddenly as it had come upon them, and she brought her head up, treading water again.

"Why——" she began angrily.

"Well?" said Jerry, and grinned at her white face.

"It nearly got us!" panted the girl.

"I knew we were all right," he said. "You told me you knew these waters." All at once she was laughing.

"You're a queer one," she called, and headed back for the line of the surf. He remembered, as he followed, that Don Manuel had said she would find him different. In fact, he was so full of many thoughts that he by no means grasped her lessons in surf riding. He saw a big wave take her and shoot her toward the shore, she riding lightly in the crest; and then the same wave caught Jerry, doubled him up, and rolled him over and over like a ball. He came up with sand in his ears, his nose, his mouth, and in his blindness staggered toward the waves again; but Patricia came, laughing, and led him up the beach. That misadventure seemed to restore her good humor. She was still laughing when he had washed himself clean again and turned on her.

"In my part of the country," Jerry said, "they don't treat a tenderfoot this way. Five minutes after I meet you, you take me within a yard of drowning, and then you roll me in the sand."

She was pulling on her shoes and lacing them; the instant before she had seemed more boy than girl; now she was wholly woman. And when she smiled up at him absent-mindedly, he searched his mind for something to say. But his brain was a perfect blank. He looked around him—the sea, the hills, the wind, the sky, the sunrise rushed upon him, and he rejected them all. He wanted to say something, in fact, which would make her forget all those very things. A great gray bird flew in from the sea, and she raised her head slowly up and up, watching its flight—until he was conscious only of her parted lips, her eyes, and the line of her throat.

"I wonder what it is?" said Patricia, standing up and catching her cloak about her. The cream-colored horse came up to her; he was evidently a pet.

"It's not a gull," said Patricia.

"Damn the bird," said Jerry with warmth. "I beg your pardon," he added hastily as she glanced at him. "I wasn't thinking of what I said."

"I think you were," Patricia replied not altogether coldly. She surveyed him anew and liked him. "What in the world made you say that?"

"I don't know," said Jerry miserably. "I guess you're pretty peeved about it, eh?" He began to explain with a frown: "You see, I was about to say something when that bird flew over, and——"

"And then I interrupted you?" She observed him still again, for men did not usually tell her when she interrupted them. She had never seen a man who looked quite like that in a bathing suit. His face and neck were tanned and his hands were even darker to the wrist. But the rest of his body was as white as snow, and whenever he moved she could see long, unobtrusive, efficient-looking muscles at play. "What was it you were going to say?" she added.

"That's the point," and Jerry sighed. "You've made me forget it."

"You are queer," the girl commented, with a light laugh.

"I had an idea you'd think that," said Jerry gloomily.

"Why?"

"Because I feel mostly like a fool."

She had a wonderful resource of laughter, effortless and sweet to hear.

"Do that again," said Jerry.

"Do what?"

And he answered:

"Laugh again; it's great to hear you."

She looked beyond him and saw that the sun was about to rise, her signal to depart for a beauty sleep before breakfast time; but she saw that he was enjoying her immensely, and, for some reason, it meant a good deal to see this

fellow look at her with intense eyes; it seemed important, indeed, just to keep that big, powerful body at play.

"I'm sorry that I made you forget that thing," said the girl.

"So'm I," Jerry replied unaffectedly.

"No idea what it was about?"

"It was about you."

"Oh!" murmured Patricia; she had been talked to so much by men that she was long past the stage when she glanced away or had to summon a flush when they talked personalities; instead, she was able to look directly at them, and that always gave her a vast advantage. It always made the men feel that they were inane and that Patricia was formidably clever. But when she looked at Jerry he seemed too much absorbed in his own reflections to note her. A surmise struck her that he had not consciously intended a compliment—that he was talking as naturally and as simply to her as he would talk to another man—that under the surface of those keen gray eyes and behind that rather ugly face there was simply the heart of a boy. The moment she surmised these things something like a pang went through Patricia. She leaned against the side of the cream-colored horse and she watched Jerry with a wonderful, still look.

"It was about you," he was saying, "and it was important. I'll tell you," he continued, gathering head, "you're harder to talk to than most girls; do you know that?"

"No," said Patricia; she even forgot to smile, she was so intent studying him; and she was beginning to wonder why she usually was fencing with words when she talked to men—even the boys of the island, whom she had known ever since they were mere infants.

"Well, you are hard enough," said Jerry. "I never had any trouble chatting with other girls. Nope, not a bit. Any old thing would do to start with."

"Oh!" said Patricia.

"But just now," went on Jerry, "I had an idea that you were about to get on your horse and go."

"I am," said Patricia, starting and gathering up the reins. But she did not turn toward the horse.

"I was afraid of that," said Jerry, "so I hunted around for something to talk about. I saw the ocean and the sky and the hills and the sunrise and all those things. You see?"

"Weren't they good enough to talk about?"

"If you're laughing at me inside," Jerry said, "just do it right out loud. I don't mind. In fact, I like it!"

She did laugh at that, but not very long. "Go on," said Patricia. For she felt as if she were hearing a story. There was an element of suspense about everything he said.

"What I wanted wasn't any sea or sky stuff," said Jerry. "I wanted to say something about you."

"Oh!"

"Because," explained Jerry, "you seemed more important."

"Oh!" repeated the girl.

"Say," said Jerry, "d'you mind tellin' me what you mean by saying, 'Oh,' so much?"

"I don't know," murmured Patricia; then added hastily: "I mean, it seems to me that you started the conversation very nicely without that lost remark."

"D'you think so?" said Jerry, and smiled with pleasure. "I'm no end glad of that. I'll tell you something," he said confidentially.

"What?"

"Oh, it isn't important. But I saw you go in swimming from the top of that hill, and when I came down I was hoping that I'd be able to talk to you."

"When you came down the hill," said the girl thoughtfully, "were you trying to catch my eye?"

"'S a matter of fact," confessed Jerry, "when I came down the hill my

legs got to going so fast that I didn't think about anything but running. D'you ever try it? If it's steep, your legs get a funny feelin' around the knees."

"I'll try it, some day," and Patricia smiled. "I'm glad you did talk to me. How old are you?" she asked, apropos of nothing.

"I'm twenty-four," he said, as if it were the most natural question in the world. "How old are you?"

"You look more like eighteen or thirty-five, somehow," said Patricia, thinking aloud. And then: "What did I say?"

"That I looked sort of young," said Jerry. "I don't mind, because I'm growing older every day."

"You have a way of saying things," said the girl, "that makes me want to think them over. I'm still sorry about that lost remark."

"I can't remember what it was about," he answered, studying. "But I can tell you what I meant."

"All right." She kept continually breaking out with eagerness and then checking herself. Perhaps she felt from time to time that she was compromising her dignity.

"It was something to this effect: that it makes me happy to be here talkin' to you." He was looking down at the ground in his brown study as he said this, and she was glad that she did not have to answer. Also, it gave her a chance to look at his face without passing the barrier of his glance. "So happy," said Jerry, looking up quickly, "that I feel sort of grateful."

She put her foot in the stirrup and swung up.

"What's wrong?" asked Jerry, looking behind him.

"The sun," panted Patricia. "It's a way up high."

"Isn't that natural for it to be there?"

"I have to go home. Mr. Peyton, why——"

"Yes? Stand still, fool hoss!" He caught the bridle close to the bit and took every tremor out of the horse with a twist of his fist. "Go on," said Jerry.

"Why don't you come to call?"

"At your house?" said Jerry.

"Of course."

"I'll tell you," and Jerry grinned. "If your dad ever saw me come through the door of your house, he'd start r'aring."

"Do you know dad?"

"Sure do I."

"Then you knew me all the time!"

"I never saw you before," Jerry replied with equal truth and evasion.

She admitted this with a nod, but now she was frowning as she looked at him; she was concentrating mightily on him. He had been interesting before, but if her father hated him, he must be important.

"What's dad got against you?"

"Ask him," said Jerry coldly.

"Something awful?"

"Ask him," repeated Jerry, and set his jaw. She found herself, in an instant, looking into an entirely different face, and it took her breath. Then that metallic light passed away from his eyes. It was a marvelous change.

"Maybe—where—but where did you know him before?"

"Maybe he'll do the explaining," said Jerry calmly.

"Won't you even defend yourself?" cried Patricia.

"Defend myself?" Jerry said, and he smiled. "Why should I? Does your father do your thinkin' for you?"

"Of course not."

"Then you can make up your own mind about me out of what he says. I'll tell you this, though: He thinks I'm a cross between a fool and a rattlesnake."

"But——" said the girl. She stopped, with her lips parted, and it was easy to see that she was troubled.

"I won't keep you," Jerry said suddenly, and dropped his hand from the bridle. "Good-by."

She avoided his outstretched hand.

"Why 'good-by'?" she said.

"Your dad won't let you see me again."

"I'm not a baby," said Patricia hotly.

Jerry smiled.

"What do you mean by smiling?" asked the girl.

He shrugged his shoulders, and suddenly she had slipped her hand into his. "Adieu!" she called with a delightful accent, and went galloping down the beach.

He stood watching her for a long time; but when, as she reached the point of the beach, she looked back, he had turned and was striding up the hill. "I wonder what he meant by that smile?" she repeated, and checked her horse to a hand gallop. It was easier to think at that pace.

To be concluded in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

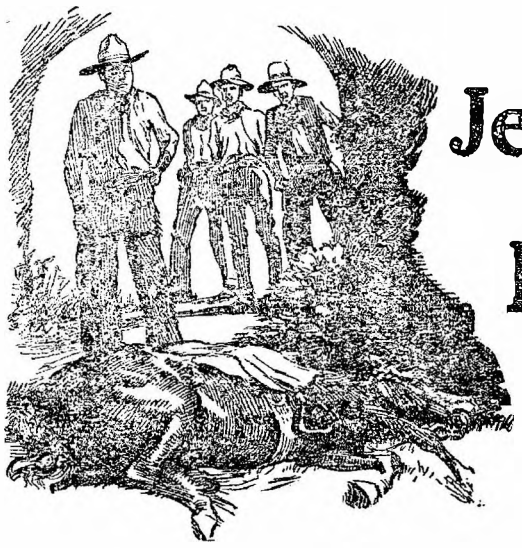
PICTURESQUE, PROSPEROUS, BUT PLACID

FARMERS whose lives have been one monotonous struggle with soil and seasons in Florence, Kansas, have recently become wealthy. Florence is now the newest oil town at the northwestern end of the great mid-continent field that in the South produced Burkburnett and other weird and picturesque communities. But oil cannot make Florence lurid—maybe it's the Kansas temperament. An industrious excitement prevails; the town is wildly paving its streets and trying to house the people who continue to flock there. The old feed store on the main street has been given a stylish brick front, and a modest restaurant with tinted walls and shining tables is functioning in it. The shop for which the village shoemaker paid a nominal rent has been secured by a soft-drink dispenser for seventy-five dollars per. Men are sleeping in their automobiles along the curbs, because they cannot get rooms.

The prairie roundabout has suddenly become a forest of derricks. The big well on the Urschel lease, which stood alone some little time ago, is now surrounded by some forty derricks, their new lumber shining like gold. It is estimated that one woman farmer in the vicinity, who before found it difficult to make both ends meet, now has an income of from five hundred to a thousand dollars a day.

MILLIONAIRES OVERNIGHT

THE Creek Indians of Oklahoma not so long ago were compelled by the government to accept allotments of land. Formerly the land had been held in common by the tribe, but legislation forced each Creek Indian to take a small tract of land. Some of the Indians did not want to accept the land, but it was cut up just the same. Indians were placed on small farms, some of which never had a plow turned on them. Then a startling thing happened. Oilmen came along and leased some of the land. Oil gushed forth abundantly; a mineral yield brought in so much money that the Indians forgot all about food crops. Just how many Creek Indians have become millionaires cannot be estimated exactly, but the Creek Indians still own their own, and their golden income shows no signs of coming to an end.



Jerry Peyton's Notched Inheritance

by George Owen Baxter

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

JERRY PEYTON inherits a revolver called "The Voice of La Paloma," which his father obtained from a rival bandit whom he had double-crossed. Although Jerry keeps the peace at Sloan, the natives expect him some day to become as lawless as his father.

His land being mortgaged, Jerry has little left besides The Voice of La Paloma and a buckskin mare, of which he is very fond. Through neglect on the part of his neighbor, Van Zandt, the mare dies; Jerry gives Van Zandt a beating and threatens to exact full payment at a later date.

When Van Zandt discovers that his chestnut horse is missing, Jerry is suspected, and a posse sets out to capture him. Sheriff Sturgis goes alone and runs down Pat Langley, the thief, a man against whom he has a deep-rooted grievance. The posse later arrives with Jerry, who is unconscious from their ill treatment; he is released and medical aid procured.

While Jerry is recovering, the sheriff concocts a plan whereby peace will be maintained at Sloan. Langley is to rob Jerry of The Voice of La Paloma, hand the gun to the sheriff, and then leave for his home in St. Hilaire. The sheriff knows that Jerry will go after the man he thinks has his inheritance, and, in this way, vengeance will be diverted and Sloan will be rid of a shady character. Jerry leaves Sloan as anticipated and traces Langley to St. Hilaire, but Langley prevents Jerry from taking immediate action. Later, Jerry meets Don Manuel Guzman, an enemy of Langley, and he unfolds a plan whereby Langley will be forced to give Jerry a fair opportunity to shoot him. This scheme begins to unfold when Jerry interrupts Patricia Langley's morning dip on the beach.

CHAPTER XX.

KISMET.

HE did not see Don Manuel until they came to the breakfast table together. The cloth was white and crisp, and against it there were some red-hearted melons so sweet and rich that one ate them with lemon. Jerry occupied himself strictly with business, and half of his melon was gone before Señor Guzman spoke.

"You had a long chat?"

"Yes," said Jerry.

There was not another interchange of words until breakfast was ended. The Spaniard employed every second of the silence to the full.

"Well," he said afterward, "she is delightful, no?"

"She?" echoed Jerry vaguely.

"No?" insisted the Spaniard.

"I don't know," Jerry replied.

"Hmm," said Don Manuel. He added: "It is unfortunate that you don't like her."

"Who said I didn't like her?" Jerry exclaimed. "She's—lovely." He said after a moment: "And the daughter of Langley."

"Well," declared Don Manuel after a moment, "you are a gay fellow."

"Do I look gay?" asked Jerry.

"Ah, yes," said Don Manuel steadily.

"Well," said Jerry, "I'm sad as the dickens."

"Tush! That is too bad. What makes it?"

"I dunno." He looked wistfully at Don Manuel. "It's something like seasickness," said Jerry.

"The melon—yes," nodded the other.

"No," said Jerry, feeling for the place. "It's not my stomach. It's higher. It's an ache." He stood up. "It—it makes me feel as if I can't breathe in here!"

"We'll step out in the patio."

"Señor," called Jerry.

They were in the door; the tall old man looked down at Jerry, and his eyes burned deep in his head.

"Why did you send me down to see that girl?"

"To amuse you, my young friend."

"Don Manuel," said the American, "you're a clever devil."

"You are profane," Don Manuel remarked dryly, "and yet in a way you honor me."

"She asked me to call," Jerry went on. "I told her that her father would never let me in his house."

"What?" cried Don Manuel, and his bony hand dug into the arm of Jerry.

"I told her that he hated me, but she seemed to have an idea that her father might be wrong."

"Kismet!" whispered Señor Guzman, and snapped his fingers loudly.

"What's that?"

"You were inspired," said the Spaniard.

"She will never come again," Jerry replied and laid his hand against his throat.

"On the third morning," said Don Manuel. "And now, come. We will walk together."

They went again to that highest hilltop which overlooked all the valley and all the coast; sometimes, from beneath the screen of green and out of the shadows, white spots showed in the sun, the laborers at work on the plantation. "My father, my grandfather, my great-grandfather," said Señor Guzman, "owned all this land as far as you can see; and I am the fourth in the line."

Jerry looked at him, and saw at what a price he retained his calm. "I'm sorry," said Jerry.

"For what?" asked Don Manuel.

"Because you lost it all."

"It shall be mine again," said Señor Guzman.

The American said nothing.

"It is that which keeps me alive," the Spaniard continued. "And the Lord sustains me to regain my heritage. I shall tell you. I am no longer a man; I am a ghost, with a purpose in place of life."

A chilly conviction came to Jerry that he had to do with a madman; that explained the fire in the eyes of the old man, if nothing else.

"It was long ago that I lay on my deathbed," said the Spaniard, "and while I lay dying the Señor Langley came to me. He had loaned me money; he came to have the debt discharged, and he said that since I was ill he would not burden me with matters of this world—the priest waited even then to give me absolution. The Señor Langley was thoughtful; he had only some papers which I must sign and then forget about all debts. I had strength to hold a pen and therefore I signed."

"Ah," said Jerry, and his voice rattled in his throat.

"But the good priest," continued the Spaniard, "had heard what Langley said to me. When he came in he warned me; I looked at my copies of the papers I had signed and saw that of all my estates I now owned only a tiny corner. A weight fell upon me; I lost my senses.

"When I awakened, they were making ready to prepare my body for burial, but I had slept and I had new strength. As I lay there, I knew that I had been

spared to get my vengeance. And when after I had waited these many years, in quiet, I saw you, my son, I knew that He had put a weapon in my hand." He added: "The heat of the morning begins. Let us go into the house."

Over the valley a mist of the day's heat was beginning to rise. It thickened, and when Jerry looked back as they went through the trees, all the rich acres behind him and below were as mysteriously clouded as a reflection in a troubled water.

The next morning he went to the hilltop and sat on the rocks, waiting and watching; nothing came up the beach, and though he remained there until the heat burned his face, there was nothing to be seen but the glare of the sand and the shining water, and some gulls balancing in the northeast wind.

On the morning after that he went again to the hilltop, but there was nothing to be seen, although he waited this time until his eyes ached from peering up and down the sand. He went back to the house, whistling.

"My son," said the Spaniard, "I am happy when I see that you have learned a cheerful patience."

"Are you?" Jerry replied, and smiled with childlike sweetness upon the old man. "Whisky, Don Manuel."

The host clapped his hands twice, and in haste two little negroes came running. "Whisky for Señor Peyton," said the Spaniard, "and in haste."

All the time that Jerry sat, looking into space, Don Manuel walked up and down the patio. He wore his long cloak, as usual, although the day was stifling hot. And when Jerry looked at the cadaverous face, pale as a lichen, he felt that there was truly no good warm blood in the body of the Don. "A horse," Jerry said, for the hired horse on which he had ridden had been returned long since to the stables by one of Don Manuel's men. Now the Spaniard clapped his hands again.

"The bay gelding," the host ordered; whereat the man started and needed a second signal and a frown before he withdrew. There was a long pause after that, with Jerry drinking steadily and alone, until four men came leading a bay horse. They led him as if he were a devil, and in truth Jerry saw a devil in the eye of the gelding. He rose and grinned once at his host; Don Manuel bowed, and Jerry vaulted into the saddle.

There followed a terrible five minutes in which the bay became a bolt of red fire, twisting into such odd shapes as only fire can assume, shaking himself from knot to knot; most of the time he was in the air, and when he struck the earth it was only to jar it and spring aloft again. At the end of the five minutes he dropped his tail, put up his head, and cantered softly down the hill. A chorus of silence followed him from the negroes and from Don Manuel; but Jerry rode straight on. The whisky was sending a genial warmth through his brain and heart, and there was a singular tingling in his finger tips. Jerry recognized that sensation, from old habit, as the signal of an approaching storm.

He rode straight across the island to the town of St. Hilaire and across St. Hilaire to the house of the author. It was nearly noon, but the author was not yet up. Jerry moved two servants from the door and entered.

"Hello!" greeted the author, after being lifted through the air and replaced on his bed. "What the devil?"

"Jeremiah Peyton," said the other.

The consul rubbed his other eye open.

"You must have a pretty bad town here," said Jerry.

"Why?" the consul inquired.

"They give you work that keeps you up all night," said Jerry with sympathy.

He bound a wet towel around the author's head.

The consul found himself able to see, and therefore leaned out the window and gasped for breath. Presently he stood up again.

"Isn't that Don Manuel's Lightning that I see down there in the street?"

"No, that's my horse."

"Good heavens," said the consul, clasping his head, which seemed to reel with a thought, "did you ride him here?"

"I asked you about the town," Jerry replied. "How bad is it—to keep you up all night."

"It isn't so bad," and the consul smiled. "I'm glad to see you riding Don Manuel's horse. How are things going."

"Fair."

"Climbed any fences? Busted through any?"

"No; I'm diggin' under one, though. About this town——"

"It's a quiet place," and again the consul sighed. "But I ran into a bunch of Irishmen last night; I wanted to go home but they wanted to stay out. I didn't feel like hurting their feelings. You know?"

"Sure," Jerry agreed, "how many are there? I like Irishmen."

"Three," said the consul. "They're at the hotel. They have some Irish whisky, too."

"Only three?" said Jerry sadly. "What do they look like?"

"Their names are Sweeney, Murphy, and Smythe," the consul replied. "They're all over six feet and built right. Why do you ask?"

"You'll hear later," Jerry retorted, and went on his way.

Later he stood at a door of the hotel.

"Are you Sweeney, Murphy, or Smythe?" said Jerry.

"Maybe I'm all three," said the black-headed man at the door.

"Maybe you ain't," Jerry remarked, who lost his sense of grammar when he was happy.

"What the devil is it to you?" asked the black-headed man.

"I've just come from the consul," said Jerry, "and he says you're three fellows —with good whisky."

The black-headed man did not hear the last part of the sentence. He reached swiftly through the door and dragged Jerry into the room by the nape of the neck; and when he was fairly inside: "Now, son, talk sharp. Who told you you were a man?"

"My mamma told me," said Jerry, and smote him upon the root of the nose.

Two large men in pajamas rose on either side of the room out of their beds and watched the fight. Afterward they laid out the black-headed man on the carpet and fell upon Jerry from both sides. The tingle had left the tips of his fingers and was in his shoulders. He hit hard and fast to get it out of him.

Finally he sat on a table, looking at his knuckles, which were raw.

"Who told you to come here?" queried the black-headed man, sitting up suddenly on the carpet.

"The author," said Jerry.

"Oh," the black-headed man ejaculated. "I had an idea that he moved in the best circles."

He added: "Why don't you have a drink?"

"I was waiting for you to pour it," said Jerry.

"Lift my friends off me," the black-headed man requested, for Jerry had made a heap of the three.

Jerry made a way for the black-headed man.

"Are you feeling better?" asked the Irishman.

"Lots."

"It's this climate," commented the Irishman. "It makes a man nervous in the fists. Here's to you."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE RISING SUN.

THAT day was a joyous oblivion, at the end of which Lightning carried Jerry softly and safely out to the house of Don Manuel. The Don came out and superintended while three of his boys carried Jerry into the house and put him to bed. Afterward he sat up all night beside the bed, listening to Jerry snore. At the first coming of gray light he wakened his guest. "It's the third morning," said Don Manuel. "Get up."

And Jerry rose like a lark, singing. "She's going to come," he said to Don Manuel.

"I know," the Spaniard replied. "I was twenty, once."

Jerry had hardly reached the top of the hill when he saw her come riding around the point of the beach and he ran down to meet her. He stood panting and holding her hand while he said: "It's taken three days to get you back, but it's worth the wait."

Then he saw that she was not in a bathing suit, but was dressed formally for riding, with shining leather boots and trousers and a derby hat. There was only one touch of color, and that was a crimson blossom at her waist.

"You were seen in St. Hilaire yesterday," said the girl coldly.

"It's a fine little town, isn't it?"

"I suppose what's left of it is," she observed.

"I was killing time until you came again," explained Jerry.

"Hmm," said Patricia, but his smile was irresistible.

"Why aren't you going to swim this morning?" asked Jerry.

"Because I have a sore foot," answered Patricia gloomily. She stared accusingly at him. "I cut it on a piece of coral at the other beach yesterday."

"Yep. None of the other beaches are any good."

She remembered something, and said, flushing: "Were you so sure I'd come back?"

"I knew you couldn't stand the mud and the coral rocks," said Jerry. "Won't you get off your horse?"

"I have to go right on," said Patricia.

"We could walk the horse the way you're going. It would rest him; besides, he looks sort of winded."

She glanced sharply at him, but he was looking only at the horse. "All right," said Patricia, and got down from the saddle. First she scanned all the hilltops swiftly.

"Are they following you?" asked Jerry.

"Why?"

"To find out if you see me."

"Do you think I've come out this morning just to see you?"

"Sure," said Jerry. "Take my arm."

The sand was deep, and she took his arm, but it was only to steady herself until she could find the right thing to say. "I think you'd better leave St. Hilaire," she said.

"I'm going to," Jerry replied.

"Aren't you happy here?" asked Patricia suddenly, unreasonably.

"Are you?" asked Jerry.

"Why do you say that?"

"You have big shadows under your eyes. You haven't been sleeping."

"Insomnia is an old trouble of mine," answered the girl, watching him. She sighed when he did not look back.

"I'm glad your foot doesn't bother you in the sand," said Jerry.

"There's a bandage on it," Patricia said instantly.

"Let's stop walking."

"Why?" But she paused with him.

"I'll tell you; the crunching of the sand starts to breaking in on what I think."

"They must be light thoughts," the girl commented idly.

"They're still thoughts," said Jerry, lowering his voice.

"Go on," Patricia urged.

"It's not a story I'm telling," Jerry replied, frowning. He began to look straight into her eyes.

"I have to go home," said Patricia suddenly.

"You don't."

"How do you know?"

"The sun isn't up."

Patricia swallowed. "You can't dictate, you know," she said.

"I'm studying up, though," answered Jerry.

"What d'you mean?"

"Why are you afraid?" asked Jerry in return.

"I'm not afraid."

"You look pretty white."

All at once she was leaning back against the shoulders of the cream-colored horse, and he turned his head and looked at her with his big, bright eyes. "I'm unhappy," said Patricia, with her gloved hand at her breast.

It was a glove of some rough, soft leather; at the wrist wrinkled into many folds, and it was loose over the hand. It fascinated Jerry; he pored over it with a sort of sad delight. For one thing, it was a deep yellow, and the color seemed to him pleasant next to the crimson blossom.

