

The Luck of the Mounted eBook

The Luck of the Mounted

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Page 1

A Tale of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police

by

SERGEANT RALPH S. KENDALL

Ex-Member of the R.N.W.M.P.

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1920

This truest of stories confirms beyond doubt,
That truest of adages—"Murder will out!"
In vain may the blood-spiller "double" and fly,
In vain even witchcraft and sorcery try:
Although for a time he may 'scape, by-and-by
He'll be sure to be caught by a Hue and a Cry!
—*The INGOLDSBY legend*

TO

MY OLD COMRADES

PRESENT, AND EX-MEMBERS OF THE

R.N.W.M. POLICE

THIS WORK IS DEDICATED WITH EVERY KIND
THOUGHT

CHAPTER I

*O sing us a song of days that are gone—
Of men and happenings—of war and peace;
We love to yarn of "th' times that was"
As our hair grows gray, and our years increase.
So—revert we again to our ancient lays—*

*Fill we our pipes, and our glasses raise—
“Salute! to those stirring, bygone days!”
Cry the old non-coms of the Mounted Police.*

Memories

All day long the blizzard had raged, in one continuous squalling moaning roar—the fine-spun snow swirling and drifting about the barrack-buildings and grounds of the old Mounted Police Post of L. Division. Whirraru!-ee!—thrumm-mm! hummed the biting nor'easter through the cross-tree rigging of the towering flag-pole in the centre of the wind-swept square, while the slapping flag-halyards kept up an infernal “devil’s tattoo.” With snow-bound roof from which hung huge icicles, like walrus-tusks, the big main building loomed up, ghostly and indistinct, amidst the whirling, white-wreathed world, save where, from the lighted windows broad streamers of radiance stabbed the surrounding gloom; reflecting the driving snow-spume like dust-motes dancing in a sunbeam.

Enveloped in snow-drifts and barely visible in the uncertain light there clustered about the central structure the long, low-lying guard-room, stables, quartermaster’s store, and several smaller adjacent buildings comprising “The Barracks.” It was a bitter February night in South Alberta.

From the vicinity of the guard-room the muffled-up figure of a man, with head down against the driving blizzard, padded noiselessly with moccasined feet up the pathway leading to the main building. Soon reaching his destination, he dived hastily through the double storm-doors of the middle entrance into the passage, and banged them to.

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Flanking him on either side, in welcome contrast to the bitter world outside, he beheld the all-familiar sight of two inviting portals, each radiating light, warmth, and good fellowship—the one on his right hand particularly. A moment he halted irresolutely between regimental canteen and library; then, for some reason best known to himself, he steadily ignored both, for the time being, and passing on began slowly to mount a short flight of stairs at the end of the passage.

Sweet music beguiled each reluctant step of his ascent: the tinkle of a piano accompaniment to a roaring jovial chorus from the canteen assuring him with plaintive, but futile insistence just then, that—

Beer, beer! was glorious beer, etc.

Reaching the landing he paused for a space in an intent listening attitude outside the closed door of a room marked No. 3. From within came the sounds of men's voices raised in a high-pitched, gabbling altercation.

Turning swiftly to an imaginary audience, his expressive young countenance contorted into a grimace of unholy glee, the listener flung aloft his arms and blithely executed a few noiseless steps of an impromptu war-dance.

"They're at it again!" he muttered ecstatically.

Some seconds he capered thus in pantomime; then, as swiftly composing his features into a mask-like expression, he turned the handle and entered. On the big thermometer nailed outside the Orderly-room the mercury may have registered anything between twenty and thirty below zero, but inside Barrack-room No. 3 the temperature at that moment was warm enough.

Two men, seated at either end Of a long table in the centre of the room, busily engaged in cleaning their accoutrements, glanced up casually at his entrance; then, each vouchsafing him a preoccupied salutary mumble, they bent to their furbishing with the brisk concentration peculiar to "Service men" the world over. As an accompaniment to their labours, in desultory fashion, they kept alive the embers of a facetious wrangling argument—their respective vocabularies, albeit more or less ensanguined, exhibiting a fluent and masterly range of quaint barrack-room idiom and invective.