"Is it connected up with me?" asked Jerry.

"I don't know," said Patricia.

"Are you kind of hollow inside?" inquired Jerry.

"Yes. How do you know?"

"Is it something like seasickness?"

"Yes, but worse; it—it stays with me."

"I know," said Jerry.

"What'll I do?"

"I tried whisky. I don't know what you'll do."

He said more thoughtful than ever: "I feel the same way. I'll tell you something. I thought that when I saw you again I'd be a lot better right away. But I'm worse."

"I thought it was this beach," said Patricia. "I'm so used to seeing the sunrise here."

"But it isn't?"

"It isn't," said Patricia.

They stood close, looking miserably at each other.

"I'm never to see you again," said Patricia.

"That's your dad's work."

"He'll send me away from St. Hilaire if he ever finds out that I saw you again."

"Doesn't like me, does he?"

She said slowly: "I think he's afraid of you. He was never afraid of any other man I ever heard of."

"Well, if you leave, I'll leave too."

"Would you follow me?"

"Of course."

"It wouldn't do any good. If you followed me, dad would do you harm."

"Does he tell you why he hates me?"

"He says I couldn't understand."

There was another silence. A gull screamed far away, and the wind blew the sound lazily down to them.

"Will you come out here once in a while?" said Jerry.

"If I can. Suppose dad has seen me here."

"But you'll come?"

"Yes."

"Shake on that."

He took her gloved hand; at the touch, something leaped from his heart to his brain and cast a mist across his eyes. Vaguely, he saw that her eyes were wide and that her lips were parted.

"It's a bargain now," said Jerry.

"Of course."

"You have to come, you see."

"I'll come. The sun is coming up, Jerry."

"Good-by."

He helped her into the saddle.

"Wait a minute," said Jerry.

"Why?"

"Keep on looking out to sea. I'll tell you later."

She smiled faintly, and then looked out to sea.

"All right," said Jerry. "You can go now."

"What was it? Why did you make me do that?"

"I saw the sunrise hit your face. It made you look pretty fine."

"Oh, Jerry!"

"What's the matter?"

"Good-by!"

He stood back, dazed, and saw her whip the cream-colored horse. He switched his tail in protest, and then sprang away down the beach.

Jerry watched her out of sight and then went up the hillside more moodily than ever.

"Well?" asked the Spaniard, on the hilltop.

"Were you here all the time?"

"Of course, my son."

"Listen to me, pardner. In your religion you go to a priest once in a while and get a lot of things off your chest, don't you?"

"Of course there is the confession."

"Hmm," said Jerry. "And you don't particularly encourage other gents to hang around at that time?"

"There must be no third man there, of course."

"Well, keep away from this beach round about sunrise, Don Manuel, will you?"

"Ah," said Señor Guzman.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE LETTER.

A MESSENGER came to the house of Don Manuel that day before noon and brought a little envelope addressed in a feminine small hand to Mr. Jeremiah Peyton. Jerry opened it and read as follows:

MY DEAR MR. PEYTON: You will be delighted to learn that I have at last come to agree with your viewpoint; and, if you will, I shall meet you on the beach, below the point which bounds the beach of Don Manuel, this evening after moonrise. There is a full moon, and the light should be pleasant, since we have no reading to do.

JAMES P. LANGLEY.

All the letters were formed with a very fine line, and drawn out with the most exquisite precision. One felt a certain mechanical perfection, looking at this letter. It was rather like a printed form. Jerry held it close to his eyes, and still he could not see a waver or a scratch.

"A steady hand," said Jerry, and went to his room.

He remained there all day. He felt that he must bring his gun to the point of absolute perfection, and therefore he took it completely apart, oiled and cleaned it, and oiled it again with so delicate a film that it left the tip of the finger clean when one touched the mechanism. The trigger had grown stiff, and he lightened the pull. Then he went through his regular routine of exercise—it had been three days since he had performed, and he found himself stale and rusty. It was not until the nerves along his arm would jump like a twist of lightning that he was content. All the time Don Manuel was walking up and down upon the hilltop, outside the window, a gaunt and ominous form.

Later on, Jerry went out and joined him. They did not speak a word for an hour, but each read the mind of the other. Jerry had a very small dinner, for, as Hank Peyton used to say, "a full stomach makes a slow hand," and when there was a pale semicircle of light over the eastern sea, Jerry said good-by to his host and went down from the hill to the beach.

He was in time, on rounding the point of the beach, to see a stream of silver come from the east across the ocean, which was very still; that light, at the same instant, picked a figure out of the gloom in front of Jerry, made the beach all white, and set the shadow

of the figure walking over the white sand; a solitary gull wavered low down against the sky.

"You are in perfect accord with me," said the dispassionate voice of Langley.

"Thanks," said Jerry.

The other paused at a distance of some ten paces.

"Am I too close?"

"Makes no difference to me," said Jerry cheerfully. "Close or far off."

"Before we begin," Langley said courteously, "I wish to compliment you on your scheme. It worked beautifully, as you see." Jerry saw the gleam of the white teeth beneath the shadow of the mustache. "The girl is under twenty and she has less sense than I thought."

"Are you done talking about her?" asked Jerry coldly.

"Certainly."

"Begin."

"Suppose," said Langley, "that in order to get a perfectly even start——"

"By all means," Jerry replied.

"We stand with our arms folded, then. We wait, say, for the next scream of the gull, and then both go for our guns. Is that satisfactory?"

"Excellent."

They stood rigid, their arms crossed, their shadows lying long and stiff on the white beach. Once a bird called from the inland; but neither of them stirred. Then came the cry of the gull. The bird had changed its course, and shooting straight over toward the land, it uttered a clear cry, hoarse as a sea wind; and the shadows on the beach leaped into action.

The arm of Langley shot straight out, for his gun had been worn under his coat, and in folding his arms he had simply settled his fingers about the butt. He flung his arm out, and the revolver exploded; but in the surety of the first shot, or because his arm swung too wide with its impetus, the bullet missed—it merely shaved through the coat of Jerry beneath the armpit as his right arm darted down and came up again, with a flash of metal. Before the finger of Langley could press his trigger the second time the gun spoke in the hand of Jerry. There was a loud clang as it struck metal, then a brief arch of light as the revolver was torn from the hand of the older man and flung away. He leaped after it with a moan of anxiety; but when he scooped it up he saw Jerry standing with his own weapon hanging at his side.

"I'm sorry I didn't get you the first time," Jerry said calmly. "I can't shoot again."

Langley came to him walking like a cat, so soft and so light.

"I ought to blow your head off while you stand there like a fool," he said. "But I'll give you another chance. The next call of the gull is the signal."

"The gull's gone," said Jerry. "Besides, this is the end of it."

"Are you yellow?" Langley asked with a curse.

"It's out of our hands," Jerry replied solemnly. "Don't you see, Langley? You miss me. You play a dirty trick, getting your gun in your hand before the signal comes—even then you miss me, and I gather it's about the first time in your life that you've done such poor work. I sent my slug right down the alley and—it hits your gun. It knocks it out of your hand without even breaking the skin. Can you understand that?"

"I understand that you're backing down," the other replied. Jerry could see the heavy mustache bristling.

"You aren't cut out to be my meat," said Jerry calmly. "You aren't my size, pardner."

Langley stood without answer. His anger was making him pant.

"You're fat in the arm and fat in the head," went on Jerry, "and you can't stand up to me. Look me in the eye, Langley, and admit it!"

"We stay here," said the other, "till one of us is drilled."

"Go home, Langley. I can't pull a gun on you again."

The older man began to work at his throat. He seemed to be stifling.

"I don't know why I don't shoot you without argument," he said.

"You're a good deal of a dog," Jerry remarked calmly, "but you can't quite do that. Worse luck for you, Langley."

"By heaven," said Langley, "you refuse to fight, then?"

"I was set for the draw," said Jerry. "I'd have smiled if I drilled you the first shot, partner; if I pulled my gun again, I'd be shooting her father. Is that straight in your head? I'd be murdering her father because I know you haven't a chance."

"Is it possible?" cried Langley. "My heavens, am I listening to this and doing nothing?"

"I can't fight you," said Jerry, "so you've got a right over me. I'll give you my word not to see Patricia again."

"Your word?" said Langley eagerly. "Jerry, there's a touch of sound, clean sense in you!"

"Keep away!" said Jerry. "Stand off from me! I'll not see her until I've gotten rid of your objections. Good night."

"Nothing but a bullet will get rid of them," called Langley.

Don Manuel saw him come in, and when Jerry went by, the Spaniard shrugged his shoulders and sat down again, as one prepared for a long wait. But Jerry went to his room and wrote to Sheriff Edward Sturgis, at Sloan.

DEAR ED.: I'm here at the other end of the world, pretty near; and I suppose you're glad to have me here. I don't know how long I'll stick here; I'm at the end of a trail, you see, but a new one may begin most any day.

I'm writing this to ask a favor of you. You know most of the old boys who used to make Sloan the center for their celebrating. In those times did you ever hear of a fellow named J. P. Langley, middle-sized, with black hair and eyes? He talks like the East, but he walks like a Westerner, and he handles a gun like an old-timer. I've an idea that if you look back into your mind you might unearth a pretty sizable record for him, and if you do, I could use it.

The point is, he's grown proud lately, and somebody ought to remind him of his past. And I can tell by his eye that he has one.

He's fixed well down here. He has millions, they say, and his dugout looks like it. Also, he has a daughter.

Well, good-by, Ed. Here's wishing you better luck than you ever wished me.

And say, Ed, don't you owe me a favor because I lifted myself and a lot of trouble out of your county? Yours,

JEREMIAH PEYTON.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SHERIFF.

THE thing which bothered Jerry more than anything else during the next ten days, or so, was really the conduct of Don Manuel. He knew without a word being spoken about it, that Jerry had met Langley; he also knew that neither of them had been killed in that meeting; and yet Señor Guzman remained perfectly equable. He protested with something close to tears when Jerry declared his intention of leaving the house and going to the hotel in St. Hilaire; so Jerry stayed on. He was left almost entirely to his own devices. In the silent household of Don Manuel he came and went when he pleased, and the servants obeyed him with as much eagerness as they obeyed their master. And Jerry noted this singular fact: that no servant in the Guzman household accepted gifts. He used to think of this, and then remember the quarters he had tossed to the men at Langley's place. Indeed, if he had been a nervous wreck seeking absolute retirement, Don Manuel would have been giving him a perfect vacation and rest cure; but Jerry represented some hundred and eighty or ninety pounds of

iron hard muscle without a nerve in it, and the inactivity ate into him day by day.

For seven mornings he had risen and gone to the hilltop from which he could look down, before sunrise, on the beach. And for four mornings she came regularly before sunrise and stayed there until the day was well begun. But Jerry never went down to her. By the very fact that she was allowed to come out in the morning he knew, with a melancholy pleasure, that her father was trusting in his own promise not to see the girl. But on the fifth, sixth, and seventh mornings she did not come at all; and finally Jerry gave up his trips.

It was ten days after the letter that Sheriff Edward Sturgis arrived. He came in as much of a hurry as if he had ridden barely five miles and must turn back as soon as his horse was breathed. He, at least, had made no change in costume to suit the change in climate. He had his ancient felt hat, his shapeless trousers, his remarkable sack of a coat, always unbuttoned, just as he had worn them in Sloan. And when Jerry saw the sheriff standing in the entrance to the patio, he was swept directly back to the little town. He had connected Edward Sturgis with the law so long that he immediately forgot all about the letter; indeed, it seemed quite impossible that the sheriff should have come in answer to any written appeal. So he said as he took the stubby hand of Sturgis: "What's the matter, Ed? Do they want me back in Sloan?"

"Nothin' particular," said the sheriff, and his bright little eyes surveyed every inch of Jerry in a split-second glance. "I ain't heard any special mournin' because you're away, Jerry."

The latter smiled faintly.

"Come in and sit yourself down, Ed. I'm some glad to see you."

He led the way to one of the tables in the patio; at his direction, cold drinks and strong drinks were brought, while the sheriff sat back and fanned himself with his hat and looked admiringly about on the coolness and upon Jerry.

"Kind of to home here, ain't you?" he commented.

"Old Spaniard runs this dump," said Jerry, who had forgotten to wonder at his own relations with the Don. "He's a pal of mine. Sort of took me in when I blew down into these parts. But come out with it, Ed. What do you want me for?"

"I don't want you," said the sheriff gently. He finished a drink, and continued to look about him. "This is a rum place, Jerry."

"But if you don't want me, who does?" asked Jerry.

"Durned if I know," replied the sheriff frankly. "I don't know of anybody that hankers after you, particular. Why?"

"You haven't come here to take me back?" Jerry inquired, sitting back in his chair with a sigh of relief.

"Certainly not, Bud." The sheriff grinned. "Nothin' pleases me more than to have you do your plantin' of dead men outside my hang-out. Well, I'm glad you're fixed comfortable."

He continued to fan himself, always looking about him. He was one of those men who discover interesting details no matter where they may be. And his shoulders were so humped with riding a horse and sitting at a desk that when he looked around he had to move his head in hitches, so to speak.

"Not bad," said Jerry, still looking narrowly at the sheriff. "I hope you're not trying to put something over on me, Ed."

"What makes you ask that?"

"I dunno," said Jerry. He leaned back in his chair again, with one hand behind his head—but his right hand was always free, always unemployed—with the finger tips continually tapping lightly on something. No matter in how per-

fect a state of quiescence he might be, that right hand remained alive, as though it were controlled by a separate intelligence. All of this the sheriff noted.

"You're always set for something, ain't you, Jerry?"

"That's where you're all wrong," said Jerry. "I'm never set—I'm just sort of expectin'."

"Oh, all right," and Sturgis grinned. "Put it that way, then."

"I'm glad you understand," Jerry said. "This is pretty peaceful country, but I believe in goin' prepared for war."

"Get that out of your head, Jerry. I'm not down here gunning for you. I'm pretty smooth, maybe, but I don't drink with a man I want to get."

"I know that, Ed. But tell me straight, hasn't your being down here got——"

"Got something to do with you? Well, maybe it has. Maybe it hasn't."

"Take your time," said Jerry. "I hate to rush a man. Have another drink. You weren't interested in what I wrote about Langley, were you?"

"I seen what you said about him."

"Know him?"

"I dunno. What's he look like? Oh, I remember you told me what he was like. Well, I'd like to look him over."

"I can't take you over to see him, Ed. Him and me, we had a little falling out. In a word, he's a skunk, Ed."

"You don't say," murmured the sheriff conversationally. He settled himself to hear a story.

"He must have millions," said Jerry. "But he made a flying trip up to Chambers City on some queer sort of business, and on the way he took it into his head that he wanted The Voice of La Paloma. Somebody must have told him about it while he was going th[illegible]gh. Or else he was an old-timer in those parts and knew all about it already. Anyway, he stuck me up for it when I was helpless with my wrists all bunged up. I took his trail; and here I am. But the way he rode that country up home made me think he was an old-timer here; so I wrote to you to see if you knew his record."

"Have you met up with him?"

"Twice."

"And you're both still healthy—up and around?"

Jerry flushed.

"You must be kind of out of practice, Jerry."

"The first time he wouldn't pull his gun, Ed. The second time—well, I hit his gun with my slug the first shot and then——"

"Well——"

"I dunno. We just sort of parted, Ed."

"Is he good?"

"Fastest I ever saw. But he tried a crooked stunt. It spoiled his aim. That's why I'm here chinning with you."

"For a boy," said Sturgis, "you're a cool kid. I sort of like you, Jerry. What about this girl?"

The question came so suddenly that Jerry winced. "What girl?" he said.

"The one you talked about in your letter."

"What did I say in the letter?" inquired Jerry, dazed.

"That you were out of your head about Langley's daughter."

"Did I say that? I thought—well, I can't answer you, Ed."

"The girl spoiled your play with Langley, is that it?" asked the sheriff.

"How d'you mean?"

"What's she like?" asked the sheriff suddenly.

"You mean what does she look like?"

"Yep."

Jerry raised his head and studied the dobie wall. His restless right hand was still, and the sheriff noted. "Suppose," said Jerry, "that you been on a party and your head is hot, and your mouth

full of ashes—well, you step out into the morning and a cool wind hits your face——"

"Is she like that?" the sheriff inquired.

But Jerry was still absent-mindedly studying the wall. "Suppose you been riding the desert," he went on slowly, "and you drop out of the mountains into a valley full of fruit trees, and spring; and you ride along with the blossoms dropping around you; and the birds fightin' in the tops of the trees and——"

"Is she like that?" asked the sheriff with increasing emphasis.

"Suppose," said Jerry, "that you been playing poker, and the luck's against you, and you step out into the night and look up and see how still the sky is with all the stars close down——"

"Oh, Lord," the sheriff exclaimed without heat.

"What's the matter?" said Jerry, looking dazed again.

"Do you see much of her?"

"Her father's against her seeing me, you know."

"So——"

"She came down for a while where we used to meet. But I couldn't fight it out with the old boy—he's her father. Put a mist over his eyes and they're about the same as her eyes, see?"

"Hmm!" said the sheriff.

"I couldn't fight it out with him, so I didn't have any right to go sneaking around seeing his daughter. So I promised him that I wouldn't talk to her any more."

The sheriff started violently. Jerry looked at him in surprise, but the sheriff was only crossing his legs, which was a considerable feat, owing to the size of his stomach and the shortness of the legs.

"Well, Ed, the odds were sort of against me. I think he's a crook. But I have no proof. I want to be able to go around and talk straight to him. I want to be able to say: 'I haven't a cent and I've been a rough one, but I've been clean. You've got a fortune, but you're crooked. What you say about your daughter doesn't make the slightest difference to me!'"

"I follow you," said the sheriff. He added with his characteristic suddenness: "Does the girl miss you, Jerry?"

"I don't know, Ed."

"She came down to your meeting place even after you'd stopped going there?"

"That doesn't mean anything. She likes to see the sun rise there."

"Hmm," said the sheriff. "Well, I don't suppose you could introduce me to this Langley?"

"Not without a troop of cavalry, Ed."

"I'm going out to look him over."

"I'll show you his house."

"You needn't mind. I located that before I came to see you."

"Come back here for the night, Ed. Don Manuel will be glad to see you. Particularly if you know anything about Langley's past. He's interested, too."

"Come back here?" echoed the sheriff vaguely. "Oh, yes. Sure. Good-by, Jerry."

CHAPTER XXIV.

END OF THE TRAIL.

LANGLEY was a strong believer in efficiency, and he knew that efficiency means a concentration of the executive authority in anything from a nation to a household. And therefore, shortly after their honeymoon ended, when his wife began a sentence with "I think——" he promptly answered: "My dear, you're much too nice to waste your pleasantness thinking. Hereafter I'll do your thinking for you." Mrs. Langley was one of those calm-eyed women who know how to look the truth in the face and smile. She saw her husband for the first time, really, but she smiled when she heard him say this. After that she was never

known to rebel against fate, and the word of Langley was fate in his household. Only of late, as Patricia grew into womanhood, there had been vague stirrings of revolt behind the calm eyes of his wife; and on this day the storm broke suddenly and without warning on the head of the rich man. She had placed herself between him and the door and lifted her head and told him that whether he willed it or not, her daughter was to be happy.

"And will you tell me," Langley replied, "what I'm grinding my heart out for if it isn't her happiness?"

"She's been in her room—and hardly out of it—for forty-eight hours," said Mrs. Langley.

"She's sick?" Langley asked, changing color.

"The doctor told you that."

"Fever," said Langley. "Nothing unusual at this season."

"The doctor is a fool." It was a strong word for her. It made even J. P. Langley stop—mentally—and look at her again. He had known long ago that she had little tenderness for him, but he had been content with knowing that he controlled her. Also she was decorative and knew how to make his guests happy; so that it came to him with a distinct shock, as he looked at her this evening, and discovered that she was very close to hating him. "The doctor is a fool," repeated his wife, as though she feared he had not heard.

"He is the best in St. Hilaire."

"She has a fever," said Mrs. Langley, "but it's a fever of longing, James!" She made a little gesture with her palm up, but Langley was thinking so hard and fast that he did not notice. It was a gross error, for when her hand fell back to her side it gathered into what was almost a fist. "She's in love," she added coldly.

"Give her quinine just the same," said Langley. "Give her quinine and rest. That'll do the work."

"Do you really intend to make her marry where you wish?" asked Mrs. Langley calmly.

"Of course I do. Good heavens, Mary, are you surprised by that?"

"And yet," she pursued, more to herself than to him, "she's more your child than she is mine." She added: "I think you're breaking her heart, James."

"Not in this century," and Langley chuckled. "They may be strained, but they don't break. It's out of date."

"Ah!" said his wife, and smiled to herself. It was growing to be a habit of hers, this inward smile, and it always maddened Langley. He stood rubbing his mustache, and smiling in jerks.

"There's one trouble with you, my dear," he said. "Ever since the first baby died——"

"James!" she cried faintly.

"I've got to say it," he persisted. "Ever since that, you've an idea that every man is a baby. By heavens, I think you're fond of this infernal snake in the grass without ever having seen him."

"I like what Patricia tells me about him. He has an honest way of talking."

"What makes you think that?"

"Because it's just a little foolish. She's told me all the silly things he's said at least ten times over. She sees nothing funny in them, James."

"This ends it," he said angrily. "I forbid you to talk to her about him, Mary."

"It's impossible for me to obey you," his wife replied.

He tried to speak, but could not. "Do you mean that?" he managed to say at last.

"Yes."

He jerked open the door and fled, for he was in a panic, and the thing he feared was himself. As he went downstairs, every servant he passed was a blow. He hated their faces, and to escape them, he fled into the night, down the road, and twisted off onto a

bypath until he stood in a place where the evening light filtered softly and coolly about him. There he stood still, and tried to arrange his thoughts.

"Pat," called a voice.

And the sheriff stepped out.

"You're losing the old quick eye," the sheriff said. "I made as much noise as a herd of yearlings in stubble, but you never heard me."

"What in the name of the devil are you doing here?"

"I've come down to see the other end of the joke I played on you in Sloan. Seems to have worked out, all right."

"I'll send your man back to you wrapped up in wood before he's a month older," Langley retorted. "I'd have done it long ago, but he refused to fight. Yellow."

"Mostly," said the sheriff, "you lie well. But now you're mad. Going back to that joke——"

"Confound you, Sturgis."

"Now, now," said the sheriff soothingly. "Ain't he a rough talker! I guess Jerry has sort of irritated you, Pat."

"I'll give you two minutes to talk sense and get out."

"That's plenty. I'll tell you, Pat. When I sicked Jerry onto you in Sloan, I sort of thought I was usin' one useless gent to wipe out another. Then I got a letter that made me think maybe I was wastin' a man's life to kill a snake. You bein' the snake. Back in Sloan I thought Jerry was jest a public danger. Now I c'n see he's just young. And all he needed was somethin' to tie to. Can you beat the bad luck that makes him tie to your daughter?"

"Is that bug in your fool head too?"

"You ain't even got a sense of humor left, have you, Pat?" said the sheriff, wondering. "Funny thing, I figure. When a man's crooked it's a sort of cancer. It starts with a little thing and eats all the good right out of him."

"I can't listen to your chatter any more, Sturgis. Finish and get off the place. I can't waste time on you here."

"So," went on the sheriff calmly, "I figured it this way: I'll go down and see what the boy amounts to now. And I come and what d'you think? Jerry's in love with your kid. Well, Pat, nothin' but a man-sized man can be in love with a girl the way he is with her. Now, it wouldn't be right to throw him away to kill a skunk. No, it wouldn't. I seen that. But look at me. You busted me up twenty years ago. I been just driftin' along, mostly no good. And now I see it's my job."

"Ah," said Langley, "I begin to understand. You've come and brought your gun, eh? You really think you can beat me to the draw, Ed?" He smiled almost in friendship on the sheriff.

"No," Sturgis went on. "I know you're faster and straighter. But always before I been figurin' on gettin' in the first shot and then comin' away clean of hurt. Now I see that my one chance to get you, Pat, is to soak up about three of your slugs while I plant one in your inwards. Is that straight?"

"So you're going to clean up, Ed?"

"Sure am, Pat."

"When I had that affair with your girl twenty years ago I had an idea that it would end this way—I'd have to wipe you off the slate. Yet in a way, Ed, I hate to do it, because——"

He had extended his left hand as he spoke, and now he raised his right hand. It came past his waistline carrying a revolver, and the explosion tore off the end of his last word. Flinching from that glint of metal, the sheriff had turned, drawing his own gun; so that the slug struck him across the chest and the weight of it toppled him to the ground. He would have fallen prone, helpless, had he not struck a tree trunk as he fell, and he slid in a bunch to the ground. He began raising his revolver.

As for Langley, he had paused to observe the effect of his shot, and now

he drove in another. It was meant for the forehead of the sheriff, but at that moment he raised his head back with a jerk, and the bullet crashed down through his breast. It sent a quiver through the sheriff, as though he shook with cold. His face seemed already dead, and his mouth was hanging wide, but the muzzle of his revolver, tilted and pointed up, and as Langley fired for the third time the sheriff's gun exploded, and the bullet struck Langley squarely between the eyes.

Afterward the sheriff lived long enough to crawl over to the fallen body.

"A good-lookin' man like him," said the sheriff, "had ought to make a good-lookin' stiff."

So he took the arms of Langley and folded them across his breast. And he closed the eyelids, and the open, horrified mouth.

"Now," said the sheriff, "I'll tell a man that was worth doin'. It makes him a picture."

He put his own back against the tree. Presently he felt his right hand growing cold, and looking down, he saw the revolver which he had never dropped from his fingers.

"Well, well," said the sheriff, "The Voice of La Paloma come in for the last word, after all!"

CHAPTER XXV.

EPILOGUE.

IT was a long time after this.

The United States consul of St. Hilaire sat on the front porch and three Irishmen sat around him. They had been drinking for some time, and there was still liquor before them. They had passed the stage of hilarity; they had reached the stage of solemnity. The consul had just finished a story and he was telling them about it.

"You see that boat?" he said.

A long, low, graceful white launch of comfortable width, was sliding up the bay. There happened to be no other boats in the bay except fishing smacks, tilting this way and that as they tacked to port; the wind was coming out from the land, and yet it allowed the murmur of the white boat's engine to come distinctly to the house of the consul.

"That, in fact," said the consul, "is him now."

The three Irishmen did three things. After standing up, one of them raised his hand to his nose, another touched an eye, the third caressed the angle of his jaw. They looked and looked until the yacht was far down the bay.

"That was Jerry standing on the poop," they said in one voice. "And was that his wife?"

"Sure."

"Well, then," said the three Irishmen, and sighed, "Patricia's gone!"

"It ought to be a good yarn," they added, turning to the consul.

"It's a good story," he admitted, "but there's a missing link. I still don't know whether he climbed the fence or busted it or mined it."

The three Irishmen made each their peculiar gestures.

"He probably used all the ways," they said. "He could do three things at once fairly well."

THE END.

POMONA'S PRIZE EGGPLANT

AN eggplant as big as a summer squash and weighing four and a half pounds was exhibited recently at the Pomona Chamber of Commerce. The eggplant was grown at Pomona, California, by Roy Hurr, and rivaled in size any seen at the State Fair in Sacramento. The eggplant was grown from a slip obtained from a Pomona gardener and horticulturist who recently shipped more than a million tomato plants to Colorado.

all over again on the right trail. Now, so you boys will know what this honor thing is, I'm putting you all on your honor not to pot me while I'm leaving town, but to give me a chance." And with that Red Spurk jabs his guns into their holsters and, turning his back on the crowd, rides away.

"Let him go? Sure we let him go. Didn't he put us on our honor—anyway, Red always was mighty quick on the draw.

METAL MINING IN CALIFORNIA

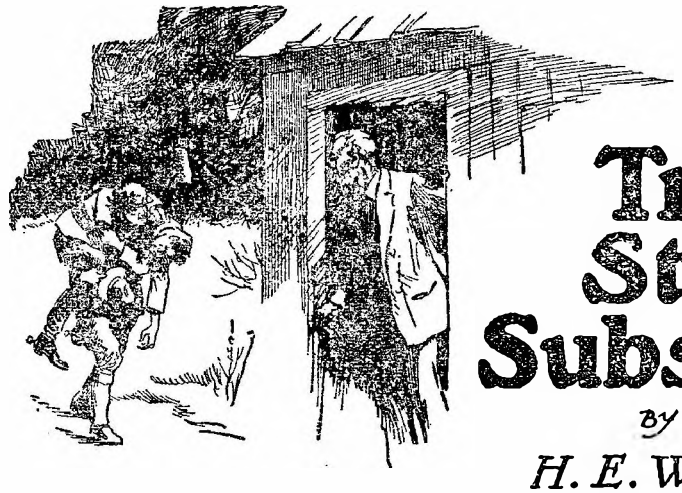
THE output of metals in California during the current year has fallen below the low production of 1919. The conditions in the metal-mining industries of the State during the first half of 1920 have been extremely untoward to the operators. The high cost of supplies and labor and the scarcity of skilled labor have materially curtailed, and in some instances entirely suspended, operations.

Most of the newly mined gold from California is sent to the United States mint and local smelters and refiners, who report from the mines of the State more than one million eight hundred thousand dollars in gold; this is a decrease of more than a million dollars for the same period in 1919. In 1918 gold production in California fell far behind the production of 1917, but in 1919 there was a perceptible recovery of the normal output. If the monthly receipts at the mints, smelters, and refineries for the last six months of the present year continue at the same rate as in the first six months, the total output in gold in 1920 will be considerably less than in the past year.

The production of silver in the State has been abnormally increased during the first half of the current year. This unusual increase in the output of silver is explained by the opening in 1919 of a newly discovered silver mine in San Bernardino County, just over the border of Kern County. Very few purely silver mines have ever been operated in California, and up to the present year most of the silver has been obtained as a by-product in the mining of gold, copper, and lead ores.

Many causes have contributed to the loss in gold production. Not the least, perhaps, has been the curtailment of operations in certain large mines on the mother lode and elsewhere, and the suspension of work entirely on a large number of mines. Many properties that were worked profitably under normal conditions continue to be operated at a loss.

At Grass Valley, the most productive quartz-mining district in the State, the larger mines are severely affected by a shortage of skilled miners. The Empire Mine, the most productive deep gold mine in the State, has made extensive improvements in 1920. Production at the North Star Mine has on the other hand, fallen below normal. At Jackson and Sutter Creek, in Amador County, the most productive district in the mother lode, the owners of the principal mines have been too busy unwatering their properties, to produce much of an output. The Morgan Mine in Calaveras County has recently been reopened, and its highly productive activities are a splendid omen for the future.



Trooper Stewart, Substitute

By

H. E. Williamson

CHAPTER I.

THE MOTTO OF THE SERVICE.

TAKE the horse, will you? Hello, Denis! Hello, dad! I've been riding for two days, and I'm done up—dead beat. Got to take the river trail from here—get a canoe ready for me, Denis—after—I—get some sl——"

The big man who had just swung from his saddle, tottered. His khaki coat and his blazoned saddle blanket proclaimed that he was of the Mounted.

Denis Stewart caught his trail-worn brother's figure. After a moment the other laughed and flung himself erect. Dugald Stewart, father of the two, was leading the horse to the shack stable behind the cabin.

"All right now, Denis," exclaimed "Big Ben" Stewart, stepping out with saddle-stiffened legs. "Give me two hours' sleep, will you? Then a bite to eat, and I'm off down the river."

"Whom are you after?" demanded Denis. Barely twenty-one, and three years younger than Big Ben, he was almost the equal of his brother in rugged strength.

His face, too, had the same tight-lipped, keen-eyed, efficient look, and the two brothers might easily have passed one for the other, save for the difference in clothes. Denis wore the rough garb of a homesteader. Ax work and paddling had widened his chest and shoulders almost incredibly.

"Tell you later," returned Big Ben, nodding as he strode into the cabin. "Too tired to talk—got to sleep—been ridin' seventeen hours an' half——"

He dropped limply into a bunk, and his voice droned off into a snore.

Denis drew off his brother's riding boots and then stood looking down at the recumbent figure. A year or two more, and he also hoped to wear that khaki coat, and that knotted revolver lanyard, and to win his spurs as constable of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police. But for this, the time was not yet.

The young fellow's ice-blue eyes softened in tenderness as he gazed at his brother. He, no less than Big Ben Stewart, was filled with the ideals of the service, the tales of daring and danger by plain, snow field, and river valley which made up the traditions of these troopers.

He knew the sternest tradition of that service—to never leave a duty undone. He dreamed of the day when he, like this brother of his, should be sent to

hunt down criminals and preserve the law; when he should set forth, and never return unless he brought his man.

For the Mounted has two laws, and the greatest: First, not to use a weapon except in the last extremity; second, to bring in the man wanted, though the hunt take weeks or months, though it lead into the ends of the earth. And the Canadian flag covers some far corners of earth, as men have found to their cost.

Denis knew that his brother was on a hunt of this kind—perhaps to spend months, to travel a thousand miles, to arrest some man who might have done no more than knock down his neighbor. But the law is the law.

Dugald Stewart limped into the cabin with a grunt at sight of his trooper son, and began to make ready some food. Denis, remembering his instructions, hastened down to the river and prepared a canoe. Into it he flung his brother's saddlebags, with sufficient rations of grub to carry a man north to Stockade Landing, the nearest Hudson Bay post.

Five years previously, Dugald Stewart, crippled by a falling tree, had come to Canada from northern California, bringing his two sons. After much searching, they had homesteaded on the upper waters of the Hay River—in Alberta—little-known and rough country, but promising in the extreme.

Big Ben was now stationed at Peace River Landing, seventy-five miles to the southeast. Enlistment in the Mounted had annulled his American citizenship, and this was the only reason why Denis had any hesitation about the fulfillment of his ambition.

"Who's he after, do you think?" said Denis to his father, when he returned to the cabin. Grizzled old Dugald Stewart shook his head.

"There's no tellin', lad. Whoever it is, I feel right sorry for him. Ben is liable to chase him clear across the Arctic Ocean! I'm glad you're not twenty-two yet, just the same. You stick with the old man, Denis, long's you can."

"You bet I will, dad," nodded Denis, grave-eyed. "I wish the police still wore the old scarlet jackets and all that outfit! Wouldn't Ben be some sport?"

"Huh!" grunted his father scornfully, surveying Ben's blue breeches and khaki coat. "He'd likely get shot a mile away by some drunken breed. Got that canoe ready?"

Growling into his beard, Dugald Stewart limped outside to make sure that Big Ben would be well provided on his trip down the Hay. Meantime, Denis laid out a pair of his own thick moccasins for his brother, who would not need the Strathcona riding boots till his return.

What papers did Ben bear inside that travel-stained khaki tunic? Was he after some red-handed murderer, was he merely relieving some case of distress, or was he serving a court summons? The Mounted Police have twenty different duties, but Denis rather hoped that Ben was on some spectacular assignment which might bring notice from Regina.

Little did he dream what his own share in that assignment was to be!

Except for Indians and half-breeds, the Stewarts were alone in this stretch of country. There was no regular post on Hay River, and the river itself was little explored. During the winters, the Hudson's Bay Company maintained a semioccasional post a few hundred miles farther down the Hay, but the river was practically unknown, the land a wilderness.

When the two hours were up, Denis shook his brother into wakefulness. Ben pulled himself up to the table and began to eat mightily; after ten minutes, he deigned to take notice of the insistent questions of Denis.

"It's a queer case," he remarked, tap-

ping his tunic pocket. "I haven't time to show you the papers, but here it is in brief. Over on the Peace River, 'bout a hundred mile west o' Vermilion, there's a family of American settlers—father, mother, two kids. Name's Ballard. Well, two weeks ago a pretty slick chap visited them and handed Ballard a few drinks, then got him to hand over all his spare cash for some worthless mining stock. It was a raw swindle."

Ben paused to swallow a cupful of steaming coffee, then resumed:

"The fellow's name was Cowley, and he had headed our way. Three days ago, Ballard blew into the post—came up the Peace on a company steamer—and was after Cowley with a six-shooter. He wouldn't quit, either. After reporting the swindle to us, Ballard plumb disappeared. With a warrant for Cowley's arrest, I followed the swindler up the Pine River a bit, then he struck over to the Hay, just above here. Early this morning, I found two Indians who had sold him a canoe—you didn't see any one pass here?"

"Not a soul," returned Dugald Stewart, and Denis shook his head.

"He went by last night, prob'ly," said Ben. "The queer part of it is that this Cowley must be heading for some definite place, or he'd never strike down the Hay River! As I figure, he's either going to hit up for the Mackenzie River and do some trading, or else he's aiming to follow the Hay to the Great Slave Lake, go down to Chipewyan by steamer, and then down to Edmonton or Winnipeg."

"How much did he cheat Ballard of?" inquired Denis.

"Couple o' hundred dollars—he thought Ballard was too drunk to remember it. The blamed mean part of it was that the money really belonged to Ballard's little girl; he'd been going to invest it in furs for her——"

"How old is she?" broke in Denis. His brother grinned.

"Fifteen—smarter than a whip, too!"

Dugald Stewart, cramming an old clay pipe with tobacco, looked at his elder son from beneath beetling brows.

"Ben," he growled, "ye're doing good work! You get that little kid's money back, or I'll disown you!"

Ben laughed cheerfully, knowing his father's ways of speech. Then he sobered.

"I'll do it, and get the scoundrel into the bargain. You know the motto of the police—*Maintiens le Droit*—Maintain the Right; It's great work, too. Well, I must be off; I want to catch that fellow in another day, before he gets to Hay Lake."

Leaving his Ross rifle until his return, he passed with Denis and their father down the path to the river, which even here was no small stream. A quick handshake, and he stripped off his coat and shoved out, paddling with long, even strokes until he had disappeared around the bend.

As he swung an ax with his father that afternoon, clearing out some black-soil land above the river, Denis thought more than once of his brothers' final words. Maintain the Right! That was a noble motto, for an individual as well as for a force of men. The very task on which his brother was now engaged showed that the words were no dead letter, but a living spur to duty.

More than once the keen-eyed, manly features of Denis Stewart flushed hot with anger at thought of Cowley—the swindler who would rob a little girl, and turn her father into a liquor-sodden fool.

"By Jasper, I'd like to meet that fellow!" he thought, putting savage energy into his ax strokes. "If I wouldn't biff him a couple to make him see straight, it'd be a funny thing!"

As Ben had said, it was an odd thing that Cowley would seek safety in this

portion of the country—unless he intended to give the police a long chase and meant to slip away up the Mackenzie to Alaska, or down to Edmonton and the United States.

Even this was not very logical. It was more likely that Cowley did not suspect that the police were on his trail, since he had thought that Ballard was too drunk to remember the swindling transaction—or the details of it.

That night, Denis talked the case over with his father, and Dugald Stewart made an observation that was destined to stick in the young fellow's memory.

"The whole thing looks queer, Denis," remarked the crippled old homesteader reflectively. "That whisky part, for one thing. Men of Cowley's type can follow the whisky trail once too often. If we were nearer the border, I'd say he was a whisky runner."

"That couldn't be, up here," said Denis.

"No, it's hardly possible," agreed his father. "But mind this—there's a big bend in the Peace River, down south, which brings it within forty miles of Hay Lake. If Cowley wanted a quiet, hidden place for any illegal work, a place where travelers or settlers or prospectors or trappers wouldn't molest him, he'd find it around Hay Lake. And it wouldn't be far to the Peace and the civilized world."

This theory seemed to Denis far-fetched, however. As he rolled up in his blankets and waited for sleep to come to him, he reflected that, after all, the situation, although odd, was simple.

Cowley had merely carried off a dirty trick, and with his ill-gotten money had started out for the waste places. Big Ben was after him, and would doubtless show up with the prisoner inside of another two or three days. And that would be the finish of the dishonorable Mr. Cowley.

In the morning, Denis was up with the sun, caring for their two work horses and his brother's mount. Dugald Stewart's crippled back was in a bad way that morning, for the grizzled homesteader had swung too hard on his ax during the previous day—the Californian's rugged strength was unable to endure more than the weak link of that injured spine would bear.

So Denis had his hands full, with small time for thought. He was fully equal to the task, for he had been brought up in a hard school—the school of self-dependency amid ardors of the wilderness.

While his mother had lived, until three years previously, she had given the two boys more than an average good education. At her death, Ben had gone into the police, and after completing his year's training at Regina, had been assigned to Peace River Landing; while Denis had gone sturdily about his father's business of carving a home from the northland.

An hour before noon Denis was busily snaking out trees, felled the day before, and lopped off limbs—with the team of horses. His father was still unable to leave the cabin.

Suddenly Denis pulled up his horses and turned. Sharp, clear-cut, and loud on the morning air, had cracked out a revolver shot!

"From the river," he muttered. "I wonder——"

The river was only a hundred yards away from the half-cleared ground where he was working, but the fringe of trees left for a windbreak hid the water completely. Even as Denis stood and stared, another shot rang out.

At this, Denis plunged off toward the trail leading down to the water's edge. Something was amiss, he realized, and the thought of Ben came to him like a stab wound.

Leaping down the path, he broke through the bushes and emerged on the high bank, ten feet above the water. For a brief moment he stood transfixed

to the spot, as his eyes took in the startling scene a scant five yards distant, and as his heart leaped in alarm to the realization of it.

For Big Ben had come home—but not as he had gone!

CHAPTER II.

A STARTLING DECISION.

CLINGING to the red willows that fringed the bank with one hand, and weakly holding in the other the service Colt forty-five which had sent out those signal shots, was Big Ben Stewart in his canoe.

At first glance, little appeared amiss, save that Ben's head sagged strangely on his chest, and that his paddle had slipped into the water and was floating away.

But the keen eyes of Denis swiftly pierced the mystery. Clasped about the upper part of his brother's right leg was a knotted handkerchief, and the yellow-striped blue trouser below it was spotted with blood.

In the moment that Denis stood staring, Ben's hand wavered up, shakily, lifting the revolver as if for another shot.

"All right, Ben!" cried Denis wakening from his trance. "I've got you!"

Ben raised a haggard face to him, then slumped down in the canoe, unconscious.

Denis gained the light craft in a leap and hauled it ashore. He must get Ben to the cabin at once, for it was evident that his brother was badly injured. Then he stooped, deeply thankful for the hours he had spent poring over Ben's training books.

Fortunately, the trooper was beyond feeling pain. Hauling the inert body from the canoe, Denis got it around his shoulders, one arm and leg on his chest; then, with a great effort, he straightened up, raising Ben in the "fireman's lift."

Staggering, he stood until he had gained sure balance, then stepped out up the path. He could feel Ben's heart beating, and his first terrible anxiety had lessened considerably.

As he came within sight of the cabin, he saw his father leaning against the door, called from his bunk by those two shots. Denis straightened himself a little to ease the strain of the load, and called out reassuringly:

"It's all right, dad! It's Ben—his leg's hurt."

At length he tottered into the cabin, and, with his father to help, gently rolled Ben from his perch into a bunk. Dugald Stewart, being well able to use his hands, seated himself beside the trooper, and took charge of the situation.

"Quick, lad—build up the fire, an' get some water hot. Fetch me a first-aid packet and the peroxide bottle, then stand by to help wi' this tourniquet."

"Tourniquet!" exclaimed Denis, already busied at the stove. "Is that what——"

"Aye—Ben has saved his own life this day, or I'm not Dugald Stewart!"

While he spoke, the father was stripping off the trooper's trousers, knotting a fresh tourniquet beneath them as he removed the one Ben had put on. There proved to be little need of this precaution, however, as the flow of blood had ceased.

A moment later there broke a cry of mingled anger and pity from the homesteader.

"The poor boy! By the eternal, if I get my hands on the skunk who did this, I'll throttle the life from him!"

With hot water and bandages, Denis eagerly rejoined his father. As he gazed down at Ben's unconscious form, his face clouded in a frown that reflected his father's words.

For Big Ben had been shot, just below the knee, and the leg was broken!

Only then did Denis, remember having noticed a small rip in the birch canoe, close to where his brother had sat. He spoke of it quickly, and his father nodded, as he washed out the wound.

"Yes—it was a thirty-thirty rifle that did this work, lad! Oh, if I had my strength back! I'd go down river and take a whip to that skunk Cowley——"

"Eh! You think Cowley did it?"

"Who else, Denis? O' course he did! Fired on Ben in the canoe, as that rip shows, and broke his leg. Ben knew he was badly hurt and managed to get back up the stream—give me those bandages. The bullet's not in the wound, so it's all right."

None the less, Denis knew that it was *not* all right.

Ten minutes later, the broken leg was carefully washed, set, and bound in splints. Ben lay breathing heavily as they undressed him. Denis broke the service revolver, and found that but two shots had been fired from it—the two signal shots which had summoned him from work.

"Good for Ben," growled Dugald Stewart. "He stuck to the rules, eh? You'd best get ready to ride down to Peace River Landing and get another constable——"

"There's no other there," interrupted Denis, frowning. "Don't you remember, Ben told us yesterday that the sergeant in charge, with his second constable, were going to the Lesser Slave Lake after some fighting Crees? The nearest post would be Dunvegan or Fort St. John, and by that time Cowley would probably have escaped."

To this his father assented, with a mutter of wrath.

Denis took his brother's clothes outside, and proceeded to wash the blood from the trousers. As each constable has to supply his own uniform out of his pay, every such item counts up.

Reëntering the cabin at a mutter of voices, he found Ben just coming to consciousness. The trooper proceeded to recount a tale that set Dugald Stewart shaking with anger, and that left Denis more tight-lipped and blazing-eyed than ever. Indeed, the only noticeable difference between the brothers was that Ben was gray of eye, while Denis' ice-blue gaze contrasted vividly with his dark-brown hair and brows.

Ben's story proved that Dugald Stewart's conjectures had been correct.

At sunset of the previous day, Ben had caught up with his quarry. Cowley was then encamped fifty miles downstream, near the junction of an unnamed river, which came into the Hay from the north.

Cowley, himself, whom Ben described as wearing a faded blue flannel shirt, corduroy trousers, and high Cree moccasins, stood boldly on the shore, rifle in hand, as Ben swung down the river. At fifty yards' distance, the trooper had called on the man to surrender. Cowley's only reply had been to lift his rifle and warn Ben off.

Quite naturally, Ben had paid no attention, but had paddled in. At twenty-five yards Cowley had fired twice, sending one bullet past the trooper's ear, the second through canoe and leg in deliberate brutality. Then, laughing, Cowley had turned and vanished in the brush.

Knowing himself to be hard hit, Ben had been forced to abandon pursuit. He had vaguely caught sight of two Indians or half-breeds going away with Cowley, then all his attention had been paid to his wounded leg. Having fashioned a tourniquet, he had turned and headed for home.

"You'd better take my horse and ride to Fort St. John, Denis," he concluded weakly. "Sergeant Masters is there. Tell him what's happened——"

"But Cowley will be gone by then," exclaimed Denis. "Before a constable could get here through the mountains,

Cowley would have reached the Slave Lake and be gone!"

"Yes, and my chances of promotion with him," assented Ben bitterly. "But it's the only thing to do, Denis. There'll be double charges against Cowley now, and the whole force will be after him."

There was a moment's silence, then Dugald Stewart spoke gruffly:

"They won't discipline ye for this, surely, lad? It's not your fault——"

Ben broke in with a hard laugh.

"Sure, not! But I was sent to get a man, and I've failed. It's results that count, and nothing else. Ten years from now this blamed thing will count against me."

Denis looked down at the speaker, comprehending to the full. A man who failed could make no excuses. Big Ben had been sent to bring in a single man, and had failed. It would be a blot against his record, though not a dishonorable blot, for years to come, unless, of course, he——

A sudden flame sparkled in the blue eyes of Denis Stewart.

"If you had Cowley here, under your gun," he asked slowly, "could you get him in to Peace River Landing?"

"Trust me for that," grunted Ben, grimacing with pain. "I could be strapped to the saddle, and that horse of mine doesn't need much knee pressure. Well, you'd better trot along to the post, Denis, and take an up-river steamer to Fort St. John."

Denis looked at his crippled father.

"Can you make out all right while I'm gone, dad?"

"Sure. We have plenty of grub, and I'll not try to work. Prob'ly I can shoot a deer or pull in some fish for fresh meat."

Nodding, Denis turned and went outside.

He did not approach the little half-cleared space where Ben's horse was grazing, however. Nor did he make any more toward the saddle and bridle hung under the shed.

With that same dancing flame filling his ice-blue eyes with determination, and a grim resolve stamped into his rugged face, he swiftly stripped. Then he put on the yellow-striped blue trousers, still wet from where he had washed the bloodstains, and laced up his high moccasins.

Then the khaki shirt and tunic followed. Buckling on the belt and holstered Colt, swinging the lanyard around his neck, Denis caught up the flat-brimmed Stetson and pulled down its fastening cord. The clothes fitted him perfectly. Except for the blue eyes, any trooper who knew Big Ben Stewart would at first glance have taken this strapping young woodsman for the Peace River Landing constable.

Denis quickly cleaned out the revolver and reloaded it. From an inner pocket of the tunic he took the warrant for Cowley's arrest, examined it, and replaced the paper. Then he reëntered the cabin.

"I'm going to get Cowley," he announced briefly.

Dugald Stewart stared at his younger son with narrowed and, perhaps, admiring eyes. But Big Ben pulled himself half up, and cried out swift dissent.

"Stop this foolery, Denis! Take off that uniform——"

Denis looked at his brother very steadily.

"You heard what I said, Ben? I'm going down the river and arrest Cowley. Then I'll fetch him here, hand him over to you, and take you both into the post. You needn't talk back, old man! It's either that, or else Cowley escapes and you suffer for it."

"Confound it, you take off that uniform!" raged Ben angrily. "Don't you know that we'll both suffer if you impersonate an officer? You can't get away with it, you little fool! Quit it!"

At that epithet, Dugald Stewart grinned slightly.

"Your clothes seem to fit him, Ben," he remarked. "I don't know as he's so little, come to think of it! You look mighty good in that get-up Denis. Question is, can you handle Cowley? How you goin' to get him?"

"I'll attend to that when the time comes," responded Denis, eying his angered brother. "Now talk sense, Ben! I'll pass for you without any trouble, except with the police, and we'll not put over anything crooked or deceptive. When you've brought in your prisoner, you can tell the whole story——"

"But if you don't get him, we'll get the deuce!" roared Ben furiously. "If he slips away, or if he shoots you like he did me, Indians will bring in reports of two constables, and the inspector will be down on me for explanations and then——"

"And, in brief, you're scared that I'll muss up your old uniform," said Denis. He sobered quickly, and every line of his face spelled earnest resolve. "Ben, I'm going to make a gambler of you, see? I'm going down the river in your clothes, impersonating you.

"You have to take a chance on me. You have to gamble that my woodcraft, skill, and level-headedness will amount to something. You have to rely on my word that I'll put forth every energy to land that skunk Cowley, and that if I don't land him, it'll be only because I'm in a hospital. You have to gamble that your brother is going to serve your interests a blamed sight better than you will yourself — because he's your brother. Now, do you get me?"

Before the blazing determination in the face of Denis, Big Ben subsided with a mutter. Then he came to his elbow again, and stuck forth his hand.

"Denis," he said, so quietly that Denis knew he had pierced his big brother's heart by those words, "I'll gamble on you till the hot place freezes over! Just one word of advice—if you catch up with that skunk, you shoot first. Good-by, old man, and good luck."

He dropped back, faintly. Dugald Stewart rose to his feet, and gripped the hand of Denis.

"I'm proud o' you, son," he said simply. "Now you—you get out o' here and stay gone till you bring that cuss back. God bless you!"

Denis went forth, jingling the handcuffs in his tunic pocket. But, as he passed the door, he caught up his brother's Ross rifle.

CHAPTER III.

DENIS TAKES THE TRAIL.

IN Ben's canoe were still the blankets, grub, and general outfit which Denis had made ready.