Both were clad in brown duck "fatigue slacks," the rolled-up sleeves of their "gray-back" shirts disclosing the fact that the sinewy forearms of both men were decorated with gay and fanciful specimens of the tattoo artist's genius. A third man, similarly habited, lay stretched out, apparently sleeping on one of the cots that were arranged around the room. Opening his eyes he greeted the newcomer with a lethargic "'Lo, Redmond!"; then, turning over on his side, he relapsed once more into the arms of Morpheus—his nasal organ proclaiming that fact beyond doubt.

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The orderly aspect of the room bore mute evidence of regimental discipline. The blankets—with the sheets placed in the centre—were strapped into a neat roll at the head of each tartan-rugged cot, at the foot of which lay a folded black oil-sheet. Above, on a small shelf, were the spare uniform and Stetson hat, flanked on either side by a pair of high brown “Strathcona” riding-boots, with straight-shanked “cavalry-jack” spurs attached. On pegs underneath hung the regulation side-arms,—a “Sam Browne” belt and holster containing the Colt’s .45 Service revolver. A rifle-rack at the end of the room contained its quota of Winchester carbines.

The last arrival, whom the sleeper had designated “Redmond,” proceeded to divest himself of his short fur coat and, after dashing the snow from it and his muskrat-faced cap, unbuckled his side-arms, and hung all up at the head of his own particular cot.

Flashing across our retrospective mind-screens, as at times we dreamily delve into the past, beloved faces come and go. Forever in the memory of the writer, as his ideal conception of healthy, virile splendid Youth personified, will stand the bronzed, debonair, clean-shaven young face of George Redmond—or “Reddy,” as he was more familiarly dubbed by his comrades of L. Division.

Handsome his countenance could not have been termed—the features were too strongly-marked and roughly-hewn. But it was an undeniably open, attractive and honest one—the sort of face that instinctively invited one’s “Hail, fellow, well met!” trust at first sight. His hair was dark auburn in colour, short and wavy, with a sort of golden tinge in it; his forehead was broad and open, and below it were two uncommonly waggish blue eyes. His habitual expression was a mixture of nonchalant good humour and gay insouciance, but the slightly aquiline, prominent nose and the set of the square aggressive jaw belied in a measure the humourous curl of the lips.

Those who knew his disposition well were fully aware how swiftly the mocking smile could vanish from that indolent young face on occasion—how unpleasantly those wide blue orbs could contract beneath scowling brows into mere pin-points of steel and ice. Slightly above middle height, well-set-up and strongly, though not heavily made, the lines of his clean-built figure suggested the embodiment of grace, strength and activity.

He was dressed in the regulation winter uniform of the Force, consisting of a scarlet-serge tunic, dark-blue cord riding breeches with the broad yellow stripe down the side, thick black woollen stockings reaching to the knee, and buckskin moccasins with spurs attached. Over the stockings, and rolled tightly down upon the tops of the moccasins as snow-excluders, were a pair of heavy gray socks.

Wriggling out of his tightly-fitting red serge he carelessly flung that article onto the next cot; then, filling and lighting a pipe, he stretched out comfortably upon his own. With hands clasped behind his head he lazily watched the two previously-mentioned men at

their cleaning operations, his expressive face registering indolent but mischievous interest, as he listened to their wrangling.

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"No!" resumed one of the twain emphatically, apropos of some previous contention, "No, by gum! this division ain't what it used to be in them days."

He gave vent to a reminiscent sigh as he spat upon and rubbed up some powdered brick-dust.

"Billy Herchmer was O.C., Fred Bagley was Sergeant-Major—and there was Harry Hetherington, Ralph Bell, De Barre, Jeb Browne, Pennycuik, and all them old-timers. Eyah! th' times that was! th' times that was! Force's all filled up now mostly with 'Smart Aleck' kids, like Reddy, here, an'"—he shot a glance of calculating invitation at his vis-a-vis, Hardy—"old sweats' from the Old Country Imperials."

Artfully to start some trivial but decidedly inflammable barrack-room argument was one of Corporal Dave McCullough's pet diversions. At this somewhat doubtful pastime he would exhibit a knowledge of human nature and an infinite patience worthy of a better object. From some occult reasoning of his Celtic soul the psychological moment he generally chose as being likely the most fruitful of results was either a few minutes before, or after "Lights Out."