These, with the Ross service rifle, he piled carefully in the bow of the canoe. The bullet hole was far above the water line, and could be plugged with spruce gum at any halting place. Unlashing the spare paddle, Denis stepped into the canoe and shoved out.

His first aim was a wide stretch of weeds along the shallows just below. Here he picked up the paddle which Ben had dropped overboard, relashed his spare paddle under the center thwart, and then set out in earnest on his trip.

Where that trail would end, he could not foresee. He might find Cowley along the river, or he might have to strike into the hills. Two hundred miles or more to the northeast lay Hay Lake—always downriver. Denis had been there twice on trapping expeditions, and knew that it was rimmed with foothills.

A hundred miles farther on, the Hay flowed through long stretches of prairie; beyond this, again, through cañonlike rock walls, to the famed Alexandra Falls, and on to the Great

Slave Lake. Neither Denis nor any one else knew more about the Hay River than this, unless it were wandering Slave Indians, who tell no tales.

By paddling hard that afternoon, resting until midnight, and then floating down with the current, Denis calculated that he would reach about dawn the spot where Ben had been disabled.

If Cowley were not there, his trail could be followed, whether it went by water or land. If Cowley *were* there—the blue eyes of the imitation Trooper Stewart blazed deep at the thought. That Ross rifle was loaded, and would be used.

When the westering sun closed on the mountains rimming the horizon, Denis headed in to a stretch of beach, figuring that he had covered about thirty-five miles. That was a good afternoon's work, even with the current helping him, and spoke volumes for the great shoulder muscles beneath his borrowed khaki tunic.

He camped on the shore, half beneath his turned-up canoe. A fire, built Indian fashion, seemingly sloppy, but really very efficient, sufficed for his needs, and he soon rolled up, with his mind set to awaken at midnight—a simple mental exercise which was useful in the extreme.

He wakened to find a low moon hanging over the trees, and a glance at his watch showed him ten minutes past twelve. With a regretful yawn he was up, shipped his canoe, loaded his duffel aboard, and shoved out with the current.

That last night trip held mystery for Denis—mystery and adventure, and iron-lipped resolution to bring back the man who had deliberately shot his brother. Only the ripple of water, the splash of a fish, or the occasional eerie screen of a loon, broke the night silence. And, somewhere below, lay—Cowley.

Denis quite forgot what Ben had said about the disappearance of the swindled settler, the American, Ballard.

The place where Cowley had waited for the trooper would not be hard to find. It was the northern side of a large bend, amid a thick bank of yellow poplar, and the camp had been where tepee poles from some old Indian lodge stood in plain sight. It was for this spot that Denis was now seeking.

Keeping fairly close to the left or northern bank, for the river was three hundred feet wide, Denis swept down steadily. Five miles below his camp was a bad rapid, on which he had counted. Portaging this, he took to the river again and drove on into the early dawnlight.

He intended coming on Cowley while still asleep, if the man were there. When he finally reached the wide, curving bend, and made out the poplars along the banks, the mists were still writhing along the river, and the dawn had not fairly broken. Denis edged in to the shore and eased along, twisting his paddle with every backstroke and keeping it in the water to avoid dripping.

Then he sighted the lodge poles on the bank, stark against the mist, and headed in.

A glance was sufficient to show him that there was no camp here. Stepping from the canoe, he found himself on a strip of gravelly beach edges with goose grass and poplars, a dozen feet across. Close to the trees stood the lodge poles, with a windbreak of stones near by, for fires.

These stones were still half covered with blackened ashes and dead embers. Here had been Cowley's camp fire. Satisfied of this much, Denis sat down to await fuller day before investigating further. He built himself a small blaze, and, before the full day broke, had finished his breakfast of tea and flapjacks.

His detective work was simple, brief,

and highly satisfactory. Ben's story was corroborated by the discovery of two thirty-thirty shells lying near the shore; here, too, were marks where a canoe had landed, been pulled up, and later had been shoved out again. It seemed plain that Cowley had gone on downstream.

To make sure, and to explain those two Indians whom Ben had seen, Denis explored the trees back from the shore. Here he found evidence of a second encampment—and something else that made his eyes gleam in exultation.

This was a charred bit of birch bark, with three symbols scratched on it as if by a knife point. These symbols were exactly like a triangle set on one end, its apex pointing to the right, followed by two carpenter's squares.

To Denis, that scrap of bark meant everything, and explained everything. The three marks were characters of Cree writing, and they stood for "O-me-me," or The Pigeon. Therefore, he had only to find a Cree named The Pigeon to find one of the two Indians with Cowley.

This opened up another vista. Hereabouts there were no Crees, the aborigines being Slave Indians, of totally different race. The Crees were warlike, quarrelsome, and always in hot water; the Slaves, quiet, inoffensive.

"Looks queerer all the time," mused Denis, carefully stowing away the birch bark as evidence. "What are Crees doing here, evidently waiting to meet Cowley? What's Cowley himself doing here, in this country, where there are few white men for hundreds of miles? If those two Crees were waiting here for Cowley, his trip must have been prearranged."

To those questions there was no answer. But now, for the first time, Denis began to realize that what had seemed a mere arrest of a swindler, was developing into something very different —something as yet unknown.

Also, he knew very well that he now had to "buck up against" three men, instead of one, in order to arrest that one. As this thought occurred to him, he glanced down at his tunic and trousers, and on the latter caught those half-washed bloodstains.

"I'm going on," he declared inwardly, his lips setting a little more firmly. "I'm in Ben's place, and I'm here to do Ben's work. By Jasper, I'll *do* it!"

Inspecting the shore again, he found the marks of only one canoe—that in which Cowley had arrived and left. Therefore, the two Crees had come from some point overland, for any other canoe would have left plain traces in the mud gravel of the clearing.

Having thus cleared up everything in sight, Denis took to his canoe and paddled down the river, the six-foot ash swinging in long, powerful, regular strokes with the slight wrist turn at the end which kept the canoe in a straight course. That even, tireless paddling was a joy to behold.

Denis was quite well aware of the danger that he ran, in thus following Cowley openly; but he had no idea of pursuing Mounted Police tactics when he ran down his man. The notion of paddling in under rifle fire did not appeal to him in the least.

Sooner or later he would catch up with the swindler, and when that time came, Denis was determined to take Cowley by surprise. And as Ben had advised, if there was any shooting done, the Ross rifle would crack first. But—Cowley must be brought in alive; this was imperative, especially to Ben's record. The police want live prisoners, so that jail terms may make an impression on other such folk still at large.

His first task, however, was to catch Cowley. To this end Denis settled himself against the stern thwart, and got down to work. His cedar-birch canoe was faster than any Indian dugout or clumsy birch craft on the river, luckily,

and unless Cowley had left the water trail, he would soon catch the man. That Cowley had left the river was most unlikely; there was no trail to go by, and no place to which one might go. For this was the wilderness primeval.

Toward noon, Denis sighted a dug-out coming upstream, and headed for it. The occupant proved to be an Indian he knew slightly, a Slave named John Tadeteecha, an old, wrinkled Indian, who passed his time hunting and fishing along the river. As Denis approached, John displayed evident perturbation at sight of the uniform, but soon recognized the young settler and opened up with some information.

Yes, Crowley and two Crees had passed, going down the river toward Hay Lake. John had met them on the previous evening, and gave an accurate description of their camping place, fifty miles farther down. This was the extent of his knowledge, it seemed.

More than content with this, Denis told the aborigine to take word of his well-being to his father, and they parted.

Up here, above Hay Lake, Indians were not so plentiful as farther down, below the lake and on to the Alexandra Falls. There, tepee poles would be found at frequent intervals, and the river would contain canoes in plenty, but up here there were too many rapids and too few whitefish to tempt the wanderers.

That afternoon, Denis landed a six-pound pike white trolling, shot a long white-water rapid that put him within an ace of death half a dozen times, and toward sunset drew in to shore and camped, well satisfied with his day's work.

From John's story, he knew that Cowley's previous night's camp was at the head of the next rapid, still twenty miles below him. Denis planned to proceed at midnight, as before, reach that camp at dawn, pick up on Cowley during the day, and finally to come up with him in his next camp.

After that, matters could handle themselves.

Weary and not a little stiff, Denis enjoyed his fish dinner and rolled up. At twelve he wakened, and, after a dip in the river, started out again. His confidence in an early settlement with Cowley had waned, but his determination had only grown stronger with the chase. At every clink of the handcuffs in his pocket, his blue eyes flashed a little at thought of Cowley wearing those bracelets.

With the dawn mists writhing around him, he caught the noise of the rapids below, and at once sought the left-hand bank. Edging along cautiously, for he dared not shoot these rapids, he at length came upon the place he sought—a hundred yards above the white water, and marked by large bowlders. He landed and prepared to portage.

Before doing so, however, he prospected around Cowley's camp fire. Here nothing was revealed except the tracks of three men, two wearing moccasins and one wearing boots. This was clear enough. So fresh were the tracks, he knew that the three had left an hour previously.

Duffel bag and rifle slung over his back, he turned up the canoe, swung it over his head, and started out on the trail by which Cowley had portaged around the rapids. This was plain to follow, and he traced it down below the worst of the rapids. There the ground showed that Cowley had once more embarked. Denis followed suit.

The day was now begun fairly—a clear, bright, sunny day. By that night, Trooper Stewart figured he would come up with his quarry. Then a brief, sharp, "Hands up!" and the return march would begin. This was a very simple matter—if it turned out that way. But Denis was figuring without his captive.

Close to seventy miles below him was a bad stretch of rapids, just above the opening of the lake. Seventy miles would be a good day's trip. Denis calculated that Cowley would reach there and camp there that coming night. He could pick up on the precious three during the day, but he did not want to come on them until after nightfall.

That morning he went on steadily, and landed at noon to cook a small trout he had hooked en route. From the previous trips he had taken to the lake, he knew that he was covering good distance. After his meal, he pushed out again, and sped along at a good pace, shooting a small rapid like a veteran, and rejoicing in the perfect handling of his canoe.

Toward four in the afternoon, as his watch showed, he found the river opening out ahead in a wide, flat stretch bordered with dense woods. This was but five miles above the rapids at the head of the lake. Not daring to proceed farther until the evening had begun to gather, Denis headed in toward the left bank.

As he got within twenty feet of the shore, a puff of white darted from the fringing trees. With a vicious, whip-like crack, a bullet broke the paddle between his hands.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PIGEON MEETS DEFEAT.

INSTINCTIVELY, Denis felt that the bullet had been no warning, but sent with deadly intent. Only poor aim had saved him.

The fringe of trees showed nothing. The faint powder smoke had dissolved, and no one was in sight. But the broken pieces of the paddle, floating away from the canoe, proved to Denis Stewart that a shot had been fired at him.

Not by Cowley. Cowley would have stepped out in plain sight, and, with deliberate brutality, have fired at his victim. More likely by a half-breed, by one who feared recognition, a skulker among the trees.

Like a flash, Denis bent over and grasped his spare paddle.

With the very movement that concealed rifle cracked again. He heard the bullet whiz wickedly past his head. Barely enough time had passed for the shooter to eject his first cartridge and aim again. And an Indian is very seldom a good shot, especially if flurried.

Trooper Stewart attempted no return fire. That would have been madness, out in the open as he was. With a mighty lunge, he dug down his spare paddle, and sent the canoe whirling at the shore. Another stroke, and he would reach it!

That few seconds of time seemed like an eternity. He guessed swiftly that for some reason, probably through sheer chance, this Cree had been on the back trail, and had seen him. Probably the man had been set ashore to hunt and to bring in some game to Cowley's camp, below, and had observed his approach. Beyond a doubt, after the crippling of Ben, Cowley would have no longer thought himself followed.

This swift reasoning flashed across the mind of Denis, then he bore down on his paddle for the final stroke. As he did so, he leaned over and caught up his rifle. From the shore came a third bursting crack, and a bullet ripped through the gunnels of the canoe a foot in front of Denis.

With that, the canoe ran her nose up onto the beach.

Leaping out, Denis paused only to bring up his rifle and fire at that last splotch of white. Then he went into the bushes at one bound. That he was shooting at a man did not worry him at all. He only knew that under those trees was a cowardly redskin, who had thrice attempted his life within a minute, and who was evidently desperately determining that this seeming Mounted

Policeman should not live. When Indians shoot at members of *that* force, there is usually a reason.

Trooper Stewart wanted to know the reason.

Pumping a fresh cartridge into place, Denis struck in among the trees, in some anxiety lest his assailant had departed to bear warning to Cowley. Keenly alert for any signs of the Cree, he headed away from the river for a hundred yards, then turned and struck back diagonally in order to head off the man's possible flight.

Three minutes later he was able to congratulate himself on his own skill. He caught no sight of the Cree, but, fifty feet away, detected sudden movement in a long clump of dense red willows.

Instantly he flung up his rifle, aimed just ahead of the movement, and pressed the trigger.

"Hands up, and do it quick!" he shouted.

A howl of anguish answered the shot, a howl that for an instant paralyzed him with the thought that he had slain a man. He was speedily undeceived, however. From the willows appeared two brown hands, reaching up; the rest of the body was hidden by the green leaves.

Pausing only to reload, Denis leaped forward, plowed through the willows, and found himself face to face with his would-be assassin.

The Cree was a leathery-faced, low-browed ruffian, dressed in cotton shirt and overalls. At his feet lay a rifle, two rabbits which had been knocked in the head, and a small pike, with eyes not yet glazed in death. Denis saw at a glance that his conjecture regarding the man's presence here had been absolutely correct.

He also saw that his last bullet had taken effect. The Indian's right arm was bleeding profusely, but Denis was relieved to see that the wound was slight, the bullet having gone through the fleshy part of the forearm. So he wasted no pity on the scowling redskin, who was regarding him with a truly venomous expression of hatred.

"You're a nice fellow, I dont' think," remarked Trooper Stewart, eying his catch. "Is your name O-me-me?"

Only a grunt replied to him, but by the expression of startled surprise which flickered over the dull, evil features, Denis knew that this was no other than The Pigeon, whose scrawl he had discovered at the previous camp.

"Where's Cowley and the other Cree?" he demanded.

"I dunno," grunted The Pigeon, scowling.

This being a palpable lie, Denis made no comment. He had detected a slight bulge in the man's front overall pocket, and now he stepped forward until his rifle touched the shrinking redskin's chest. Putting out a hand, he inspected the bulge, and drew forth a pint flask filled with a white liquid.

At first sight, Denis took this to be water. A sniff at the flask, however, gave the rank odor of cheap whisky, whereat he was more than a little surprised. White whisky, of all things!

"Have you a permit to have this liquor in your possession?" he asked.

The answer was a scowl and a grunted negation. Denis threw down the flask.

"Now, Pigeon, I suppose you know you're in for it?" he remarked quietly. "You've taken three shots at me, and you have liquor without a permit. There's a nice cell waiting for you at Edmonton, and a job breaking rock for several moons. Take a step away from that rifle and bind your arm with that neck cloth."

Sullenly The Pigeon obeyed, taking the dirty red bandanna from about his neck and tying up his wounded arm. Denis uncocked his rifle and lowered it, watching the fellow carefully.

"You can have your choice, Pigeon," he went on. "Refuse to talk, and I'll take you back to face those charges. Answer my questions, and I'll let you go free. Speak up, now. Which shall it be?"

Across the sullen, brown face flitted a quick gleam, which showed just how eager The Pigeon was to face a police judge.

"I talk," he grunted at once.

"Thought you would," muttered Denis, and raised his voice. "Where'd you get that whisky, eh?"

"Cowley give um," said The Pigeon.

"Oh, Cowley gave it to you, eh? For nothing?"

"Cowley give um," came the sullen reply. "I hunt. Cowley give um pay."

"So you put it up to him, eh? All right. Where does Cowley intend to camp to-night?"

"White water down below."

Denis nodded, this reply confirming his own guess.

"Where'd you come from before you met Cowley?"

The Pigeon waved his arm in a vague, northerly direction.

"Got um camp. Hunt."

"Sure you hunt. How long have you worked for Cowley?"

"Two, t'ree moon."

"Where's Cowley's headquarters?"

The Pigeon only stared blankly, with a grunt. Denis repeated the question in a different form as he remembered what his father had said:

"Is Cowley's camp on Hay Lake?"

A nod of assent to this.

"North shore?"

Another nod.

"Who's the other Cree with you?"

"Him breed," was the surly answer. "Petwanisip—Smoking Duck."

"Is he with Cowley now, waiting for you to bring in that grub?"

A nod.

Denis considered this information for a moment. Cowley and Smoking Duck were then in camp together, five miles below, awaiting The Pigeon. Of Cowley's business on Hay Lake, however, he had, so far, learned nothing.

"Now, Pigeon, loosen up fast," he commanded bluntly. "What does Cowley do at this camp? You and Smoking Duck hunt for him—what does he do there?"

"Got um shack, dig um ground," scowled the redskin. "Make um fire. Homestead."

This, as Denis considered, might be all very true, though it was surprising enough. Cowley might have a shack on the lake, and might have hired the two Crees to hunt for him—though that seemed unusual.

It was evident that there was little more to be gleaned from the sullen Pigeon, however, and Denis was aware that the time was fast slipping by. But what was he to do with his prisoner? He dared not leave the fellow foot loose and free, yet had promised to set him at liberty.

Denis was under no misapprehension as to the character of The Pigeon. He knew that the man was treacherous, shifty, cruel, and utterly beyond the pale of any trust. To leave him in the rear would be to jeopardize his own safety—nay, his very life, as that late episode had proven.

Then, with a sudden laugh, Trooper Stewart brought down his rifle butt on the flask of whisky, smashing it.

"Pick up those rabbits and that fish," he ordered. "Mind you keep clear of that rifle! Walk three feet ahead of me, back to the shore."

The surly Cree obeyed. Denis picked up the other's rifle, and, with the two weapons thrust into his captive's back, marched the man to the shore. A moment later they stood beside the canoe.

"Get into the bow!" commanded Denis, laying down his rifles and drawing his revolver ostentatiously.

The Pigeon stepped into the bow and

sat down, with philosophic unconcern. Denis then took his stern seat, shoving out, and began to paddle across the river.

The excellent idea had come to him of landing his prisoner on the other side. Placed there, without a canoe, it would require a man of far greater ability and energy than The Pigeon possessed to get back to the north side and then rejoin Cowley—at least, in time to be of any service to the swindler.

On the whole, it appeared to Trooper Stewart as though he were proceeding very well, indeed, with the task before him.

Halfway across the river it occurred to him that he might toss overboard the Cree's rifle, but since it was an excellent Winchester, and might be considered as legitimate spoils of war, Denis left it in the bottom of the canoe; and this action, or lack of action, rather, was destined to bear tremendous consequences.

The sun was dropping out of sight, and the first dusk was gathering, as they reached the south bank of the river. Here Denis ordered his prisoner to depart in peace, and gave the man both rabbits, largely because he himself would have no time to clean and cook them. He retained the small pike for his own use, if necessary.

He watched the sullen, angered Cree vanish among the nearer trees, then he set forth and headed downstream, paddling steadily. As he proceeded, his thoughts were busy once again with Cowley's presence in this country.

"If that fellow's homesteading up here," he reflected, "it's mighty funny that we didn't hear about it, or get a call from him. And what in thunder was he doing with his bag of dirty tricks away down on the Peace River—and away east at Vermilion, too? I wonder if dad had the right hunch about the whisky?"

That Cowley was a whisky runner, however, was not only improbable, but impossible. Smuggled whisky could never be brought so far north for distribution; besides, this was the very worst place in the country to distribute it. These local Slave Indians scarcely knew the taste, and had little to trade.

The best theory which Denis could form was that Cowley had homesteaded on the lake, and wished that fact to remain unknown, simply to have a central location from which he could set forth on enterprises of petty thievery and swindling—such as the Ballard case.

"But that's a mighty weak theory," he concluded, frowning. "Even the whisky part may not be illegal. He may have a permit for the stuff, or a saloon permit; he may be doing a bit of trading for pelts that he doesn't want the Hudson's Bay Company or Reveillon Frères to know about. In fact, he may be doing a dozen things—but it's a cinch he's doing something that ought to be stopped, and in about two hours more it'll be stopped, by Jasper!"

Had Denis known where the next two hours would behold him, however, it is doubtful whether he would have put such savage energy into his paddle strokes.

CHAPTER V.

A VOICE IN THE DARK.

A TINY spark of fire, half a mile distant, glowed like a red pearl against a setting of black-velvet night.

Trooper Stewart eyed that glowing redness with distinct relief as he rounded the last bend above the rapids. To all appearance, it removed possibility of a danger which he had for some time been considering.

There was a fairly strong westerly breeze, and he was well aware how far the sound of rifle shots carries in the wilderness. Although he had encountered The Pigeon at least five miles above Cowley's camp, it was by no means impossible that the wind might

have carried the sound of the shots to Cowley and Smoking Duck. Those five shots, three of them from the Cree's Winchester, and two from his own Ross .303, might easily have constituted a warning to the swindler.

Now, it seemed, this fear had been groundless. Else, why should those two men be awaiting their comrade, with that bright speck of fire as a guide.

"I'm glad, mighty glad, that this thing is about over," half sighed Denis, in relief. "Now that I've caught them, my only job is to get to that fire unobserved and to then nab my man. That's the worst of it. The trip home won't be so bad."

Already he was picturing in his mind's eye that paddle upstream, and the placing of the manacled prisoner in his brother's hands. None the less, he did not minimize the difficulty which would first confront him—the capture of Cowley.

Still, things were coming exactly as he had planned, and he saw no reason to doubt his final success. He would land to one side of that fire and creep down on it, pitting his own footwork against the keen ears of Smoking Duck. Then, getting the drop on his quarry, the game would be finished.

Slowly and steadily he worked his way in toward the shore, a hundred yards above that glimmer of light, tracking his paddle through the water at every stroke, using every precaution against the slightest noise. These men would be as easily alarmed as any moose or bear. A touch of paddle against the canoe, a swish of water, would startle them.

The camp fire was that of an Indian, small. Even so, Denis played safe against any chance of its glow on the water betraying him, and headed a hundred yards above it. He might make noise along the shore, but that would not be so bad, because Cowley was expecting The Pigeon to come by land and rejoin them with fresh meat.

At last the shore loomed up on his left, twenty feet high, and crowned with thick trees that rose like a black cliff against the sky. There were no flickering northern lights that night, for which Denis was duly thankful.

Drifting under a group of willows, he found himself in sight of the fire still, and hung on to watch. For a brief instant the fire was blotted out. Something had passed in front of it! At that, Denis let go the willows, picked up his rifle, and allowed the canoe to float down a little farther. Every foot gained by water lessened the danger of being discovered.

But at length he dared go no farther in this fashion. Catching a projecting willow, he carefully stepped out into the shallow water. Just under the twenty-foot bank he found a soggy little stretch of mud shore, covered with goose grass, and on this he quietly drew the canoe. He noted at the moment that the willows overhung the small craft, although his intention had not been to conceal it.

Then, taking his Ross rifle, and leaving the Winchester in the canoe, he stepped out along the shore.

He did not climb the high bank, for it was evident that along here was a stretch of mud shore below the bank, where the river had dropped after the late spring rains. It would be less dangerous to proceed along this, where there were no sticks to break under his feet, nothing but the soggy grass.

Rifle in hand—for he placed small reliance on the revolver, with whose use he was not acquainted—Denis cautiously stole along the lower level, testing each step against leaves or small sticks. He had occasional glimpses of the fire, which had been built at the edge of the bank, but caught no more sight of moving figures.

With every nerve taut, every sense

on the alert, he came, a moment latter, to a small creek emptying into the river. The problem of getting up the bank at the fire had worried him; now he quietly climbed the creek side, gained the top of the twenty-foot bank, and was soon enabled to get a line on the situation ahead.

While he could get no clear view of Cowley's camp, he could see the fire gleaming amid a large screen of bushes, about forty feet distant. Before he could "get the drop" on the two men there, even before he could see them, he would have to make his way partly through those bushes.

Denis went at it with all the skill of a trained woodsman. He moved almost by inches, without so much as the crackling of a twig to betray him. His whole energy was concentrated on that small fire glow ahead, while his moccasined feel felt their way through the darkness surely and warily.

Suddenly he felt himself in one of the three-hands-wide Indian trails, and almost at the same instant made out the crossing of three old tepee poles somewhere near the fire. So Cowley had camped on some former site!

The trail made his passage of the bushes easier, though now he had to keep from swishing the smallest branch. All this care was rewarded, a moment later, when he reached a spot twenty feet from the fire, where he had an unobstructed view of the camp.

Sitting close to the fire, with rifle across his knees, was a swarthy fellow whom Denis at once took for Smoking Duck. The half-breed seemed to be nooding sleepily. On the mud level below the canoe was doubtless reposing. But—where was Cowley?

No sign of other living creature could Denis see. There was a duffel bag slung down, and a cartridge belt, with revolver and holster, but Cowley was not there. A wave of disappointment surged over the motionless watcher.

Either the swindler must have gone out to meet The Pigeon, or else he was after firewood or water. Listening, Denis could hear no sound.

"I'd better stand right here and wait," he resolved inwardly. "If he should put in——"

Absolutely without warning, something round and cold and small was shoved into the back of his neck, and a rough voice broke the night behind him:

"Reach fer the sky, mister—and reach sudden! I laid a right smart trap fer ye, didn't I? Ye didn't allow that Jim Cowley might ha' heard them rifle shots, huh? That's right—put them hands up, 'way up!"

CHAPTER VI.

COWLEY.

AS that voice rang out, the somnolent half-breed suddenly developed life, raising his snaky eyes and his rifle together, an evil grin stamped into his leathery features.

Trooper Stewart obeyed the command, and "reached for the sky" promptly. The feel of that cold rifle muzzle in his neck meant business.

A wave of hot shame and self-anger swept through him at the way in which he had been tricked. He saw the whole thing clearly. Cowley and Smoking Duck had heard those shots, after all, and had guessed that some one else was on their trail, and that this some one had encountered The Pigeon.

Accordingly, Cowley had made his camp fire openly, in the belief that had the unknown follower bested The Pigeon he would come direct to the fire —exactly as Denis Stewart had done. Smoking Duck had remained beside the fire as a lure; Cowley had waited out in the bushes, and sprung his trap.

Denis was forced to confess that the trap had be admirably set and baited. It might have taken in many an older man than himself.

"March in to the fire an' set down," commanded Cowley, chuckling hoarsely. "Drop that gun aside o' Smokin' Duck."

Trapped without a fight! Denis obeyed the command, helpless to resist. In his character of a trooper, it was a bitter pill to swallow; but his lips tightened a little at thought that he must, at all costs, play up to that character.

At his approach, Smoking Duck rose, reached forward, and deftly relieved Denis of his revolver, jerking the lanyard over his head and dropping the weapon beside that of Cowley.

Denis then dropped his rifle, turned, and sat down. He found himself face to face with Cowley, who had halted across the fire from him. And certain it was that Jim Cowley was anything but prepossessing in looks.

He was a big man, roughly dressed, wearing high boots. His heavy face was brutal, but strong, and was crowned by a shock of red hair. Just at present he was grinning in rough familiarity, and from behind a straggling red mustache peeped out yellow fangs of teeth.

Denis, who was about as much the opposite of Cowley as was possible, eyed his captor with quiet steadiness. Inwardly, he was wondering just what tack the fellow would assume, and felt a trace of surprise when Cowley, sitting down, began to roll a cigarette, and exhibited good-humored defiance of Mounted Police and all else.

"I sure made a mistake, I sure did!" remarked that husky individual complacently. "I allowed there wasn't but one redcoat after me, and here turns up a second one! Say, your outfit must set a heap o' store by Jim Cowley!"

"It's my duty to tell you," said Denis stiffly, "that you are under arrest——"

Cowley emitted a roar of laughter, but Denis did not fail to observe the reckless malevolence behind that laugh.

"Arrest! Ye'd look fine arrestin' me, wouldn't ye?" jeered Cowley. "I s'pose ye seen what I done to that other redcoat?"

"Yes"—with an effort, Denis held himself in hand—"and it'll add quite a bit to your sentence, Cowley. As for Smoking Duck there——"

"You shet your head about Smokin' Duck!" roared Cowley swiftly, his assumed good nature vanishing in a black scowl. But Denis, again, did not miss the flicker of uneasy light in the half-breed's eye.

"I'll do all the talkin' that's necessary here," went on Cowley gruffly. "Now, young feller, what happened upriver this afternoon, between you an' The Pigeon?"

Denis smiled a little. To keep himself under control was not easy with this man who had crippled his brother, to say nothing of stealing a little girl's money, but Denis was no fool.

He wanted very much to know what Cowley intended doing with him. He had lost the first round through failing to catch his man by surprise, and being caught in turn; but if he could only get a chance, against fair odds, now or later, he was quite willing to try the issue of force. Accordingly, he played his part well.

"I gave The Pigeon a bit of lead, and then gave him his choice between going to jail or skipping out. He's skipped out."

At this, Cowley mouthed a sullen oath.

"You done me a bad turn there, and I ain't goin' to forget it," he growled. "What's your name, anyhow?"

"Stewart," answered Denis.

"H'm! Ye look a sight like the feller I put a bullet into, up the river. Any relation to his'n?"

"Brother," said Denis curtly. Cowley grunted again, then broke into an expansive grin.

"Ye ain't got much love for me, then,

huh? Well, let's see. The Pigeon's got cold feet, an' skipped, so I'd better mosey along with Smokin' Duck. Question is, what'll I do with you?"

Denis met his gaze squarely, and once more smiled slightly.

"You'd better give up, and come back with me," he said easily. "You know that after what's happened now you'll never get out of the country. We'll be after you from Fort Vermilion, Chipewyan, and Providence. From Edmonton to the Yukon, you'll be watched for—and you won't get away."

Cowley leered at him.

"That's all right, young feller—Jim Cowley knows what's doin' when he bucks your outfit. Sure, your whole blasted gang will be after me, but they won't get me. For why? 'Cause they ain't smart enough, nor they ain't fast enough, that's why! I got about five thousand in pelts waitin'. A week form now I meets my man, and I gets my money—an' then blooey!"

All this was interesting, but not to the point. Since Cowley seemed to be in a talkative mood, presumably due to his easy capture, Denis resolved to take advantage of it.

"If you have that much stored away," he remarked casually, "why on earth did you run your head into trouble by stealing a bit of money from a child?"

The swindler leered again, but there was brutal menace in his face.

"Easy with them words, mister! I'm liable to hand ye somethin' hot! Jim Cowley don't overlook nothin', not if it's small nor big. That's him. I will say that I didn't figger on your outfit gettin' after me so blasted quick, but I was ready to blow, anyhow."

"Then you've been trading pelts up on Hay Lake?" inquired Denis.

"I reckon ye'd like to know, huh?" grinned the other. "How much did ye get out'n The Pigeon? Not much, I guess."

"Enough to settle you in jail for quite a spell," returned Denis coolly, and then resolved on trying a chance shot: "For example, when you get to Edmonton you'll be able to explain quite a bit on the lines of white whisky——"

He broke off abruptly, startled by the result of that word.

Smoking Duck had whipped up his rifle, stark murder in the swarthy eyes. Cowley leaped up, struck aside the weapon, and then glared at Denis.

The brutal threat of the man's attitude was not unmingled with fright, yet the red mustache was drawn back in a savage snarl, revealing the yellow, tobacco-stained fangs beneath. Cowley stood like a wolf at bay, dangerous, cruel, deadly.

"So that's it, huh?" he roared at last. "Ye sneakin', pryin' redcoat—blast your dratted hide! Ye made The Pigeon talk, huh? Well, that settles *your* hash right here! I 'lowed I'd turn ye loose to get home acrost country—but now ye'll stay set a while till I get clear, consarn ye!"

"You seem to be making a lot of fuss over what was due to come anyway," remarked Denis calmly, wondering just why his words had so plainly struck home. He dared not expose his own ignorance, however. "You've been breaking the law, you've resisted arrest twice, and now you're up against it. What do you propose to do with me?"

The other rapped out an oath.

"I'm goin' to keep ye where ye won't do no more spy work. I'm goin' to give ye a taste of your own med'cine, mister—an' if ye try any funny work I'll blow your blasted head off! Get me? You stand up, an' stand still! Smokin' Duck, put your gun into this feller's back. If he gets gay, blow a hole through him, but don't do no murder less'n ye have to, mind!"

Denis came to his feet, half tempted to make a bolt for it into the darkness. The next instant, however the half-

breed's rifle was jammed against his side, and he stood motionless. These two were desperate, and he was not minded to tempt fate.

At least, Cowley had no idea of murder, this was clear. Denis felt tremendously relieved, for the man was capable of anything. Doubtless it was fear, rather than conscience, which restrained Cowley from such extremities, since it was one thing to face possible trial for small offenses, and quite another thing to be hung for murder.

While Smoking Duck held Denis at his rifle's muzzle, Cowley strode over and went through the pockets of the khaki tunic. Denis felt a moment's swift apprehension lest the tousers be observed, with their bullet holes and bloodstains, but even had Cowley noticed them it was unlikely in the extreme that he would have been able to arrive at their correct explanation.

With a grunt of satisfaction, the ruffian extracted the warrant from Denis' breast pocket and held it down to the firelight. He read it over, and then tore it across and flung it into the blaze with a savage snarl. Returning to his search, he drew forth the regulation handcuffs and key, and grinned mockingly.

"Meant them bracelets fer me, huh? Say, I reckon they'll make a leftenant out'n ye when this joke gets out, won't they? Stick your hands out—quick, blast ye!"

White-lipped, Denis put forth his hands. Cowley snapped the handcuffs on his wrists and pocketed the key. Then he thrust his unlovely face close to that of his captive and swung up a threatening fist, like a scarred ham.

"Now, Mister Trooper Stewart, ye've talked mighty big about your dodgasted police outfit, ain't ye? Talked mighty big 'bout what was comin' to Jim Cowley, ain't ye? Well, ye got somethin' comin' to you, an' you're goin' to get it—flapjacks an' water, and mighty glad to get it, by gum! Let me have any fuss out'n ye, and I'll drub that uniform off'n your back, into the bargain!"

With this gentle effort at persuasion, Cowley straightened. From his hip pocket he drew a flask, the brother to that which had been carried by The Pigeon. This, too, was half-full of white whisky. He lifted it to his lips and took a long swallow, then held it toward Denis, with a leer.

"Have a drink, an' no hard feelings?"

"Thanks, I don't drink the stuff," said Denis, not keeping the contempt from his voice.

For an instant, he thought the other would strike him in the face. But Cowley controlled himself, and, with a flood of profanity, turned to the half-breed.

"Drive him down to the canoe, Smokin' Duck. We got to shove out'n here an' get home. Got a heap o' work to finish up 'fore we can light out. Think ye can run them rapids at night?"

Smoking Duck grunted a scornful assent and prodded Denis with the rifle.

Manacled and helpless, Denis obeyed the shove. Threatening Cowley would effect nothing, and might bring on an outburst of drunken rage which would mean disaster. And, despite the locked handcuffs, he began to think that he was getting off cheaply.

Again, Cowley had quite forgotten about any canoe which Denis might have had, or else had taken it for granted that Denis had come by shore. That canoe, and the rifle it contained, might yet prove a valuable asset.

Scrambling down the steep bank to the water, Denis got into the canoe and seated himself amidships, facing the stern. Smoking Duck shoved the craft out, then busied himself with extreme care in stowing and lashing the duffel bags which Cowley tossed down. Cowley himself followed, a moment later, and gave Denis a last word of caution:

"I got two six-guns here, mister, and we're goin' to run a mighty mean stretch o' white water. You set mighty quiet."

With this admonition, Cowley crawled into the bow, behind Denis. Smoking Duck placed a spare paddle in readiness, grunted, shoved out, and climbed into the stern. With one sharp lunge, the half-breed sent them swirling out into the swift current above the rapids.

Denis looked over his shoulder. He had one swift glimpse of wildly tossing white water, looking doubly dangerous in the faint starlight, then he turned toward the half-breed again and sat immobile, knowing that his own safety depended on his balancing the canoe in that moment.

Then the canoe seemed to leap forward—faster, faster! About them foamed a tumbling mass of waters; jagged, black rock points flashed past, so close that Smoking Duck could have touched them with his blade; the frail birch-bark leaped and jumped to the swirling vortex as though it were a cork floating without guidance.

But Smoking Duck sat like a bronze image, powerful, steady, his knotted, brown arms thrusting down his paddle in skillful play of muscle, his keen eyes watching every aspect of the water ahead and roundabout.

Even in those moments of danger and stress, it occurred to Denis that this Cree half-breed must have had long acquaintance with these rapids, yet the fellow was not known as a resident of the district.

And then—they were through the rapids.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HAY LAKE HOMESTEAD.

ON some maps of Canada there is no such thing as Hay Lake; but it is there, a sheet of water forty miles long and fifteen wide, its northeastern end running into low hills and prairies, the rest of it bordered by foothills.

With the first streak of dawn, Cowley arrived at what he was pleased to call home, midway down the northern shore of the lake. Then it was that Denis understood why no wandering Slave hunter had carried word of this homestead on the lake.

Down between two low hills ran a little creek, emptying into the lake through what was a miniature cañon. The canoe turned up this, and was instantly hidden by the pines and bushes that clustered along the lake shore. There was barely enough water in the creek to float the canoe.

Ascending for two hundred yards, the canoe stopped at a landing made of logs, lopped, and laid along the creek bank. Five minutes later, Denis, with a rifle at his back, debouched from a trail through the trees on a small clearing set on the hill slope back of the lake, and, of course, completely hidden from any view of the water.

Cowley's shack made Denis open his eyes. It was a log structure, of course, and of no great size in itself; but on three sides of it were erected lean-tos, each of them as large or larger than the original cabin, and running to the thick trees at the edge of the clearing. The building, as a whole, was thus of surprisingly large size, and yet there were no horses or farming implements in evidence, nor any sign of another clearing.

As a homestead, it was undoubtedly a queer proposition.

On closer sight, Denis was apprised by the sense of smell that at least one lean-to was used as a storehouse for peltries. Hardly more than one of the additions could be used for this purpose, since five thousand dollars' worth of furs, provided the furs are good ones, do not occupy an enormous amount of space.

Before he could note more than this he had arrived at the entrance of the shack proper. Cowley flung open the door and bade him enter.

Expecting to see anything from a counterfeiting establishment to a trading store, Denis Stewart stepped into the house of his enemy. As he did so, he smiled at memory of an old nursery rhyme:

"Will you step into my parlor?"
Said the spider to the fly.

The interior of the shack was disappointing, however. It contained two rooms, one small one at the rear, and one large living room. Both were dirty, littered with clothing and dried pelts, and very uninviting. The smaller room seemed to be used as a storeroom for winter-clothing, traps, and grub supplies, and was lighted only by a narrow, foot-long chink caused by cutting through one of the wall logs near the roof.

To this room Cowley led his captive, with gruff humor telling him to make himself at home. Then the door slammed, and Denis heard an old-fashioned bar slid into place on the farther side. Through the moss-chinked barrier Cowley roared back a final Parthian shot:

"I'll take off them handcuffs when ye eat; and ye'll eat when I get ready, so settle down."

Not having slept that night, Denis was in some need of repose, but not so much so as his captors, who had worked hard at the paddle. This was almost immediately borne in upon him by a conversation between the two worthies, their words coming faintly through the half-chinked logs from the outer room.

"Now, Petwanisip," said Cowley, using Smoking Duck's red name, "we got to get busy an' clean up that there corn before I bring up that feller from Vermilion. He's a-goin' to meet me at the foot o' the lake in two days more, an' he'll buy the peltries.

"So we got to work like sin them two days. First, however, we got to sleep up—say till noon. Any fresh grub?"

"No," grunted the half-breed. "Make um sleep, den eat. Mebbeso catch um rabbit, fish, huh? You make for watch dat soldier, huh?"

"Who — him?" Cowley laughed coarsely, and Denis felt the anger mounting in him. "Not much. He's plenty safe, with them bracelets, in that room. You do get the fire to goin', then sleep. I'll wake ye at noon; then ye can get some fresh meat by night. Raise some o' them cussed Slave Injuns and send 'em out word what's doin'. We ought to get some more good pelts 'fore two days is up."

Denis caught the soft pad of the half-breed's moccasins, then a door closed. He heard Cowley, evidently without removing his clothes, fling himself into a bunk, with a jar that shook the structure; almost at once a snore reverberated loudly.

Tired though he was, Trooper Stewart was too puzzled for sleep offhand. What had Cowley meant by "cleaning up that corn"? And what was he trading to the Slave Indians for their furs?

The mention of the "man from Vermilion," however, helped to clear up one thing—the reason for Cowley's trip down to the Peace River. Cowley had gone down the Hay until he struck the trail to Fort Vermilion, and had at the latter place arranged with some fur trader to meet him at the foot of Hay Lake.

He had then—very possibly to throw off any chance investigators—ascended the Peace, swindling Ballard en route, had taken to horseback, probably at Dunvegan, and had cut through the mountains to the Hay again.

"I'm beginning to understand his actions now," thought Denis, studying this out by degrees. "His fur trader will buy the pelts here, as they stand, and

that'll leave Cowley free to skip out, either to Alaska, via the Mackenzie, or to Edmonton and the United States. And if he gets away inside of three or four days, even a week, he'll very likely get clear before the Mounted Police learn that he's resisted arrest and defied them."

Making shift to climb the logs to his little window, Denis found that this opened on one of the lean-tos. After a moment he was able to make out that the lean-to outside his room was that containing the furs—bales and bales of them lying crowded together a foot from him. He dropped back to the floor.

Escape was hopeless so long as Cowley held the key to his handcuffs and confined him in this room. Digging a way out with his knife was easy to talk about, but the log walls were of untrimmed tamarack and second-growth pine, which is about as hard as oak. The place was rudely but solidly built, and the door was barred on the outside.

"I'm up against it," he thought blankly, stretching out on the littered floor with a sigh of weariness, "and I've foozled Ben's job right up to the limit, too! If I dont' get away, somehow, and manage to stop Cowley's crooked work, then, by Jasper, both Ben and I will pay pretty dear for my foolishness!"

At length he fell asleep, with bitterness and self-accusation rankling in his heart, but he had not given up.

That hidden canoe, with The Pigeon's captured rifle, had more than once occurred to him as a possible cache against his being turned out afoot to starve or get home, if he could. Cowley evidently knew nothing about the Stewart homestead on the headwaters of the river, or else disregarded it.

But there was something else that Cowley did not know, and that Denis Stewart had completely forgotten. This was what his brother had said about Ballard, the American settler whom Cowley had swindled; rather, whose little daughter Cowley had swindled. Ben had said that Ballard, after reporting to the police, had "disappeared."

When Denis wakened, he heard stirrings in the other room, and could smell something cooking. He guessed that it was not long after noon. Cowley had appropriated his watch, with his other belongings. As he came to his feet, the bar on the other side of the door was lifted away, and the door opened.

Cowley stood regarding him with a sleepy grin, holding a tin plate and a steaming tin mug. This greeted Denis with the odor of chickory coffee, but it was sweet in his nostrils, for he was hungry.

"Here's your grub, mister soldier—flapjacks an' coffee," said his jailer, and set down the mug and plate. Then, drawing forth the handcuff key, he tapped significantly at the revolver in his belt.

"Don't start nothin', less'n ye want to stop a lead pill, now! I ain't aiming to starve ye, but I'm plumb set an' determined to keep ye out o' mischief. And Jim Cowley don't miss what he shoots at, neither!"

Trooper Stewart, however, was just then too much absorbed in food to bother about any foolhardy attempt at escape.

Not until he had polished off the flapjacks did he regard his keeper. Then he looked up with a smile that completely deceived the other. Jim Cowley had no means of knowing that his captive was apt to be most dangerous when smiling sweetly.

"How long are you going to keep me here?" asked Denis sipping at the hot coffee. "I suppose nothing would induce you to leave those handcuffs off me?"

"It'd take a heap more'n you could offer," and Cowley laughed heavily, his

yellow teeth conspicuous. "Oh, I figger to get my business cleaned up in a few days. Then ye can take over the homestead, an' welcome. I've cleaned up all there is in these parts, anyhow. The Hudson's Bay Comp'ny can have the leavin's."

By this, Cowley must refer to furs, thought Denis. No more speech passed between them; the handcuffs were replaced and locked, Cowley took up the mug and plate, and turned to the door. There he paused, glancing over his shoulder.

"If the breed brings your grub tonight," he remarked, "you be mighty careful. Smokin' Duck is plumb scared o' your outfit, and he'd a sight sooner put a bullet in ye to shet your mouth than he would otherwise. So mind your eye."

Leaving Denis to brood upon this gentle admonition, he closed and barred the door.

But, for once, Jim Cowley had made a huge mistake, and was destined to pay dear for it.

At those final words, Denis Stewart's heart leaped suddenly. So Smoking Duck would bring his supper! This argued that Cowley would be away, possibly to look up some Slave Indians with furs to barter. Whether that bartering was for white whisky, no longer held the thoughts of Denis; he wanted, primarily, to get free.

Beyond-a-doubt, Cowley had spoken truth. Smoking Duck would be so afraid of future consequences from the Mounted Police that he would be more than anxious to secure his own safety by shooting Denis, and so removing incriminating evidence. Cowley might flee the Dominion, but that would be a hard matter for the half-breed.

None the less, Denis perceived that here would be the chance for which he had been praying—the odds even. True, Smoking Duck would be armed, suspicious, and keenly watchful, while he would be unarmed. But, on the other hand, Cowley would presumably be away. To make any break for liberty by attempting to overpower one guard, while the other was somewhere near at hand, would be madness; but with Cowley gone, Denis determined to at least make the effort.

The long afternoon hours dragged slowly. Once or twice Denis caught the voice of the swindler from somewhere outside, lifted in hearty oaths. At intervals the smack of an ax was audible, and the reason for this was soon evident in a persistent reek of wood smoke that filled every nook and cranny of Denis' prison chamber.

He recalled the phrase used by The Pigeon, "make um fire." What on earth *was* Cowley's game here? What was he bartering to the Indians? What gled whisky Denis put aside; to get the stuff here, or even to have any quantity with a government permit, would be something impossible to conceal from the vigilant police. The secret, however, would soon be explained, once Cowley were ironed, and an investigation into those adjoining shacks could be made. For in these Denis was convinced lay the solution of the mystery.

As the hours wore on, two faint shots sounded, and it seemed very probable that the half-breed was laying in a stock of fresh meat, as ordered that morning. Denis got what sleep he could, but the little room was hot, and the wood smoke was just thick enough to be distinctly unpleasant, so that rest was hard to obtain.

With the passage of time, however, Trooper Stewart grew even more determined to escape that night, if possible. Could he but overpower the half-breed, he would be able to meet Cowley on the latter's return, and so overcome the swindler at the rifle's point. Thus to turn the tables would be quick work.

Denis had few preparations to make.

His wide-brimmed Stetson he removed, and placed under some muskrat pelts in the corner, out of harm's way. He tightened the thongs of his moccasins, which he had loosened, and then was ready.

The semidaylight that came to him from the lean-to outside his window faded and died away, and presently he heard the soft pad, pad of Smoking Duck's moccasins moving about the other room of the shack. An appetizing odor of broiling venison came to him, and he realized that the half-breed's rifle must have brought down a deer or caribou that afternoon.

Then, without warning, the bar was lifted from his door, and the heavy door itself swung open. Smoking Duck stood there, sharply outlined against the light of an oil lamp which stood on the table of the main room behind.

Denis drew a deep breath. Cowley was not in sight!

To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, out on Thursday, November 25th. Do not forget that, as this magazine is published every week, you will not have long to wait for the next installment of this serial.

THE RAINBOW OF THE DESERT, ZION NATIONAL PARK, UTAH

A DEDICATION of interest to American people who appreciate their own natural scenery, was the formal dedication of Zion National Park, Utah, on September the fifteenth. The area covered by the park has been reserved since 1909, but it was not until November 19, 1919, that Congress created Zion Park, making it the nineteenth member of the great national park system.

Zion National Park is situated in the extreme southwestern part of Utah. It is accessible by rail from both Salt Lake City and Los Angeles by the Salt Lake Route to Lund. Here a motor stage conveys the traveler the additional hundred miles. The entire journey can be made by motor from either Salt Lake City or Los Angeles, following the Arrowhead Trail.

The park consists of one hundred and twenty square miles of seventy-six thousand eight hundred acres. The most striking scenic feature is Zion Cañon which bisects the park from north to south. This cañon, which is fifteen miles in length, varies in width from fifty to two thousand five hundred feet, and its walls, never less than eight hundred, frequently rise to two thousand feet high. Even the American, familiar with the great West, will find this "Rainbow of the Desert" one of the most striking spectacles which our country has to offer. Crowned with enormous peaks and domes it is a veritable rainbow of color. When Brigham Young visited the region, in 1861, he named the cañon "Little Zion."

This newest of our national parks, is new in name only. Geologically speaking, it is perhaps millions of years old, historically, probably thousands. Only this year, ruins of the cliff dwellings of a prehistoric race, were discovered in almost inaccessible places in the cañon walls. Major Powell, explorer of the Grand Cañon, visited the region in 1870, and some years later Captain Dutton gave it considerable study.

Before the advent of the railroad and the motor, few persons had ever seen this region. The glowing accounts of the few explorers who had penetrated its remote recesses, were accepted with reservations. Enthusiasm was credited with playing fast and loose with veracity. Now that Zion Park is accessible, both by rail and motor, Little Zion will come into its own as a brilliant link of our national park system.

softly. "And, if she wants you, I'm getting vengeance all right as it is, ain't I?"

"She doesn't want me, any more than I want her," rejoined Joe Carroll explosively. "I haven't seen her since that night. She left town yesterday. She's going to be married to some fellow up in Butte. The new teacher comes today."

"Is she as pretty as Miss Page?"

"It ain't a miss at all," he grinned. "They're going to have a man teach school after this."

Nance reflected in silence a few moments. Then, with a mischievous curl of her lip, she said:

"Wouldn't it be funny if I was to like this new man teacher, the same as you liked Cora Page? Wouldn't that be a good way to get even with you?"

Joe shook his head smilingly. "I don't think you could do that, Nance. That wouldn't be your kind of vengeance."

She put a hand—much thinner than it used to be—in his and whispered:

"I'm glad you know that, Joe."

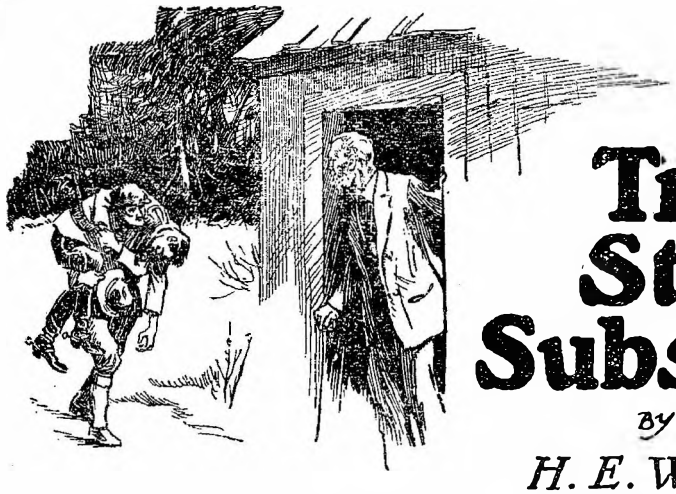
THE CANAAN OF THE NORTH

A SMOOTH land in the rough is Alaska. Widely fictionized as it has been in connection with dance halls, roulette games, and Dawson City dives, that it also has farming resources is not so well known. Those who visualize Alaska as a place of long winter nights forget that it is also a land of long summer days with lots of sun. Many root crops, including rhubarb, have a luxuriant growth. And reindeer, which folks are inclined to think of only in connection with Santa Claus, thrive in this rugged country. A herd of eighteen hundred imported from Siberia twenty-eight years ago has increased to more than eighty thousand.