When the ensuing conflagration had blazed to the desired stage he would quietly extinguish his own vocal torch and lie back on his cot with a sort of "Mark Antony" "Now let it work!" chuckle. "Getting their goats" he termed it. Usually though, when the storm of bad language and boots had subsided, his dupes, too, like those of "Silver Street" were wont to scratch their heads and commune one with another:—

—*begod, I wonder why?*

He was a heavy-shouldered man; middle-aged, with thick, crisp iron-gray hair and moustache and a pair of humourous brown eyes twinkling in a lined, weather-beaten face. His slightly nasal voice was dry and penetrating to the point of exasperation. For many years he had acted as "farrier" to L. Division.

George warily accepted the share of the pleasantry extended to him with a shrug, and a non-committal grin. But Hardy chose to regard it as a distinct challenge, and therefore a promising bone of contention. He gloated over it awhile ere pouncing.

A medium-sized, wiry, compactly-built man bodily, Hardy bore lightly the weight of his forty-five years. His hair was of that uncertain sandy colour which somehow never seems to turn gray; the edges of the crisply-curling forelock being soaped, rolled and brushed up into that approved tonsorial ornament known in barrack-room parlance as a "quiff." His complexion was of that peculiar olive-brown shade especially noticeable in most Anglo-Indians. In his smart, soldierly aspect, biting, jerky Cockney speech and clipped, wax-pointed moustache he betrayed unmistakably the ex-Imperial cavalry-man.

“Old sweats!” he echoed sarcastically—he pronounced it “aoweld”—“Yas! you go tell that t’ th’ Marines, me lad! . . . Took a few o’ th’ sime ‘old sweats’ t’ knock ‘Ay Leg!’ ‘Straw Leg’ inter some o’ you mossbacks at th’ stort orf. Gee! Har! oh, gorblimey, yas!” He illustrated his trenchant remarks in suggestive pantomime.

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“Ah!” quoth McCullough blithely, “Yu’ know th’ sayin’—’Old soldier—old stiff?’ . . .”

His adversary burnished a spur viciously. “Old pleeceman—old son of a—” he retorted with a spiteful grin. “W’y, my old Kissiwasti here knows more abaht drill’n wot you do.” He indicated a rather disreputable-looking gray parrot, preening itself in a cage which stood upon a cot nearby.

At the all-familiar sound of its name the bird suddenly ceased its monotonous beak and claw gymnastics for a space, becoming on the instant alertly attentive. There came a preliminary craning of neck and winking of white-parchment-lidded eyes, and then, in shockingly human fashion it proceeded to give voluble utterance to some startling samples of barrack-room profanity. Its shrill invective would have awakened the dead. The whistling, regular snores of the sleeper suddenly wound up with a gasping gurgle; he opened his eyes and, in a strong cereal accent gave vent to a somnolent peevish protest.

“Losh! . . . whot wi’ you fellers bickerin’ an’ yon damn birrd currsin’ I canna sleep! . . . gie th’—”

But Hardy silenced him with a warning finger.

“Sh-sh! McSporran!” he hissed in a loud eager whisper, “Jes’ ‘awk t’ im? . . . gort th’ real reg’mental tatch ‘as old Kissiwasti! ain’t he?”—his face shone with simple pride—“d’ yer ‘ken’ that? sh-sh! listen now! . . . Yer shud ‘ear ‘im s’y ‘Oot, mon!’ . . . ‘Awk t’im up an’ tellin’yer w’y th’ Jocks wear th’ kilts.”

Awhile McSporran listened, but with singular lack of enthusiasm. Presently, swinging his legs over the side of the cot with a weary sigh, he proceeded to fill his pipe. He was a thick-set, grey-eyed fair man about thirty, with a stolid, though shrewd, clean-shaven face.

“Best ye stickit tae wha’ ye ca’ ‘English,’ auld mon!” he remarked irritably, “Baith yersel’ an’ yer plurry pairrut. . . . Ou ay, I ken!—D’ye ken John Peel?—”

And, in derision he hummed a few lines of a rather vulgar parody of that ancient song that obtained around Barracks.

“Say, by gad, though! that bird is a fright!” ejaculated George suddenly, “Holy Doodle! just listen to what he said then? . . . If ever he starts in to hand out tracts like that when the O.C.’s up here inspecting he’ll get invested with the Order of the ‘Neck-Wring’ for usurping *his* pet privilege. You’d better let Brankley the quartermaster have him. He was up here the other day and heard him. He was tickled to death—said he’d like to buy him off you, and ‘top him off’—finish his education.”