BETWEEN TEN-THIRTY AND ELEVEN-THIRTY

FIENDISH in the extreme was the attempt made recently to wreck the southbound Colorado & Southern Texas fast train which left Denver at eleven-thirty p. m. Twenty-six spikes were pulled from the inside rail of the Denver & Rio Grande track on a concrete culvert, one and a half miles north of Acequia. Had a fast train struck the unspiked curve, it would have been thrown into a dry arroyo fifty feet deep, and one of the most terrible disasters in history would have occurred.

The would-be train wrecker was discovered shortly after ten o'clock by a Mr. O'Brien who was walking along the track to his home in Acequia. As he came into view, the man took flight. On investigation, O'Brien found that twenty-six spikes had been pulled from the rails with a crowbar such as railroad men use to pull railroad spikes, which the outlaw had left behind. O'Brien ran all the way back to town and gave the alarm. Warning was flashed by the railroad operator to the train dispatchers, and instructions were sent out to halt all trains for Acequia. Chief special agents arrived, and bloodhounds were put to work. They at once took up the trail, but the supposition is that the would-be train wrecker made his escape by automobile. This is the second attempt made recently to wreck the southbound Colorado & Southern Texas fast train.



Trooper Stewart, Substitute

BY

H. E. Williamson

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

WHILE attempting to arrest Jim Cowley, a swindler, "Big Ben" Stewart of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, is severely wounded. Cowley escapes, and Denis, Ben's younger brother, clad in Ben's uniform, takes up the hunt. He follows Cowley to a certain camp ground, and there slightly wounds O-me-me—The Pigeon—one of Cowley's Indian helpers. The fellow has a flask of white whisky in his pocket, and Denis suspects Cowley of being a whisky runner as well as a thief. The Pigeon tells Denis that Cowley, and Smoking Duck, another Indian helper, are in camp five miles away. Denis disarms The Pigeon, sets him free, and resumes the search. He reaches the camp, but is captured. Cowley then takes Denis to his cabin, a mysterious affair. He proves to be a trapper as well as a something else, which Denis determines to find out. The next day Cowley leaves Denis in charge of Smoking Duck while he goes to sell some furs, and Denis decides to make a break for freedom.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TABLES TURNED.

SMOKING DUCK stood at one side of the door, so that the lamplight fell on Denis while he himself was shadowed. None the less, Denis made out the glitter of a revolver, and knew that the half-breed was on guard.

"Mebbeso you jump, me shoot," said Smoking Duck. "Give um hands."

Denis held out his wrists, and after a little fumbling the handcuffs were unlocked. The half-breed pointed to a tin plate containing some cut-up pieces of venison and a mug of coffee, which stood on the floor near the door.

"Take um. Eat."

Stooping, Denis caught up the plate and began to eat the venison, which proved to be excellent. Smoking Duck watched him keenly, alert for the least sign of trouble. Finishing the meat, Denis slowly stretched himself—the deliberate movement bringing a black scowl to the half-breed's face.

"It's good to have my arms free, anyhow," said Trooper Stewart, and smiled at his guard. "Why——"

"Shut up!" said the other. "No talk—drink um coffee—mebbeso Petwani-sip shoot plenty quick."

"Not for talking, though," returned Denis, still smiling. He leaned over for the tin mug of steaming liquid and continued to speak as he did so. "Whew! You certainly made this stuff hot, all right! But I never saw an Indian yet who could make really decent coffee. You should have made tea, Smoking Duck. It'd taste better, and it might not have kept hot so long——"

He straightened up lithely. With a swift swing of his hand, he tossed the entire mug of hot fluid squarely into the half-breed's eyes.

Ducking forward instantly, Denis caught the man about the waist and bore him backward. The revolver roared out wildly, then clattered down

as Smoking Duck dropped it and clapped both hands to his face with a howl of anguish.

Blinded and scalded though he was, Smoking Duck collected himself after that first paralyzing surprise and put up the fight of his life. Denis had forced the man back against the log wall, but now the half-breed's fists came down in desperate fury, beating him away. Denis brought up his right to the neck, rocked Smoking Duck's head with a short-arm jab, and leaped clear. At least his prime object had been gained—the odds were now even.

He realized swiftly that there was no cowardice in this fellow, and that Smoking Duck would fight to the last gasp to down him. Therefore he must put the half-breed to sleep, and do it thoroughly, or else get hold of a weapon.

As he leaped away, it was in his mind to pick up the fallen revolver and bring it into play. But for this there was no time. Whipping out his long skinning knife, Smoking Duck rushed with a snarling cry of rage.

With a quiet smile on his lips, Denis met that rush squarely, keeping close watch on that deadly knife blade. Avoiding the lunging thrust by a hair's breadth, he smacked right and left into the cruel, swarthy features, and followed with a crashing right drive that sent Smoking Duck reeling slap into the table. And then——

Crash!

The table went over, and the lamp with it—fortunately being extinguished as it shattered. The shack was plunged into pitch blackness.

Denis leaped to gain the door, but he was too late. A gasping figure staggered into him and gripped him; it was the half-breed, his knife gone, but still fighting doggedly to prevent the escape of the trooper.

Smashing out at random, Denis drove home his fists again and again and felt the blows land. The half-breed had clutched him by the throat, but he broke the hold with a stinging left uppercut, then followed it with swift right and left.

Smoking Duck gave ground, Denis after him in the darkness, both of them fighting blindly, desperately, savagely, one for liberty and the other for mastery. Again the brown hands grappled the throat of Denis, this time by a lucky grip that there was no breaking. Swaying forward in that stern clutch, Denis struck against the débris of the table, and they both went down together.

There ensued a wild struggle—Smoking Duck fighting with hands and teeth and feet, Denis still striving to get clear of that death clutch. Over and over they rolled, until a wall of the shack fetched them up short; with a powerful twist, Denis managed to writhe away, flung his antagonist backward into the wall, and then rose, panting, to his feet.

But even as he did so, he stopped short.

"Smokin' Duck! What was that shootin'? Where are ye?"

A black mass loomed in the doorway, and the voice of Cowley cut the darkness. The swindler had returned!

In that agonizing instant, Stewart's brain worked like a flash. A few seconds more, and he knew Cowley would strike a match to investigate, or would be warned by a cry from Smoking Duck. In that case, he himself would be shot down, beyond a doubt.

Without a weapon, he could not face Cowley's rifle—at least while Smoking Duck was in his rear and ready to pounce on him. Within the last few moments he had gained a good deal of respect for the breed's fighting ability.

"My only chance is to get away into the darkness," he thought swiftly. "And I'll have to move fast to do it!"

Instantly he moved to the door. From the darkness broke a gasping, un-

intelligible cry in Cree; Cowley seemed to understand it, for he stepped inside the shack, cursing. While the oath was still on his lips, Denis was into him.

Gauging fairly accurately where to strike, Denis brought up his fist and swung heavily. Had the blow fallen true on Cowley's chin, it had been a knock-out, but it glanced from the man's cheek, serving only to hurl Cowley aside and fling him against the rising figure of Smoking Duck.

This much Denis guessed from the babel of oaths and raging cries, but waited not to see more. He slipped through the doorway, turned toward the path that led to the creek, and then changed his intention. Instead of departing speedily, he darted around the nearest lean-to, and stood panting.

Free! The thought was intoxicating. He gazed up at the silvern stars, then was recalled to his situation by the scratch of a match inside the cabin, followed by the excited tones of Cowley. Sucking his barked knuckles, he listened.

In half a dozen words, Smoking Duck explained what had taken place—most of which Cowley could see for himself. Also, he vehemently urged immediate pursuit, which, to the surprise of Denis, Cowley profanely vetoed.

"Ye're sure he ain't got no gun? Then let him go. Come morning, I'll trail him down myself. He ain't goin' to hurt us without a gun, is he? You lay down an' sleep, an' I'll 'tend the fire a spell. Jeewhiggers, but he cert'nly beat ye up, ye blasted no-account jailer!"

Denis had half hoped that the two scoundrels would rush forth in pursuit of him, thus giving him a chance to reënter the cabin, get hold of a weapon, and hold them up on their return. This hope was now dashed.

He slipped away from the cabin into the fringe of trees, longing to investigate the additions surrounding the shack, but not daring to do so at present. Indeed, his own immediate future was pregnant with anxiety.

"So Cowley's going to trail me in the morning!" he reflected mentally, watching the little glow of light that had arisen inside the cabin. "Looks pretty bad for me. I'm several hundred miles from the nearest white man, alone and unarmed, and without any breakfast in sight. Talk about your possum up a gum stump—that's me!"

Small wonder that Cowley was not hugely disturbed over his escape!

Denis began a cautious advance on the creek. Could he locate a canoe, he would be able to get clear of the place and paddle back to where he had left his own canoe, with grub sack, rifle, and blankets.

Before he could again face the unscrupulous Cowley he must have a rifle. Never again would he be tricked as he had been on the previous evening! Now that he knew the lay of the land and was acquainted with Cowley's lair, he could easily return, bide his time, and then get Cowley under his gun. It was vitally necessary to do so, he knew, before the scoundrel would give in to arrest. And Denis was taking no more chances.

"I've got to have a rifle, and I've got to have grub," he reflected grimly.

"That means I've got to get back to the rapids, twenty miles up the lake, and portage around to my canoe. It surely does——"

He had gotten thus far, when there was a sharp rifle crack behind, and a bullet whipped through the leaves just ahead.

Whirling, he saw the bulky figure of Cowley standing in the doorway of the shack, outlined against the light of candles within. A red jet of flame, another rifle crack—and Denis flung himself down in the brush, silent.

Cowley had heard his movements, and was shooting at the noise.

Firing a third and equally fruitless shot, the man stood as if listening. Then he lowered his rifle and seemed to shake his fist in air.

"I'll get ye!" his whisky-laden voice lifted easily to the ears of Denis. "I'll get ye, blast ye fer a sneakin' spy! And when I get my hands on ye again, watch out! I'll leave ye to fool with Jim Cowley, police or no police!"

With that, Cowley turned and reentered the cabin.

"And I'll get you, my friend!" muttered Denis wrathfully. "You'll laugh out of the other side of your mouth when you step into jail!"

Rising, he continued his way toward the creek. He had no intention of abandoning his aim, despite his present hopeless situation. Flight would have been easy enough, and he would sooner or later find Slave Indians who would help him away—but that did not occur to him.

Ben trusted him—and he was doing Ben's work! He was well aware that his brother's reputation in the force would stand or fall by the result of this man hunt, especially now that he was literally filling his brother's shoes. He smiled at the darkness around him, and his smile was eloquent of the steady determination urging him onward.

The night was starlit and fairly bright, and in a short time he reached the creek, coming out at the same landing of rough logs where he had first come ashore. But, to his growing uneasiness, there was no canoe in sight.

"I thought it was queer that Cowley let me go so easily," he thought, glancing around. "He's probably cached his canoes somewhere among the bushes. Well, I've either got to find one, or he'll find me in the morning."

Spurred by this certainty, Denis waded into the nearest clump of bushes and began his search. He had already ascertained that the only possession left to him was a small waterproof bottle of matches in his trousers pocket, but use these he dared not.

He was not at all sure that Smoking Duck might not be trailing him, rifle in hand, and so made as little noise as possible. For a hundred feet in either direction from the landing he searched the bushes and trees, but nowhere could he come across a canoe. At length, convinced that such search was worse than useless, he gave over the attempt, and stood staring down at the creek.

His situation was a desperate one. Up to the rapids at the head of the lake was over twenty miles by shore—a distance which he could not possibly cover ahead of Cowley, without food and ignorant of the trails. Further, it was quite certain that Cowely would be after him in the morning, to prevent any possible interference with future plans.

"Let's see—he'll be leaving about tomorrow night to meet that man from Fort Vermilion," ruminated Denis. "They'd get back here about noon of the next day. The question is, how on earth can I stave off pursuit until tomorrow night, even if I go hungry?"

Like a flash the answer came to him.

Stepping down to the creek, he stripped off moccasins, trousers and tunic, rolling them into a compact bundle, which he strapped about his neck with the moccasin laces. Then, shivering at the icy contact, he splashed out into the creek, which was knee-high, and started down.

Crossing over, he kept close to the right-hand bank, felt his way down the cañonlike entrance, and, ten minutes later, emerged on the open lake shore. His feet were numbed by the cold water, but exultation sang within his heart.

This water trail was the one thing that could throw even Smoking Duck from his track—with luck! He could not go far, of course, but he could go so far that Cowley could only give hazard

guesses as to where he might emerge, and it seemed that Cowley was too busy with his own affairs to waste his own time and that of Smoking Duck in search.

Turning along the lake shore, Denis felt his way through the water for two hundred yards. Then he stepped to the shore and dressed again. In five minutes he had gathered some bark and twigs, and was drying himself before a small fire, secure in the knowledge that Cowley's shack was on the other side of the hill.

"Huh!" he grunted, rising and stamping out his fire when he was thoroughly warmed, and striding up toward the trees. "By Jasper, I know one fellow that isn't licked yet, and doesn't intend to be licked in a hurry, either! You wait, Mr. Jim Cowley!"

CHAPTER IX.

NAPOLEON M'SHAYNE.

ALL of Trooper Stewart's plans and predictions were brought to naught however when the shadows of the night lifted.

With the first streak of gray in the sky he was up, eying the still darkened lake below him for any sign of Cowley. It was not the first time he had slept at the sign of the Starry Tavern, and, like an old campaigner, he had made himself comfortable with cedar boughs, dispensing with blankets from necessity. He was soon to receive evidence that even in this unexplored country the uniform was known at its true value.

Ensconced beneath a shelter of bushes just above the lake edge, he scanned the water and shore keenly. At first he could make out nothing at all. A moment later, he drew in his breath sharply at sight of a dim shape on the water. So Cowley had started after him!

"No—that isn't Cowley, either!" he muttered, after a few instants. "That's too long and narrow for a birch canoe; it must be a dugout!"

With excitement stirring him, he watched that vague, moving thing, stealing like an apparition along the edge of the shore. Its length and slimness suggested a dugout rather than a canoe, but the fact that a heavy dugout could not have been taken up the creek showed that it did not come from Cowley's camp. None the less, that single paddler might be Smoking Duck, and Denis waited to make sure.

Slowly the moving object assumed clearer lines. The paddler was seated in the center of the craft, Hay River fashion, and was paddling easily and without hurry. A moment later, Denis, as the dugout drew closer to him, could make out that the paddler was an Indian or half-breed, and was more certainly not Smoking Duck. A thrill of exultation ran through him.

This Indian was coming from the foot of the lake, and seemed to be searching the shore, as if to find that all-but-hidden creek mouth. He had passed it in the dawn light, however, and Denis conjectured that he was one of the Slave Indians coming to get whisky or other illegal barter from Cowley.

It was no time for hesitation, however. What Denis most wanted was to get away from here in a hurry; this paddler could hardly be one of Cowley's gang, or he would not have missed the opening of the creek. Accordingly, Denis sprang erect, and, with a leap, gained the edge of the shore.

"What cheer, there!" he called, with the usual Cree greeting. "Paddle in here!"

As the dugout was only a few yards distant, each figure was plainly visible to the other in the steadily growing light.

The Indian halted in blank astonishment at sight of Denis, and sat, staring, for an instant. Denis feared that the

startled fellow would turn tail and be off, but the paddle drove down, and its sweep turned the dugout in to the bank.

Then Denis observed that the man was not a Slave Indian, but a sandy-haired half-breed, of what race he could not determine. As the dugout grounded, the half-breed leaped nimbly out, and again stared at Denis in evident amazement.

"What cheer!" repeated the trooper, smiling. "I want you to give me a lift, it——"

"By gar!" exclaimed the other. "Mebbeso you's be de soldier, huh?"

As the man's eyes swept over tunic and trousers, Denis read in the swarthy face a swift mingling of surprise, anger, and eagerness.

"I want for talk!" went on the half-breed quickly. "I got de complaint for make——"

"All right," said Denis, with a feeling of dismay. "Make it!"

He saw that this fellow took him for one of the Mounted, and probably wished to enter some petty complaint about a stolen pelt or some squabble with a neighbor. The next moment he was most agreeably disappointed.

"I'm nam' Napoleon McShayne," exclaimed the man breathlessly. "I'm come up dis countree las' week, look for de good trapping ground, de good camp for nex' wintair, see? I'm camp me at de foot de lake, mebbeso. Las' night a white man come from Fort Vermilion. He come my camp, hol' de gun on me, take my grub. Den he say go up in his dugout, find a white man's camp dis side de lake, by ver' small creek, mebbeso. When I come——"

Denis nodded comprehension, a sudden gleam in his eyes.

"Hold on, McShayne!" he said quickly. "This fellow sent you up to find a man named Cowley, eh? Why did you come, if he took your grub?"

"I want my grub back! He say come, den come back, an' he give me back de grub, mebbeso. Mebbeso he pay. So I come. Now I want for make complaint——"

Denis broke in with swift questions. He found that Napoleon's camp was about ten miles farther down, on the other side, near the head of a trail that led to Vermilion and the Peace River. The white man had tried to buy Napoleon's services, but had failed; then he had promptly used force, and sent the half-breed to get Cowley, promising to give back the grub when the two returned. All this, because the white man had no canoe and was not exactly sure of where Cowley was located.

Further questioning elicited the fact that Napoleon had made no defense, having run out of cartridges for his rifle. Also, he knew the white man as one named Bray, who was an independent fur trader at Vermilion. Bray was armed with revolver only.

"By Jasper, I have some luck, after all!" thought Denis jubilantly. "Here's the man Cowley expected to buy his furs—and he's come a day ahead of time!"

He turned to the half-breed, with a glance at the still misty lake:

"See here, 'Poleon, you've got to turn in and help me, understand? I'll see that you get paid for your trouble, and well paid. Will you do it?"

The half-breed nodded instantly. The word of the Mounted is a sacred thing to those whom it protects. Moreover, he wanted revenge on the man from Fort Vermilion.

"All right. Then the first thing is to paddle me back across the lake, right away. Land me about four miles above your camp. I'll explain further while we're on the way. Hold this blamed thing steady till I get settled."

Thoroughly delighted, Napoleon McShayne grinned happily at Denis cautiously seated himself in the cranky

dugout and got settled in place. The half-breed was apologetic over his craft, which was half rotten, fully wormholed, and ready to fall to pieces; he had bought it on the Hay River, below, merely to use while prospecting for a winter trapping ground, and he would make himself a canoe later, when the autumn sap was running.

In five minutes, Napoleon's unwieldy but powerful paddle—a straight Indian slab that Denis could never have handled—had sent them far out on the lake. The sun had not yet risen, and before the full day broadened out, they would be across the lake. Behind, Denis saw and heard nothing of Cowley or Smoking Duck.

What he proceeded to gather from Napoleon, rather offset his first theories about the fur dealer Bray. Napoleon freely admitted that he had been first offered payment to serve Bray, but, having business of his own, he had refused. The truth of it was that he was a lazy and shiftless fellow, who would not bestir himself so long as he had plenty of meat in camp. Now, however, his desire for vengeance on Bray would carry him to any extreme of energetic labor, and Stewart's offer of pay quite clinched his services.

Denis, upon comprehending this better, promised full reparation from Bray. In his heart, however, he began to think that Bray was not a great deal to blame for his action, and he strongly doubted whether Bray were hand in glove with Cowley. That, however, would develop.

With great minuteness he described to Napoleon just where his canoe was concealed, above the rapids at the head of the lake. He then instructed the half-breed that, after landing him above Bray's present camp, he should go up and secure the hidden canoe and rifle. By resting for the remainder of the day and leaving the head of the lake about sunset, Napoleon could with ease meet him somewhere between Cowley's camp and the foot of the lake, along the north shore.

"Pass Cowley's creek," he concluded, "and then come on down the same shore toward the foot of the lake, understand? I'll settle with this man Bray at once. Then I'll cross the river below the lake and walk up along the shore trail to meet you. About midnight I'll light a fire, wherever I happen to be, and you head in to that fire."

He drummed this plan into Napoleon's head until he was convinced that the other understood exactly what he wanted. By this time the sun was up, and they were drawing in to the opposite side of the lake. Farther down, a thin trail of gray smoke was winding up from the trees, and this Napoleon indicated as his own camp, where Bray now was awaiting his return.

Although unarmed, Denis had no fears of his meeting with Bray, for the fur trader would have to keep on good terms with the police, and probably knew little about Cowley's illegal work.

Trooper Stewart's plan had no loophole of escape for Cowley, that he could detect. He figured that he would meet the returning half-breed about midnight, or later. Some time during the night, Cowley would start for the foot of the lake to meet his fur buyer, and about dawn, after he had gone, Denis would paddle up to the shack and attend to Smoking Duck—with his rifle, if need be.

Then, when Cowley returned from his fruitless appointment, he would find Denis and an excellent Winchester rifle to welcome him.

That plan involved a good deal of tramping along rough trails, and depended in part upon Napoleon McShayne, but Denis was sure that the half-breed would do his utmost, and had no hesitation in promising a big reward—especially as he figured on paying that reward from Cowley's stack of peltries.

"I'm taking big chances on impersonating Big Ben," he said to himself, "and that's all the more reason why I've got to win out. And *will!*"

At last they ran in to a stretch of thick pines. Napoleon informed him that there was a trail running down the lake, and he jumped out to the bank. Promising to meet Denis as arranged, and with a hearty curse aimed at Bray, Napoleon pushed out and headed for the upper end of the lake, his clumsy paddle sending him onward with deceptive speed.

Having the assurance that he would find plenty of food at the half-breed's camp, Denis struck into the pines. He wanted to get rid of Bray, then eat and sleep for a few hours before starting for the opposite side of the lake via the river at the end. He foresaw a tramp ahead of him that night, with a possible long morning's work at the end, before Cowley was ironed.

In ten minutes he found the trail. It was one of the worn paths, the width of a snowshoe, which twist and wind all through Indian country over the whole northland; never straight, but always getting somewhere. Chilled by the keen morning wind from across the lake, Denis broke into a steady jog trot.

The trail wound in through the trees, occasionally touching the lake shore, and, at such times, Denis got glimpses of Napoleon's dugout heading north, close to the shore and probably beyond sight of either Bray or Cowley.

Forty minutes later, Trooper Stewart walked into Bray's camp.

Napoleon had erected a tepee on three poles, close to the water; this, with his stone windbreak for fires, constituted his residential labors. Close behind the tepee a horse was nibbling, hobbled among some lush grass, and the owner of the horse was sitting, smoking placidly, while he cleaned fish.

Denis saw at a glance that his latest estimate of Bray had been correct. The man was decently dressed, and his face, while not particularly prepossessing, showed no traces of alarm as Denis hove in sight.

Bray arose to meet his visitor, and, in some surprise, extended a huge paw, while he grinned appropriate welcome.

"What cheer, Mister Trooper! Come in and set down—havin' fish to-day."

Denis shook hands. His keen eye took in Bray's ready revolver holster, the saddle and bridle lying off beside the tepee, the trail running off to the south. Then, before he could speak, Bray continued his greeting:

"Say, ain't you the trooper posted down to Peace River Landin'? Name o' Stewart? Mebbe you remember meetin' me, a couple o' months back—I was down that way to give evidence time o' the scrap at Lambert's saloon."

Denis chuckled.

"Sure," he responded. "I'm Stewart, all right. Your name's Bray, eh?"

"That's me," nodded the trader. "Ain't you off your beat up here? Or ain't it none o' my business? This is a kind o' lonesome country for white men, ain't it?"

Denis eyed him steadily, wondering what effect his next words would have.

"That's about the kind of question I was going to ask you, Bray. As a matter of fact, I think that what you are doing here is very much *my* business! And this is such a lonesome country up here that I'm going to ask that you give an account of your relation with Jim Cowley, and just how far you're in cahoots with him."

Bray looked at Denis with startled eyes; then his hand fell to his revolver.

CHAPTER X.

NEW ARRIVALS.

THAT gesture on Bray's part was little more than instant. Staring at Denis, he let go his revolver, a puzzled look in his eyes.

"See here, trooper," he exclaimed slowly, "you've sprung somethin' on me this time. You ain't after *me?*"

Still Denis regarded him steadily, judging the man in that moment. Bray was not of the Cowley stamp, he felt sure.

"No," he said at length. "I'm not after you, Bray—if you tell a straight story. You're here to meet Cowley. Well, you won't do that."

"Eh? Why not?" demanded the trader.

"Because Cowley is due to spend part of his life in jail. He has about five thousand dollars' worth of pelts up the lake——"

Bray set his hands on his hips.

"Say, Stewart," he ejaculated. "where on earth did you land all this? Let me tell you all I know 'bout that feller—but I'm blessed if I can see where you learned so much! It beats me!"

Denis sat down.

"Tell me what you know about him."

"Well," resumed Bray reflectively, "I was down to Peace River Landin', nigh on three weeks ago, and Cowley, he come up on the boat with me from Vermilion or thereabouts. I've seen him around the post off an' on——"

"What was he doing there?" demanded Denis sharply.

"Hirin' pack ponies an' packers, soon's the trail to the Hay opened up this spring. He got a lot o' stuff in from Edmonton, an' bought a sight o' corn. Come to think of it, mebbe it was *all* corn he was packin' up to the Hay."

Denis nodded, puzzled, but not voicing his wonder. What Cowley was doing with all this corn was something that he could not fathom. Bray continued.

"As I was sayin', he was on the boat with me. He says he's got a heap o' peltries up here, an' for me to meet him 'bout this time, right here at the foot o' the lake. But he didn't want nothin' said about it, 'cause he was afraid the H. B. C. or the French outfit would get sore, an' bust up his tradin' here. So I kep' quiet. He got off the boat at the Peace Landin', and that's all I've seen of his since."

"That's quite enough, Bray," said Denis, with quiet satisfaction. "Now, the best thing you can do is to saddle up and hit the trail back to Vermilion."

Bray frowned, meeting his look squarely.

"This is a free country, ain't it?"

"Yes," said Denis. "Perfectly free. I'm merely giving you a bit of advice. This Indian whose camp you are holding has laid a complain against you for——"

At that, Bray flung up his hands, and turned.

"Gosh take it, how you police fellers get hold o' stuff beats me!" he said helplessly. "Then all you want is for me to get out?"

"I hate to be discourteous," said Denis, with a laugh, "but that's about the size of it. You can't buy Cowley's pelts, that's flat!"

"Then I ain't got no business here. Better keep a couple o' them fish for yourself. Tell that Injun to come to my store at Vermilion an' I'll settle with him for what little of his grub I used."

Turning, Bray saddled up his horse and departed, evidently more than a little put out by the way in which his hopes of a big lot of pelts had been dashed.

By noon, Denis had made away with a huge meal, bathed, and stretched out beneath the shade of a skin tepee for a sleep. He awakened about four, as he guessed by the position of the sun, and was instantly up and doing.

From this camp he could make out the topography of the ground ahead of him, after a rough fashion. To the river, at the foot of the lake, was about

three miles. He would have to cross the river—probably by swimming—and then start on his long trail up the opposite shore toward Cowley's. If he got across the river and picked up the opposite trail by dark, he would be well on his way up the lake by midnight.

Feeling well satisfied over the elimination of Bray, he packed up some grub from the half-breed's supply, and departed.

There were no hills in this quarter, and the trail wound through spruce and pine and tamarack to the river opening. This Denis reached toward sunset, to find the stream two hundred yards wide, but with a smooth, deep current.

With a knife found at Napoleon's camp, he quickly lopped off two small saplings and lashed them crosswise. On this improvised raft he piles his clothes, tied in a tight bundle, and, pushing the raft before him, struck out for the other shore.

That swim was by no means to his liking, for the water was bitterly cold, and the current proved swifter than he had anticipated. Twice his bundle was nearly swept away from him, and when he did draw in toward the opposite shore, it was to find a line of rocks awaiting him, just above a sharp bend in the river.

More nearly exhausted by that swim than he would have thought possible, he dragged himself wearily from the water, got a small fire started, and struggled into his clothes. By this time the darkness was falling.

Shivering, Denis crouched over his fire, and piled on more wood in the effort to get well warmed before taking up his trail again. He had his back to the river, and was just beginning to enjoy the warmth, when from behind he heard the distinct "swish-sh!" of a paddle. Like a flash he whirled.

Too late! A canoe was just sweeping in to the bank, ten feet away, bearing three paddlers; and the bow man was standing erect, with leveled rifle.

"Stand mighty still, you!" came a harsh voice. "We been after you for quite a spell, now, an' here's where you pay up, you dirty cuss!"

But that was not the voice of Cowley, nor was it a voice that Denis could remember having ever heard before!

CHAPTER XI.

BALLARD ARRIVES.

FROM the canoe stepped three men, then in the darkness appeared another canoe that swam into the circle of firelight to show a fourth man—all white. The three who had landed approached the fire.

As they did so, their weapons fell, and amazement which was almost ludicrous sprang into their features as they stared at Denis. He himself, who was puzzled enough over seeing so many white men here and over their abrupt greeting, was forced to laugh at the manner in which they changed countenance.

"Well, we're having quite a party up here!" he said, smiling. "Since I haven't had the pleasure of meeting any of you gentlemen, I presume there's been a mistake?"

The leader flushed. He was a raw-boned, energetic, straight-eyed man of forty. "I reckon there has," he assented sorrowfully. "Yes, stranger, there's sure been a mistake. We thought you was some one else, didn't we, boys?"

"We sure did!" went up the hearty chorus. "He's a soldier, too! Must be that chap from Peace Landing!"

Denis stooped and flung more wood on the fire. The advent of these men, he swiftly reflected, might change his whole plans. With one of their canoes he could paddle up the lake and meet Napoleon, or he might borrow a rifle from them and——

"Go slow!" something warned him

mentally. "Go slow, Denis! Let these fellows do the talking first."

When he straightened up, he faced the tall leader frankly.

"Well, who are you?" he demanded, with quiet firmness. "In my opinion you're a little free with your rifles, gentlemen. Whom are you seeking?"

The other eyed him for a moment.

"Ain't you the trooper from Peace Landing?"

"Trooper Stewart," replied Denis. "Answer my question, please."

In reply, however, the leader only swung about and shouted down to the man who was still sitting in the second canoe:

"Hey, Ed! Get up here in a hurry—here's your friend, or claims to be. He don't look the same to me, though."

Denis was puzzled at the man's manner. A moment later, the fourth man arrived from the canoe, took a look at Denis, then stuck out his hand, with a deep exclamation.

"Why, it's Big Ben Stewart! Hello, there, trooper——"

He leaned forward suddenly, his face changing.

"No, it ain't Ben, neither!" he cried out. "Ben ain't got blue eyes, like you—yet you look enough like him to be his brother!"

Denis smiled, understanding at last what was forward. Here was some one who knew Ben, and who knew him too well to be deceived.

"I *am* his brother," he returned easily. "Now, answer my questions, and let's have no more of this fooling. Whom are you after?"

"After the same one you are, I reckon—Cowley," said the leader, giving him a keen glance. "You ain't a trooper, are you?"

"No," said Denis. "My brother got shot up by Cowley, and I'm taking his place."

"Oh, that's all right, then!" the leader's hand was extended, as if in relief. "Shake, Stewart! My name's Ballard—I'm the fellow that skunk swindled."

With a mixture of emotions, Denis shook hands with Ballard, and the latter introduced his three friends.

What were these four men doing here? Denis Stewart's mind leaped into keen suspicion as he watched them unloading their duffel and making camp. He remembered what his brother had said—that Ballard had come looking for Cowley with a six-shooter, and had then vanished, after laying complaint. Could Ballard possibly still be on his enemy's track, seeking personal satisfaction?

If this were the case, Denis knew what his own duty was.

When bacon and beans were cooking, and tea was brewing beside the fire, all five sat down together. Without hesitation, Denis related what had happened to Big Ben, and how he himself had taken up the trail—but he said nothing of having encountered the swindler. A little later, he was glad of that reticence.

"We've had a right smart chase," said Ballard, puffing at a pipe. "You see, after I laid complaint at the Landing, I come back downriver with a fur trader named Bray. It turned out that Bray was goin' up to Hay Lake in a couple o' weeks, and in some way the name o' Cowley was mentioned. I didn't say nothin', but I allowed I'd follow Bray. I'm glad that ye ain't a p'liceman, Stewart, 'cause we've got other views than arrestin' that skunk Cowley."

He paused a moment, while Denis kept silence, obeying that warning voice.

"Well, me an' my friends was right sore about Cowley's cheatin' me out o' my little gal's money," went on Ballard. "So we thought we'd see if the fellow wasn't hiding out up this a way. We concluded a little shooting up and mebbe a length o' rope would do him a world o' good—eh, boys?"

"That's about right!" some one remarked. "Another world o' good, more like. A whole lot hotter world than this, by gum!"

Denis felt a little chill pass up and down his spine.

He knew that these men were honest settlers; rough, good-natured, hard-fisted, and capable of no evil unless their passions were aroused. The swindling of Ballard, and the fact that Cowley had deliberately sneaked off with a child's money, had aroused them to the boiling point—and they were after Cowley's hide.

Knowing Cowley as he did, Denis saw that the man would not give in easily, but with the first shot fired against them these four would let loose a storm of lead that would bring death in its wake. And that would be murder.

"We rode over from Vermilion, but lost Bray on the way," resumed Ballard. "Ain't seen him, have ye?"

Denis thought swiftly.

"Yes," he nodded. "I met him at noon, while I was coming down the south shore of the lake. He was just saddling up, and struck off by a trail to the south after we had talked for a little. There was no sign of Cowley, though."

"Well, it don't matter. We got Cowley safe enough," said Ballard complacently.

"How's that?" queried Denis, skeptical of this statement.

"Met an Injun family downriver, where he struck the Hay. Got them canoes, and heard there was a white man livin' halfway up the lake, north shore. That's Cowley. If you'd ha' come down the north shore instead o' the south, you'd have got him."

Supper was now ready, and Denis gave over his questions. But as he ate, he was doing some hard thinking.

If he could get ahead of these four, and reach Cowley's cabin, he might yet effect his arrest, and get off with the prisoner before Ballard arrived. His actions, however, could be governed by circumstances; in the meantime, he could see what turned up, and, if possible, make some excuse to get away in one of those two canoes. His scheme of going up the shore by land must now be abandoned.

"It's lucky, Stewart," said one of the men, with a grin, "that you ain't your brother! We're goin' to trim that skunk Cowley, an' don't want any trooper buttin' in to spoil the game. If you'd been Big Ben, we might ha' had to tie you up."

And there was more earnest than jest in those words, Denis realized.

"You'd have some job, then," he said, laughing lightly. "Of course, though I'm not a trooper and am only representing my brother in the effort to catch Cowley, I can see that you chaps are running into trouble. Why on earth don't you leave this matter to the law, Ballard?"

Ballard tapped his revolver significantly.

"I was raised in mighty wild country, Stewart, where the worst o' the cowmen an' bad men in the Western States got together. I've give the law a chance at this thing, an' you've just said how Big Ben is shot up. Now it's my innings. I aim to land that skunk where he'll stay."

The savage tensity of the man's voice held even more meaning than the words themselves, and his earnestness was reflected in the faces of the other three.

"That's all very well," said Denis quietly, after a brief silence. "I'll not argue the question of right or wrong with you, Ballard, for we see it from different angles, I imagine. Are you going to push on to-night, or wait till morning?"

Ballard regarded him half suspiciously, then seemed to make up his mind that Denis was not to be feared.

"Camp here to-night," he said. "Tackle him by daylight, when we can see to shoot straight."

"Then I'll camp with you, if you don't mind," returned Denis, seeing that this amateur lynching party was not quite sure how to accept him. "Want to stand watches?"

"Not much—we had too hard a day's trail," was the satisfied answer.

Amateurs though they might be at this work, Denis saw very plainly that all four men were deeply intent on getting hold of Cowley and punishing him in their own way—and this would not only mean inevitable bloodshed, but probably worse. The country was new, and in the eyes of these men a personal justice was more to be desired than an impersonal law, which might or might not get results. Of course the Mounted Police would sooner or later land Cowley. But Ballard wanted to do it himself, and quickly.

"It's all right, but it isn't the law," thought Denis to himself, while the others smoked and discussed what they would do to the swindler. "They hit it exactly—if I were Ben, they might look for trouble! That's not flattering to me, by any means. And if they do up Cowley, Ben loses out, all the same.

"No, by Jasper—I've got to act! I'll have to get Cowley and Smoking Duck, then I'll have to show these four chaps that I'm standing in Ben's shoes. I'll have to remember that myself—Ben trusts me, and I'm representing him!"

With this thought still thrusting through his brain, he was glad when the four men decided to turn in for the night.

"His own plan was already formed. He wanted one of their canoes, but knew better than to ask for it—such a request would only arouse suspicion, and he was in no situation to take such a course.

What punishment they intended meting out to Cowley was made evident by the sight of a coiled lariat among their stores. Denis winced at the sight of it. He knew that these soft-spoken, quiet men were to be feared, because, like still waters, they "ran deep." There was nothing criminal about them; they were rough, straightforward men, who intended to hang Cowley because they trusted in their own strong hands more than in the law.

But—Denis was there to represent the law, whether they acknowledged it or not. And he was resolved that they *would* acknowledge it.

He stretched out, wrapped in a blanket which Ballard lent him, a little apart from the four, and closer to the canoes. Ballard and the rest lay with their weapons, and he reluctantly gave up hope of getting off with a rifle, much as he wanted one.

"I've got to bank on Napoleon McShayne now," he thought, waiting for the others to fall asleep. "If he fails me, it's all up!"

An hour passed like an eternity. Feigning sleep as he was, Denis had hard work to keep himself awake; the fire died down to a red glow, and just as he had resolved to rise, one of the men awoke and flung more wood on the embers.

At last he lifted his head and inspected the others. From what he could see of the blanket-wrapped forms, all were deep in slumber, and Denis quietly threw off his own blanket, with cautious movements.

He came to his feet warily, but no one stirred. His moccasins making no noise, he stepped down to the canoes, where the hardest part of his task awaited him.

To lift the smaller canoe and float it without a sound was slow work. At last it was done, and Denis caught up a paddle. Kneeling in the frail, birch-bark craft, he pushed out and floated off, undetected. His paddle swung

down, and the canoe turned toward the mouth of the lake.

With ten minutes of silent, careful paddling, he gained it and glided out into the open sheet of water. From the west a cool breeze was blowing; this would aid Napoleon in coming down the lake, but it hindered Denis greatly, for the high bow of his canoe veered from side to side before it, and made straight paddling difficult.

The night was clear and cool, the stars brilliant. Vaguely he could make out the northern line of shore, and headed diagonally for it. He fell into a deep, powerful, swinging paddle stroke that made the water hiss and boil under the keelless craft and sent her darting forward.

Forced to guess at time, he drew in to the north shore and kept along it, until he figured that midnight had passed. Then he struck in direct to the beach.

"I'm the third side of a triangle—and I've got to handle the other two sides," he said, grimacing unpleasantly. "Also, I haven't as yet got a weapon of any kind, while those chaps back there are armed, and keen on hanging somebody, and Cowley is just as keen on shooting somebody! Well, I hope Napoleon will bring me that rifle and canoe—then we'll see what we will see!"

The canoe swung ashore, and, as nearly as Denis could figure, he was about ten miles up the northern shore—halfway between Cowley and Ballard. There he lighted a small and partly screened fire, and waited for Napoleon McShayne.

To be concluded in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, out on Thursday, December 2nd. Do not forget that, as this magazine is published every week, you will not have long to wait for the final installment of this serial.

TRIBAL HERDS ON INDIAN RESERVATIONS

WITH the idea in view of individualizing Indian interests as rapidly as possible, according to the present Indian administration, tribal herds have been formed. In utilizing the grass not needed for their individual stock the tribal herd is very valuable, providing a market for their hay and furnishing well-bred, acclimated animals for sale to the Indians. The financial profits, of course, are important to the tribe. Tribal herds of cattle are now maintained on some sixteen reservations in the States of Arizona, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, South Dakota, Washington, and Wyoming, ranging in size from a few hundred to several thousand head. By inducing one of the leading stockholders to introduce new blood into his herd, the results in grade have become so apparent that the tribal council have recently taken up the action in general on all the reservations.

The value of tribal stock on all Indian reservations is now almost three million dollars. Comparatively few tribal herds of sheep and goats are maintained, and these are confined mostly to New Mexico, where the conditions are most favorable. The largest tribal herds of cattle are located on the Crow Reservation in Montana, and, in many respects, is typical of those conducted on a smaller scale. This herd was established in the spring of 1914, at the expense of about four hundred thousand dollars for heifers, steers, and bulls; in 1919 it had doubled the outlay as well as increased the animals.

Trooper Stewart, Substitute

By

H. E. Williamson

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

WHILE attempting to arrest Jim Cowley, a swindler, "Big Ben" Stewart of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police is severely wounded. Cowley escapes, and Denis, Ben's younger brother, clad in Ben's uniform, takes up the hunt. He follows Cowley to a deserted camp ground, and there slightly wounds *O-me-me*—"The Pigeon"—one of Cowley's Indian helpers. The fellow has a flask of white whisky in his pocket, and Denis suspects Cowley of being a whisky runner as well as a thief. The Pigeon tells Denis that Cowley, and Smoking Duck, another Indian helper, are in camp five miles away. Denis disarms the Pigeon, sets him free, and resumes the search. He reaches the camp but is made a prisoner. Cowley then takes him to his cabin, a mysterious affair. He proves to be a trapper, but Denis is not satisfied that trapping is his only occupation. The next day Cowley leaves Denis in charge of Smoking Duck while he goes to sell furs.

Denis escapes, but is without arms or food. Napoleon McShayne, a half-breed, directs Denis to his camp, where Bray, a trapper, is resting, on his way to Cowley's place. Bray tells Denis that Cowley has been buying a large amount of corn. Denis then orders Bray back to Fort Vermilion. McShayne is bribed to go back up the river and secure Denis' canoe and rifle which were left there the night he was captured. A little later Ballard, the man whom Cowley had swindled, and several friends appear in search of Cowley, with the intention of lynching him. Denis decides to prevent this. That night he makes a get-away in one of their canoes, and goes to the point where he had planned to meet McShayne.

CHAPTER XII.

TIGHTENING UP.

CLOSE beside his tiny signal fire, Denis waited there in the night. As he watched, he remembered one thing to which he had given little thought.

This was that Cowley was going to the foot of the lakes some time that same night to meet Bray. Presumably Cowley would not start until an hour or so before dawn. But what would happen when he reached the foot of the lake?

"He'll take Ballard's camp fire for that of Bray," mused Denis, frowning. "When he gets close up, he'll discover his mistake and put for home. Then I'll be there to nab him—if nothing happens. Well, no use gathering trouble till the time comes."

Perhaps half an hour later, Denis sighted a dark blur on the lake, and heard a low hail. He flung a few scraps of birch bark on the fire, allowed them to blaze up until he himself was fully revealed; then he stamped out the fire and scattered it.

Waiting at the edge of the shore, he presently saw two craft come gliding in. The first was Napoleon's dugout, with Napoleon himself wielding his clumsy paddle. Towing after this was the light canoe which Denis had left at the head of the lake on his unfortunate attempt to arrest Cowley.

"B'jou'!" exclaimed the half-breed. "I got heem. What you do dat man Bray, huh?"

"I took care of him, all right," said

Denis, smiling. "He's gone back to Fort Vermilion, and you'll find your camp waiting as you left it. When you're at the fort, go in to Bray's store and he'll settle with you for whatever grub he used."

The 'breed grunted deep satisfaction at this information. Denis pulled in the canoe. To his delight, he found his duffel bag, blankets, and the rifle exactly as he had left them.

"Mebbeso you make for pay?" suggested Napoleon diffidently.

Denis reflected.

"The man Bray sent you to find a man named Cowley, returned. I'm going to arrest him. Also a 'breed named Petwanisip. Cowley has some fine pelts up there, and you can have your pick. Want to come along?"

This did not strike Napoleon's fancy.

"Mebbeso I come back. I'm want for sleep now," he said, which was a lie, since he had probably slept all the preceding afternoon, after reaching the head of the lake. "Huh? Mebbeso I come back dere to-morrow."

Denis chuckled.

"There's a bunch of four white men down at the foot of the lake," he rejoined. "They have rifles, and they'll be up here to-morrow——"

That was enough for Napoleon, who grunted deep:

"Mebbeso I go 'way quick, whatever. Want for sleep. Mebbeso I come back, mebbeso not. Whatcheer!"

He edged his dugout toward the lake shadows. Denis laughed, glad to be rid of the fellow, who would be of no use in a fight.

"Run along, then, 'Poleon. You come back to-morrow afternoon, and the coast will be clear, I think. Then I'll pay you—and pay you pretty well, too. Don't come later than that, but come then sure. Sure?"

"Huh! Sure!" was the answer. Napoleon would keep his word also—to the police.

Denis watched the dark, slim shape of the dugout float out into the night and disappear into a speck under the starlight. Then he turned to his own canoe, and, with a feeling of deep relief, knelt once more on his blankets and took up his paddle, the rifle ready to hand. Ballard's canoe he left on the bank.

To land at Cowley's Creek about dawn would be time enough for his purposes. He could let Cowley go to the foot of the lake—probably to return faster than he had gone. In the meantime he could arrest Smoking Duck and make an investigation.

That was an important point—the investigation. Besides the original charge against Cowley, and that of resisting arrest, the police must know what the man was doing here, how he had gained possession of so much fur, and just what kind of an illegal game was forward. It might be that he was simply dealing out whisky without a permit, which was in itself a grave offense in a land where the vanishing Indians are protected by laws of iron against such men as Cowley.

With ten miles to travel against a steadily increasing headwind, and three hours in which to cover it, Denis fell into a steady, even stroke that he could keep up for days on end. Keeping close to shore, he worked his way gradually along up the lake, noticing a perceptible increase in the wind as the night wore onward.

When the stars began to dim and die, and the grayness of dawn slowly lifted the darkness, Denis ran to the beach and landed. It was vital that he make no mistake now, and he must be sure of his ground before going ahead.

For half an hour he lay on the bank, watching and waiting. Then an exclamation of satisfaction broke from him. Through the lifting gray dawnlight he could discern the hills a half mile farther along the shore, where Cowley's

camp was located. Then he caught sight of a moving speck halfway across the lake, in line between the hills and the foot of the lake, and moving toward the latter.

Cowley was well on his way.

"Looks as though things were breaking my way at last," thought Denis, as he scrambled down the steep bank to his canoe. "Now I think that I'll have a little surprise for Mr. Smoking Duck before he gets through his breakfast."

Save for the cartridges which The Pigeon had expended, the Winchester rifle had a full magazine. Certain of this, Denis pumped in a fresh cartridge, knelt in the canoe, placed the rifle in front of him, and shoved out.

Now he paddled swiftly, putting all his strength in the work. In a short fifteen minutes he found himself lying outside the almost concealed creek entrance. Into this he headed, scanning the bushes and trees ahead for any sign of Smoking Duck.

No danger threatened, however. Without sighting a moving thing, he reached the log landing, jumped out, and lifted his canoe from the water. Then, rifle in hand, he stepped out on the trail to the shack.

Fve minutes later, he was standing at the edge of the clearing, eying that odd cluster of buildings. From the chimney of the shack itself no smoke ascended, but from what seemed to be the lean-to just behind, a thin trail of wispy smoke was winding into the sky.

"That must be the 'fire' to which Cowley referred," thought Denis, frowning. "If Smoking Duck isn't asleep, he's probably around there in back."

Hesitating no longer, he went across the clearing at a run, half expecting a rifle shot from the silent shack front. None came. Reaching the door of the shack, he peered inside and found the place empty, but from the back came the regular strokes of an ax!

Slipping around the side wall of the shack, to the right, Denis passed the lean-to which held the baled peltries. At the corner he paused, cocking his rifle, then stepped out around the end.

A dozen feet away stood Petwanisip, leaning on an ax; even that cocking of the rifle had attracted the half-breed's attention. Denis covered the man instantly.

"Hands up, Smoking Duck!"

Smoking Duck stared as if at an apparition. Then he cast a wild glance around, and Denis saw a rifle leaning against the wall. But it was three yards distant, and not even the desperate half-bred dared risk it. His hands rose slowly.

Each lean-to adjoined the other, here at the back. To the left of the rifle was a low doorway, near which Smoking Duck had been throwing the wood as he had cut it. Denis observed that this was firewood.

"Go to the left of that door, stand with your face to the wall, and stick your hands out behind your back!" commanded Denis.

There was a snap to his voice that spelled earnestness. His brown face convulsed with helpless rage, the half-breed did as Denis had ordered. Advancing to the man, Denis stuck his rifle in Petwanisip's back.

"Be mighty careful, now—this gun is cocked!"

With one hand he unlaced his moccasins, knotted the lacing, and drew it about the swarthy wrists. Then he set down his rifle, and in a few seconds had knotted the buckskin thongs stoutly. Smoking Duck was trapped beyond escape.

"Walk around to the front of the cabin."

Driven by that relentless rifle, the sullen half-breed led the way around the shack to the door. Denis ordered him on inside, and so to the same little room where he himself had been con-

fined. Removing the fellow's knife, he locked him in the inner room.

"Things are certainly coming fine for me!" he reflected, as from Cowley's stores he replaced his moccasin lacing. "Now we'll begin our investigations—and I'd better start right here."

Ben's Ross service rifle was in a rack, as was the revolver with its lanyard. Denis gladly took back these weapons, and found Cowley's revolver hanging to a nail. No other rifle was in evidence, however, and he conjectured that Cowley had not gone forth unarmed. This, however, he had expected.

Leaving Smoking Duck locked up safely, Denis sallied forth on his tour of inspection. First he visited the lean-to at the right, and in this he found a few sacks of corn, together with several sacks marked "beans" and "potatoes." A slash with his knife showed that all these were filled with corn.

"So Cowley has been importing all the corn he could, under every disguise possible!" thought Denis, looking down at the sacks. "The question is, why? In about two minutes your little game will be up, my friend!"

As he closed the rude door of the lean-to and stepped out into the early morning sunshine, he paused suddenly. The night wind had died away; the morning was perfectly calm and clear. He stood motionless, listening—and the sound came again. It was a distant but still recognizable rifle crack. A third sounded instantly, then two or three shots came almost together. After that, silence.

"That's Cowley and Ballard!" thought Denis, his blue eyes narrowing. "If they haven't got him, he'll be back presently. If they have—then it's up to me to arrest Ballard's crowd. By Jasper, I don't like this business a little bit!"

No further sounds of conflict reached him. While he could sympathize with Ballard and the latter's friends, he knew perfectly well that he must arrest them if they had killed Cowley. He was representing Big Ben Stewart, and his uniform typified the law, and Ben would be held responsible for the upholding of the law.

Frowning uneasily, he passed on around the corner of the log structure, and again came to where he had found Smoking Duck at work. He stepped to the doorway, set down his rifle beside that of the half-breed, and entered the mysterious lean-to.

This proved to be unlighted save by the door, and for a moment his eyes could not pierce the semidarkness. Then, as he saw what manner of place this was, an exclamation of slow surprise broke from his lips.

"By Jasper! And to think that I never even suspected it—and dad was the closest guesser of all!"

To either side of him were piled small kegs, and above these were neat rows of glass half-pint flasks, precisely similar to that which he had found on the person of The Pigeon a few days previously. About half of them were filled with a white liquid, and the subtle odor of whisky which pervaded the room betrayed the nature of that liquid. But Denis merely noted these things in passing—his gaze was riveted on what lay beyond, across the room from him.

There, with a small fire still burning, was a complicated arrangement of metal, which he did not understand at all, but whose usage was quite evident to him. He had seen pictures of stills before this, and knew at once that he had solved the mystery of Cowley's corn and trading and illegal work. Every detail lay clear before him.

Here on Hay Lake, hundreds of miles from anywhere, Cowley had located a private whisky distillery. From Fort Vermilion to the summer Hudson's Bay post, farther down the Hay, he had brought up corn under various disguises, to avert possible suspicion, and

had calmly proceeded to manufacture his own whisky and trade it to the Indians in the neighborhood.