“Oh, ‘e did, did ‘e?” growled Hardy mutinously, but with ill-concealed interest, “Well, ‘e ain’t a-goin’ t’ ‘ave ‘im!” He breathed hard upon a buckle and polished it to his satisfaction. “Brankley is some connosser I will admit,” he conceded grudgingly, “but Kissiwasti’s got orl th’ ‘toppin orf wot’s good fur ‘im—dahn Regina—‘e went through a reg’lar course dahn there—took ‘is degree, so t’ speak. . . . I uster tike an’ ‘ang ‘is kydge hup in that little gallery in th’ ridin school of a mornin’—when Inspector Chappell, th’ ridin’ master was breakin’ in a bunch o’ rookies—‘toppin’ orf,’ wot? . . .”

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"Tchkk!" clucked McCullough wearily. "What is the use of arguin' with an old sweat like him? . . . Hardy'll be happy enough in Hell, so long as he can have his bloomin' old blackguard of a parrot along with him. If he can't there will be a pretty fuss."

"Bear up, Hardy!" comforted George. "When you've got that 'quiff' of yours all fussed up, and those new 'square-pushin'" dress-pants on you're some 'hot dog.' . . . Now, if I thought you could 'talk pretty' and behave yourself I'd—"

The old soldier grinned diabolically. "Sorjint?" he broke in mincingly "c'n I fall out an' tork t' me sister?—garn, Reddy! wipe orf yer chin! . . . though if I did 'appen t' 'ave a sister she might s'y th' sime fing abaht me, now, as she might s'y abaht you—to a lydy-fren' o' 'er's, p'raps. . . ."

"Say what?" demanded George incautiously.

Hardy chuckled again, "'Ere comes one o' them Mounted Pleecemen, me dear,—orl comb an' spurs,—mark time in front there. . . !" And he emitted an imitation of a barnyard cackle.

McCullough shot a glance at Redmond's face. "Can th' grief" he remarked unsympathetically, "you're fly enough usually . . . but you fairly asked for it that time."

Hardy spat into a cuspidor with long-range accuracy. He beamed with cheerful malevolence awhile upon his tormentors; then, uplifting a cracked falsetto in an unmusical wail, to the tune of "London Bridge is Falling Down," assured them that—

*"Old soweljers never die, never die, never die,
Old soweljers never—"*

With infinite mockery Redmond's boyish voice struck in—

"Young soldiers wish they would, wish they—"

"'Ere!" remonstrated Hardy darkly, "chack it, Reddy! . . . You know wot 'appens t' them as starts in, a-guyin' old soweljers?—eh?—Well, I tell yer now!—worse'n wot 'appened t' them fresh kids in th' Bible wot mocked th' old blowke abaht 'is bald 'ead."

"Isch ga bibble! I don't care!" bawled the abandoned George; "can't be much worse than doing 'straight duty' round Barracks, here!—same thing, day in, day out—go and look at the 'duty detail' board—Regimental Number—Constable Redmond, 'prisoner's escort'—punching gangs of prisoners around all day long, on little rotten jobs about Barracks—and 'night guard' catching you every third night and—"

"Oyez! oyez! oyez! you good men of this—"

“Oh, yes! you can come the funny man all right, Mac—you’ve got a ‘staff’ job. Straight duty don’t affect you. Why don’t they shove me out on detachment again, and give me another chance to do real police work? . . . I tell you I’m fed up—properly. . . . I wish I was out of the blooming Force—I’m not ‘wedded’ to it, like you.”

“‘Ear, ‘ear!” chimed in Hardy, with a sort of miserable heartiness. McSporran’s contribution was merely a dour Scotch grin. In the moment’s silence that followed a tremendous bawling squall of wind rocked the building to its very foundations. The back-draught of it sucked open the door, and, borne upon its wings, the roaring, full-chorused burst of a popular barrack-room chanter floated up the stairs from the canteen below—

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“Old King Cole was a merry old soul, And a merry old soul was he— He called for his pipe, and he called for his glass, And he called for his old M.P.”

Outside the blizzard still moaned and howled; every now and then, between lulls, screeching gusts of sleet beat upon the windows. The parrot, clinging upside down to the roof of its cage, winked rapidly with Sphinx-like eyes and inclined its head sideways in an intent listening attitude.