"This is going the whisky-running game one better, all right!" exclaimed Denis, as he eyed the place. "Well, my job is clear—so here goes!"

Stepping outside, he took up Smoking Duck's ax and reëntered. First drawing what was left of the fire and carefully stamping it out, he then waded into the still, ripping the copper worm and everything else into useless shreds of metal. He did his work thoroughly and left nothing undestroyed.

Then he turned his attention to the kegs and bottles. The latter he smashed where they were; the former he rolled out into the yard. Ten of the kegs were full of whisky, and these he smashed in and emptied. Satisfied at length that the whole affair had been destroyed, with the exception of one flask to be used as evidence if necessary, he wiped his dripping face and took up the two rifles.

"Here's a good morning's work for Ben, anyhow!" he muttered happily. "Now I'd better prepare my little reception committee for Mr. Cowley—or Ballard. I wonder which will come?"

CHAPTER XIII.

COWLEY CRIES "ENOUGH!"

FROM the front of the shack, the lake was, of course, hidden by the intervening hill. Denis remembered that the presence of his canoe would warn Cowley if the latter arrived in flight from Ballard, and struck off to the creek at a sharp trot.

Once here, he went on to the edge of the lake, and scrambled through the bushes to a vantage point. And here his mental question was answered instantly.

A scant quarter mile away was a canoe bearing a single paddler—evidently Cowley. The canoe was heading for the creek entrance, and was traveling fast. A mile or more behind it was another canoe bearing four men, and for a moment Denis eyed them, wondering why they did not catch up with Cowley. Then he laughed shortly.

"Overloaded, by Jasper! All four of 'em in her, and she must be right down to the water, so they don't dare put on speed. This simplifies things for me, then."

So, apparently, it did, since Cowley was coming squarely into the trap. At the moment it did not occur to Denis that Ballard's arrival might bring him a new problem, and the most difficult one which he had yet faced.

Returning to the log landing, he picked up his canoe and carried it a dozen yards away, placing it among the bushes, where the hurrying Cowley would never notice it. This done, he made his way back to the shack.

With his Ross rifle under his arm, he set the other weapons out of reach in a corner. A glitter on the floor caught his eye, and he stooped to pick up the handcuffs which he had intended to place on Cowley and had worn himself by the irony of circumstance. He slipped them into his pocket and opened the door of the prison chamber.

Smoking Duck was sitting on the floor, in sour apathy, his wrists as Denis had left them. Denis smiled cheerfully at him.

"I suppose you heard the sound of wreckage, my friend? Yes, your little game is up for good and all. By the way, where's the key of those handcuffs? I want to use them on your precious partner pretty quick."

Smoking Duck glared up at him, and finally grunted out that the key was lost.

"So much the worse for Cowley, then—he'll have to reach headquarters before getting released from bondage. I see you still have some coffee on the

fire—want a hot cup that'll cheer but not inebriate?"

The scowling half-breed emitted a flood of mingled Cree and English, which Denis rightly imagined to be a profane refusal, so he barred the door and left Smoking Duck to his own reflections.

A pot of coffee stood on the tiny fish-shanty stove, and in a couple of moments Denis had a fire going, for he had not eaten since the previous evening. Keeping one eye on the edge of the clearing, he swallowed some half-warmed coffee and a cold sour-dough biscuit—and looked out to see the figure of Cowley coming at a run, rifle in hand.

Denis cocked his own rifle, drew to one side of the doorway, and waited. On his way across the clearing, Cowley let out a roar for Smoking Duck, but the half-breed had not the presence of mind to call out a warning, or else he had not yet comprehended the full situation of affairs.

Thus Cowley came leaping into the trap. At sight of the man's brutal face, Denis saw that he had been badly frightened; but that would further his own ends.

"Hands up—hurry!"

That snappy, curt command stopped Cowley as if shot. He was looking squarely into the muzzle of the Ross rifle.

For a moment he was paralyzed. His undershot jaw dropped in blank amazement, and the ragged mustache drew back from his yellow teeth in a snarl. Over the rifle sights the blue eyes of Denis were blazing at him, and with a single curse Cowley dropped his rifle and lifted his hands. As he did so, he took a backward step toward the door.

"Stop that!" Denis exclaimed. "Walk this way and put out your hands, wrists together. I mean business, Cowley, and you'd better believe it."

Cowley flung a hunted look over his shoulder at the clearing, then slowly obeyed the command, advancing toward Denis.

His heavy face showed mingled fear, bewilderment, and fury. But when Denis took the handcuffs from his pocket Cowley cried out sharply:

"Not that, Mister Trooper—fer Gawd's sake, don't iron me! There's four fellers right after me——"

"I know that," said Denis warily. "And one of them's Ballard, the man you cheated down on the Peace River. Your chickens are coming home to roost with a vengeance, eh? Stick out your hands!"

He held out the open handcuffs. But Cowley, breathing hoarsely, drew back in fear that was by no means assumed.

"I tell ye they're after me!" he repeated. "Look-a-here, don't lay me up where I can't shoot, ye fool! Them fellers aims to murder me, an' I got to handle a gun in about two minutes!"

"You'll handle no more guns for a while." Denis was smiling slightly, his eyes steady. "Bray has gone back to Vermilion, and I've just had the pleasure of smashing up your liquor stock and distillery. So you ran into Ballard, eh? I heard some shots—what happened down there?"

Cowley made as if to wipe his dripping brow, but halted as Denis' finger tightened on the trigger.

"They seen me first an' let drive. I dropped one o' them—leastways I winged him a bit, then I shoved fer home. Now, use sense! You ain't a-going' to fix me where they'll pump lead into me without gettin' a chance to shoot——"

"Shut up that nonsense!" broke in Denis. "You're not going to be hurt unless you get gay with me. If you don't stick your hands here in ten seconds, I'm going to drop you with a bullet in your leg—take your choice!"

He meant the words, for he saw that the situation was grave in the extreme.

Cowley had shot one of the four pursuers, and that meant trouble. Men of Ballard's stamp would require tenfold vengeance for that shot. None the less, Denis saw his duty clear-cut before him, and intended to protect his prisoner to the utmost.

With a growling snarl, Cowley advanced and held forth his hands. Denis lifted the open handcuffs in his left hand—and, as he did so, Cowley swiftly struck the rifle aside and bore him down with a pantherlike leap.

Taken utterly by surprise, Denis went back and the rifle was knocked across the shack with a clatter. Cowley's fist drove home on his cheek, knocking him into the wall; but as the ruffian followed, Denis flung himself to one side and scrambled up.

A fierce rush of anger swept from his mind all thought of the revolver at his belt, and he went into the man with both fists, his blue eyes blazing. He landed right and left to the face, then went staggering away, groaning, as Cowley's heavy boot took him squarely in the side. Cowley was after him with a roar.

That foul kick infuriated Denis as nothing else, and when the ruffian tried the same tactics again his anger drove new life into his veins. Disdaining to employ such tricks himself, he lifted a blow through the other's guard that went straight to the mouth and sent Cowley reeling back with broken teeth. On into him went Denis, placing blow after blow, his lips clenched in silent fury and his fists beating a tatoo on the man's face.

Cowley lurched into the wall, cursing; flung back, met a smashing left hook that rocked him on his heels, and then swung himself bodily into a clinch. At the same instant, Denis stepped into a bearskin heaped loosely on the floor. Endeavoring to get clear of Cowley's hug, the bearskin tripped and brought him down to the floor—underneath.

The breath was knocked out of Denis by the impact. He lay gasping and helpless while Cowley, above, hit him twice heavily. Then the ruffian gripped Denis by the throat in an effort at systematic choking. Aware of his advantage, without pity, he was deliberately trying to get Denis out of the way.

Vainly and ineffectually Denis struck upward—a man flat on his back cannot hit much of a blow. Cowley tore at him with snarling oaths, the great fingers digging into his throat until it seemed that his flesh was coming asunder. His breath was stopped.

With all things going black, and the black changing to specks of fire that danced through his brain, a final coherent thought came to him. It was the recollection of his revolver.

His fumbling hands went to the weapon in blind desperation. Even in that moment Denis fought against himself; he must not fire! He must take Cowley alive, he must bring in his man a prisoner. With that great thought pounding against his brain, Denis pulled out the gun and struck upward with it wildly.

Cowley caught the full effect of that blow. The fore sight of the revolver took him just above the temple and ripped to the bone. Again Denis struck out blindly, and again the heavy revolver landed, almost in the same place.

Those two blows were enough. Denis felt the terrible grip on his throat relax, and felt Cowley's weight tumble away from him. Little more than conscious himself, he rolled over and dragged himself up by the logs of the wall.

He leaned against the wall, hanging on weakly and panting for breath, fighting against the terrible faintness that oppressed him and threatened to conquer his reeling brain.

Gradually his sight cleared, as air returned to his lungs. There at his feet lay Cowley, stretched out, his head bleeding. Denis' first thought was that

he had struck too hard; dropping to his knees, he breathed quick relief at finding Cowley's heart beating. The man was only stunned.

A glance at the clearing showed no sign of Ballard's forces. After all, that battle had taken only a few moments, though it had seemed an age to Denis.

For a little he stood gazing down at Cowley, while strength came back to him and his throbbing lungs drank in the sweet air. To one side lay the handcuffs where he had dropped them. Picking them up, he drew Cowley's wrists together and snapped the bracelets in place.

"I've landed him at last," he said with a deep sigh of relief. "And it's a lucky thing for me that I made sure of Smoking Duck first! I can't leave this fellow to bleed to death, though."

Searching through Cowley's pockets, he discovered a ragged bandanna. With this and his own handkerchief he bandaged the man's bleeding scalp, roughly but effectively. While doing so, Cowley's eyelids fluttered, then opened.

"Lie still!" cautioned Denis. "You can get up in a minute."

Cowley lifted his wrists, saw the handcuffs, and relaxed with a low growl. When the bandaging was finished, Denis went to the door of the smaller room and unbarred it. Smoking Duck still reposed on the floor, wide awake and glaring like a trapped beast. Denis turned to the watching Cowley.

"Come along, now, and get in here! Ballard may show up at any minute, and I want you off my hands——"

"Ballard!"

Cowley sat up, fright stamped anew in his coarse features.

"Ye ain't goin' to let 'em have me, Mister Trooper? Fer the love of——"

"Shut up!" snapped Denis curtly. "Ballard and his friends won't lay a finger on you, I'll promise you that. You join your friend and fellow citizen in here, and go to sleep. I'll attend to the rest."

Cowley looked at him. Into the man's rough face crept a slow gleam of admiration as he met the steady gaze of Denis.

"Mister, ye sure are some man!" he exclaimed. "Ye got me—ye got me proper, and I give ye the best I had at that. I thought I'd slide out o' here with a good wad, but ye sure played the game hard. No, I reckon I got to take my med'cine now, and I ain't got any kick comin'. You blasted redcoat!"

With his grudging tribute to his conqueror, Cowley lifted himself and staggered into the smaller room, sinking down beside Smoking Duck. Denis shut the door and dropped the heavy bar into place.

The clearing was still empty of life outside the shack. Sinking down on one of the two bunks, Denis rested his aching head in his hands.

"The worst of the job is done," he thought, "unless—unless that lynching party is after gore. If they are, it looks to me as if they'll have to get it. By Jasper, I have Cowley safe, and I mean to keep him!"

He lifted his head at sound of a distant shout. Then, picking up his Ross rifle, he laid it across his knees and waited, facing the doorway.

CHAPTER XIV.

BALLARD SHOWS FIGHT.

DENIS STEWART was unutterably weary, both physically and mentally.

He had been under a tremendous strain for the past three days, and the sleep which he had gained had been fitful and at odd intervals. He had drawn heavily on his splendid physique, and as he waited for Ballard's coming he realized that he could not endure another physical struggle. Nor did he intend to.

"If I can't down him by sheer will

power, I'm gone," he thought wearily. "If I add a bit of target practice, I may pull through—but it may not come to that."

No false hopes were his. He knew the temper of those settlers, and knew that they would be savagely determined to get hold of Cowley. He was there to prevent their doing so—that was all.

Another shout sounded closer this time, and another. Denis realized that they were trailing Cowley, having found the creek entrance and evidently being without knowledge of what lay ahead. He sat quietly, gazing through the open doorway at the sunny clearing, and waited.

There was a note in those shouts which he did not like, a menacing, bloodhound note which spelled danger. This was a man hunt, firing the hunters' blood with ferocity, demanding a victim, knowing neither reason nor mercy. And at the end of the trail sat Denis, his blue eyes cold as ice.

Then he sighted the hunters.

They appeared in a group, running, and halted abruptly at the edge of the clearing as they scanned the cabin. One of the men, that same "Ed," who had on the previous evening pierced through Denis' similarity to his brother, had his left arm in a sling, but held a revolver in his right hand.

That silent cabin evidently puzzled them, and they were not sure whether they had run Cowley to earth, or whether he had taken horse and fled. They discussed matters; then, at a gesture from Ballard, the other three scattered and took to cover along the edge of the clearing. Ballard himself, rifle under his arm, stepped out and walked toward the shack, his eyes flitting over it searchingly.

"If Cowley was here with his rifle, Ballard would be a dead man—and knows it," thought Denis admiringly. "There's one brave man, at all events!"

Ballard evinced no hesitation, though he must have known that he was taking his life in his hand by that open advance. He strode across the clearing, and paused at the doorway, too dazzled by the sunlight to make out objects within.

"Come in, Ballard!" spoke up Denis quietly. "Come in; this is Stewart speaking. But leave your men where they are."

Ballard stared in blank astonishment, as his eyes finally made out the figure of Denis sitting on the bunk opposite the door. With one swift glance around the otherwise empty room, he stepped inside and eyed Denis.

"Well, for the love of Mike!" he ejaculated slowly. "Thought you had vamosed down the river last night."

"No," smiled Denis. "I borrowed one of your canoes and left it on the shore, half a mile below here. You'll find it waiting."

"Hang the canoe!" said the other. "Where's Cowley? We want that cuss."

"That's really too bad," returned Denis pleasantly, keeping his finger on the trigger of the rifle across his lap. "You won't find him."

"Eh?" Ballard's face set savagely. "Has he cleared out o' here?"

"Not exactly. By the way, there's some coffee on the stove. Help yourself."

Ballard was puzzled by his cool reception. With a bare nod, he crossed to the stove and poured out some of the bitter black coffee, swallowing it at a gulp. Then he set down the cup, his eyes fastened on the barred door.

"What's behind that door, Stewart?"

Denis shifted his rifle a trifle.

"Hold your rifle just as it is, Ballard!" he said, his voice biting like a whip. "Cowley is behind that door."

The settler stiffened. His eyes went to Denis in keen surmise, noted the rifle trained on him, and rested on the eyes of Denis. The two looked at each

other steadily, neither wavering. But Ballard did not lift his rifle.

"Look a' here, Stewart; we'd better have a little talk. I want to know where you stand, and I want to know mightly quick."

"I'm not standing at present," and Denis smiled. "I'm sitting on Cowley's bunk. Meanwhile, you have the floor, and I'm ready to listen. Shoot ahead!"

"I'll do it," nodded Ballard, his face hard and inflexible. "You know what we come here for, and why. Mebbe you don't know what happened at the foot o' the lake this mornin', do ye?"

"I do," assented Denis quietly. "I believe you shot at Cowley."

"Uh-huh. And the skunk put a bullet into Ed's shoulder, curse him! Now we aim to lift him in a rope necklace, where he belongs, and we don't aim to be interfered with, none whatever. I hope you get me."

Denis smiled again—that same deceptive smile.

"I understand you perfectly well, Ballard. You intend to commit murder by hanging Cowley. Cowley may deserve it, of course, but I'd hate to see you four men getting into court on a murder charge."

Ballard stared at him.

"Out with it, Stewart—what's your position? You ain't figgering on playin' any low-down tricks, are you?"

"Quite the contrary, Ballard. I came here this morning and arrested Smoking Duck, a half-breed. I then arrested Cowley, when he returned from meeting you. The two are in the next room together. Cowley has been making white whisky up here, or what passes for whisky with the Indians, and has been trading it for peltries."

"Making whisky?" ejaculated Ballard. "You sure?"

"You'd better take a look at what's left of the still and whisky around in back. As I told you last night, I'm representing my brother, Big Ben. Also, I'm representing the law. That's exactly where I stand, Ballard."

The other looked steadily at him.

"There's four of us, all told, and one o' you," he rejoined slowly. "D'you mean to say you're goin' to stop us takin' Cowley?"

"Exactly," returned Denis.

"Mebbe you figger on releasin' Cowley and the 'breed to take a hand?"

"They are my prisoners, Ballard. They remain my prisoners—in that room. I have promised them protection from your lynching party, and intend to keep my promise."

"Then all I can say is, you're a durned fool," retorted Ballard angrily. "We're goin' to get Cowley, hear me? If you start any foolin' like you talk about, we'll pile into you and make you wish you was somewhere else——"

"Don't forget, I'm representing the law here," interposed Denis.

The settler spat scornfully.

"Law—thunder! You ain't representin' nothin', no more'n I am! Just 'cause your brother is Trooper Stewart don't give you no license to parade around in them clothes, does it? Not much. You ain't no soldier at all; you're just an ordinary man like me, and a blamed fool to boot. Are you goin' to get out the way or not?"

Denis smiled again.

"I'm very sorry, but I must refuse your invitation to move, Mr. Ballard. Please observe that this rifle of mine is cocked, and is trained on your left knee. Now step outside and tell your friends what you've heard."

Without a word more the settler turned and departed scornfully. Striding a dozen feet from the shack door, he waved an arm.

"Come on in, boys!"

The other three appeared, and Ballard went to meet them. Denis watched their meeting and saw that Ballard was evidently describing what he had found in the cabin. The other three men

broke into strident laughter—and that was a bad sign.

Denis rose and walked to the door, pausing just outside. All four turned to gaze at him, and he held up a hand.

"Just a moment, my friends," he called pleasantly. "Do you see that stump, twenty feet to your right?"

The stump which he indicated was small, and from one side a jagged splinter of wood stood up for six inches. It was a white spruce, plain to see, only a hundred feet from the shack.

"Just watch that stump for a moment," went on Denis.

Lifting his rifle to his shoulder, he sighted at the splinter and pressed the trigger—seemingly without an instant's hesitation. At the crack the splinter seemed to blow away into nothing.

"Thank you for your kind attention," smiled Denis. "That's all."

A moment's silence greeted this display of shooting ability. Denis turned and went back to the bunk, seating himself as before, facing the door.

The four men conferred together. Then, with another laugh, they marched forward to the shack, Ballard in the lead. Denis waited until they came close to the doorway, then he lifted his rifle.

"One moment, please, gentlemen!"

They halted. Ed, the wounded man, called in rough but earnest tones:

"None o' the old stuff, Stewart! We know darned well you ain't a-goin' to shoot us, so don't try no bluff. We don't want to hurt you."

"An we know you ain't no soldier, so cut it out," added another.

"All that is perfectly true," Denis smiled. "Take a look at my rifle—you see where it is pointing?"

They squinted in at him, Ballard leaning over. Denis was pointing his rifle at the doorsill.

"What you say is quite correct," he went on steadily. "I wouldn't shoot you down at all. But I am equally correct in saying that you won't get Cowley unless you shoot *me* down—which I don't think you'll do by a good deal. I have several cartridges in this rifle, perfectly good ones, and you've seen that I know how to shoot.

"Of course, you can rush me. Very likely you will. But let me impress on you just one thing. I can fire at least two shots before you reach me, and then I have a revolver for quick work. The first man of you to step over that threshold will get a bullet in his foot. It'll make a nasty wound, too. Step right along, Ballard! You'll have to murder me to get Cowley, you know. Step up, gentlemen!"

No one accepted the invitation.

The seated figure of Denis, the rifle leveled and waiting, gave them pause. By his steady voice and cold blue eye they knew that he was in deathly earnest. The first to step on the threshold would probably be crippled for life.

"Hurry up!" Denis said suddenly. "Ballard, you're the prime mover of this lynching expedition, so step along with you! If you don't choose to chance it, put a bullet into me. You set out to do murder, so here's your opportunity. Step out, Ballard!"

"Don't ye do it!" exclaimed one of the men hastily. "He *means* it—look at his face! Don't ye do it!"

Most certainly Denis meant it, and his resolution was reflected in his battered face. Under the blaze of his cold eyes the four men paused, irresolute.

Then, with an oath, Ballard shoved forward, throwing up his rifle.

"You shoot me an' you get a bullet!" he cried.

"Step in!" said Denis coldly.

The settler heaved forward, but his face was whiter than that of Denis, and sweat was on his brow. With a quick motion he raised his right foot over the threshold, brought it down, and then poised it an inch from the floor.

"Touch the floor!" said Denis. "I'm ready."

Ballard heaved his shoulders forward, straining, as if some invisible wall were holding him back; then—he turned and stepped away.

"Go to thunder!" he returned. "Come on home, boys. I guess Stewart is competent to get that skunk into jail without us helpin'."

Denis lay back weakly in the bunk and watched them go.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BACK TRAIL.

SORRY, Cowley, but you'll have to wear those clear into headquarters. I wouldn't trust you an inch without 'em, either."

Denis smiled genially at the swindler, who grunted sheepishly.

With Smoking Duck, they were seated about the ruins of Cowley's table, enjoying the repast of venison and coffee which Denis had prepared.

Ballard and his friends had departed to the foot of the lake. Convinced of their going, Denis had taken a plunge in the creek and freshened himself, then had set about getting a meal.

He ate amid due precautions, however. Cowley wore his irons. Smoking Duck, with his hands free to eat, sat in the corner across the room from Denis' rifle.

'I heard what you said to them fellers," said Cowley gruffy. "Mister, I take off my hat to ye. As I said, I'll have to take my med'cine, an' I'll hold it agin' ye for a while, too—but you're some man, believe me! Any one who can lick Jim Cowley, an' then pull off the stunt ye pulled off on them——"

"Forget it!" said Denis.

"Ye would ha' shot, wouldn't ye?"

"Maybe I would," responded Denis, keeping a wary eye on Smoking Duck.

Before he could say more he was startled by a shadow at the doorway. Catching at his rifle, he whirled—to see the grinning face of the half-breed, Napoleon McShayne.

Behind McShayne were two other figures. One was the Slave Indian whom Denis had encountered on the upper Hay River, old John Tadeteecha, the other was a Slave unknown to Denis. These last two paused outside, while Napoleon entered.

Before the "Whatcheer!" of greeting had been exchanged, Denis had swiftly leaped at a scheme which would relieve him of much labor and trouble. No more speech passed for a moment, Napoleon filling a pipe with whittled tobacco; then, seeing that Smoking Duck had finished his meal, Denis ordered him to stand up.

"Tie that fellow's hands behind his back, 'Poleon!" he directed. "Tie 'em tight, and do the job well!"

When the scowling Petwanisip was safely secured, Denis ordered him and Cowley outside, following them promptly.

"Now, 'Poleon," he went on, "you go around to that left-hand lean-to, and you'll find a very good bunch of fur. Haul it all over here. You go and help him, John; I expect you traded some of those furs yourself, didn't you? Well, you'll get no more whisky here. Hop along, all of you!"

The two Slave Indians grinned as if at some excellent joke, and followed Napoleon. The three broke into the fur cache, and presently began to haul forth bale after bale of fur. Most of the pelts were common, two or three bales being separately wrapped and proving to contain some dark marten and cross fox pelts of better promise.

Two of these better bales Denis handed over to Napoleon, as the pay which he had promised for assistance rendered. The second Slave gave his name as Tommy, and it proved that he had come to get some whisky in re-

turn for a few sorry muskrat pelts. Denis addressed him straightly:

"Tommy, you clear out of here in a hurry! These pelts are going to stay here till your people come for them. Spread the word that whoever has traded to Cowley for whisky can come and get his furs back; that ought to be simple enough, because each fur is marked by the man who caught it. Don't try any stealing, or you'll go to jail. Run along now!"

Tommy departed toward the creek, wondering.

"You ain't goin' to hand back all them peltries!" Cowley said with a groan, seeing the fruits of his long illegal labors thus scattered. "You got to take 'em along, by law——"

"I'm the law in this case," said Denis. "You shut up! John, you and Napoleon come here!"

The two stood before him, grinning vacuously.

"I have to take these two prisoners up the Hay to my father's homestead—you know the place, John. Did you take that message to my father?"

Old John nodded his head, and reported that all was well at the homestead. Denis continued:

"Napoleon, I want you to paddle them up in your dugout. John and I will come with you in my canoe. I'll have to go all the way without sleep, and I won't be able to put in any work at the paddle. After we get there, my brother will want to take these men on to the Peace River, and will probably hire you to help him. You take us up, as I have said, and I'll promise you good pay in goods and tobacco. How about it?"

Neither of the aborigines was anxious to work, but on the other hand, Denis represented the law to them, and it is not wise to refuse aid to the law.

Five minutes later with the two prisoners safely barred in the smaller room, Denis rolled up and lay down across the door. They were to start up lake at sunset, and until that time he was going to make up sleep in anticipation of his long watch on the river trail, for he would not dare trust either Indian to guard the prisoners.

"By Jasper!" he thought sleepily. "I've made good for Ben, after all. But, believe me, I've changed my mind about going into the Mounted. Yes, sir; I'm contented to remain a plain, unadorned American—this law-and-order business is just a bit too strenuous for Trooper Stewart, substitute!"

THE END

PAINT MINE IN WEST

ALTHOUGH prospectors who sought for gold on Mullet Island, in the Salton Sea of Southern California, found none of the precious yellow metal to reward them for their labor, they are not disheartened. Indeed they are joyous, for another source of wealth has been discovered by them. The shores of the island and the mud at the bottom of the sea are rich in mineral pigments from which paints of many colors can be made.

ON UTAH HIGHWAY

SHALE, or decomposed waste cast up by the Great Salt Lake, was used recently in contruction of a fourteen-mile stretch of highway near Logan City, Utah, and proved very satisfactory. Nearly sixty-five thousand tons were used to lay a surface eight inches deep. The shale was soft and pliable when taken from the shore, but hardened to cementlike firmness when rolled and exposed to the sun.