“Eyah! but th’ Force’s a bloomin’ good home to some of you, all th’ same,” growled McCullough. “Listen to that ‘norther’? . . . How’d you like to be chucked out into th’ cold, cold world right now?—You, Hardy! that’s never done nothin’ but ‘soldier’ all your life—you, Reddy! with your ‘collidge edukashun’?”

George, unmoved, listened respectfully awhile, lying on his stomach with his chin cupped in his hands. “Must have been a great bunch of fellows when you first took on the Force, Dave?” he queried presently.

From sheer force of habit the old policeman glanced at his interlocutor suspiciously. But that young gentleman’s face appearing open and serene, merely expressing naive interest, he grunted an affirmative “Uh-huh!” and backed his conviction with a cheerful oath.

“Ah, they sure was. But where are they all now?” he rambled on in garrulous reminiscence, “some of ‘em rich—some of ‘em broke—an’ many of ‘em back on th’ old Force again, an’ glad to get their rations. There was some that talked like you, Mister Bloomin’ Reddy!—fed up, an’ goin’ to quit—an’ did quit—for a time. There was Corky Jones, I mind. Him that used to blow ‘bout th’ wonderful jobs he’d got th’ pick of when he was ‘time-ex.’ All he got was ‘reeve’ of some little shi-poke burg down south. Hooshomin its real name, but they mostly call it Hootch thereabouts. A rotten little dump of ‘bout fifty inhabitants. They’re drunk half th’ time an’ wear each other’s clothes. Ugh! filthy beggars! . . . He’s back on th’ Force again. There was Gadgett Malone. Proper dog he was—used to sing ‘Love me, an’ th’ World is Mine.’ He got all balled up with a widder, first crack out o’ th’ box, an’ she shook him down for his roll an’ put th’ skids under him in great shape inside of a month. He’s back on th’ Force again. There was Barton McGuckin. When he pulled out he shook hands all around, I mind. Yes, sir! with tears in his eyes he did. Told us no matter how high he rose in th’ world he’d never forget his old comrades—always rec’gnize ‘em on th’ street an’ all that. On his way down town he was fool enough to go into one o’ these here Romany Pikey dives for to get his fortune told. This gypsy woman threw it into him he was goin’ to make his fortune in th’ next two or three days by investin’ his dough in a certain brand of oil shares. . . .”

McCullough paused and filled his pipe with elaborate care, “Th’ last time I see him he was in th’ buildin’ an’ contractin’ line—carryin’ a hod an’ pushin’ an Irishman’s buggy . . .

There's—but, aw hell! what's th' use o' talkin'?" he concluded disgustedly. "No! times ain't what they was, by gum!—rough stuff an' all things was run more real reg'mental them days—not half th' gousin' either."

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"Reel reg'mental?" echoed Hardy mincingly, "aowe gorblimey! 'awk t'im? well, wot abaht it? I've done my bit, too!—in Injia. See 'ere; look!"

He pulled up the loose duck-pant of his right leg. On the outside of the hairy, spare but muscular limb, an ugly old dirty-white scar zigzagged from knee to ankle.

"Paythan knife," he informed them briefly, "but I did th' blowke in wot give it me." He launched into a lurid account of a border hill-scuffle that his regiment had been engaged in relating all its ghastly details with great gusto. "Cleared me lance-point ten times that d'y," he remarked laconically. "Flint was aour Orf'cer Commandin'—Old 'Doolally Flint'—'ard old 'ranker' 'e was. 'E'd worked us sumphin' crool that week. Night marches an' wot not. I tell yer that man 'ad no 'eart for men or 'orses. An' you tork ababt bein' reel reg'mental, Mac! . . . 'e was a reg'mental old soor if yer like! . . . Fit to drop we was—wot was left o' us, an' th' bloody sun goin' down an' all. But no! 'e give us no rest—burial fatigue right away. Free big trenches we buried aour pore fellers in—I can see 'em now. . . ."

For some few seconds he ceased polishing his glossy, mahogany-shaded "Sam Browne" belt, and, chin in hand, stared unseeingly straight in front of him. His audience waited. "Arterwards!" he cleared his throat, "arterwards—w'en we'd filled in 'e made us put th' trimmin's on—line 'em out 'ead an' foot wiv big bowlders. I mind I'd jes kern a-staggerin' ap wiv a big stowne for th' 'ead o' Number Free trench, but Doolally kep me a-markin time till 'e was ready. 'Kem ap a bit, Private 'Ardy,' 'e sez, 'kem ap a bit! you're aht o' yer dressin'!' 'e sez. 'Arry Wagstaff, as was in Number Two Squordon 'e pulls a bit o' chork aht of 'is pocket, an' 'e marks on 'is bowlder in big, fat letters 'Lucky soors—in bed ev'ry night'—but old Doolally 'appened to turn rahnd an' cop 'im at it. Drum-'ead coort-martial 'Arry gort for that, an' drew ten d'ys Number One Field Punishment. But that was old Doolally all over . . . yer might s'y 'e 'adn't no sense o' 'umor, that man. Down country we moves next d'y, for Peshawur, where th' reg'ment lay. We'd copped a thunderin' lot o' prisoners—th' Mullah an' all."

"Wha' d'ye ca' a Mullah?" queried McSporran, with grave interest.

Hardy, carbine-barrel between knees—struggled with a "pull-through." "Mullah? well, 'e's a sorter—sorter 'ead blowke," he mumbled lamely.

"Kind of High Priest?" ventured George.

The old soldier beamed upon him gratefully, "Ar, that's wot I meant. 'E stunk that 'igh th' Colonel 'e sez—"

The storm doors banged below. "Redmond!—oh, Redmond!" The great, booming, bass voice rang echoing up the stairway. Involuntarily they all sprang to an attitude of alert attention. Rarely did Tom Belcher have to speak twice around Barracks.

“There’s the S.M.!” muttered George. Aloud he responded “Coming, Sergeant-Major!” And he swung downstairs where a powerfully-built man in a snow and ice-incrusted fur coat awaited him.

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"The O.C.'s orders, Redmond!—get your kit packed and hold yourself in readiness to pull out on the eleven o'clock West-bound to-morrow. You're transferred to the Davidsburg detachment. I'll give you your transport-requisition later."

The storm doors banged behind him, and then, Redmond, not without design, forced himself to saunter slowly—very slowly—upstairs again, whistling nonchalantly the while.

Expectant faces greeted him. "What's up?" they chorused. With a fine assumption of indifference he briefly informed them. McSporran received the news with his customary stolidity, only his gray eyes twinkled and he chuntered something that was totally unintelligible to anyone save himself. But its effect upon McCullough and Hardy was peculiar, not to say, startling in the extreme. With brush and burnisher clutched in their respective hands they both turned and gaped upon him fish-eyed for the moment. Then, as their eyes met, those two worthies seemed to experience a difficulty of articulation.

Dumfounded himself, George looked from one to the other, "What the devil's wrong with you fools?" he queried irritably.

Thereupon, McCullough, still holding the eyes of the Cockney, gasped out one magical word—"Yorkey!"

The spell was broken. "W'y, gorblimey!" said Hardy, "Ain't that queer?—that's jes' wot I wos a-thinkin' . . . Well, Gawd 'elp Sorjint Slavin now!" With which cryptic utterance he resumed his eternal polishing.

"Amen!" responded the farrier piously, "Reddy, here, an' Yorkey on th' same detachment. . . . What th' one don't know t'other'll teach him. . . . You'd better let 'em have th' parrot, too."

McSporran, back on his cot with hands clasped behind his head, gobbled an owlish "Hoot, mon! th' twa o' them thegither! . . . Losh! but that beats a' . . . but, hoo lang, O Lard? hoo lang?"

From various sources George had picked up the broken ends of many strange rumours relating to the personality and escapades of one Constable Yorke, of the Davidsburg detachment, whom he had never seen as yet. A hint here, a whisper there, a shrug and a low-voiced jest between the sergeant-major and the quartermaster, overheard one day in the Matter's store. To Redmond it seemed as if a veil of mystery had always enveloped the person and doings of this man, Yorke. The glamour of it now aroused all his latent curiosity.

"Why, what sort of a chap is this Yorke?" he inquired casually.

McCullough, busily burnishing a bit, shrugged deprecatingly and laughed. Hardy, putting the last touches to his revolver-holster, made answer, George thought, with peculiar reticence.

“Wot, Yorkey? . . . oh, 'e's a 'oly terror 'e is. . . . You arst Crampton,” he mumbled—“arst Taylor—they wos at Davidsburg wiv 'im. Slavin's orl right but Yorkey!”. . . He looked unutterable things. “Proper broken down Old Country torff 'e is, too. 'E's right there wiv th' goods at police work, they s'y, but 'e's sure a bad un to 'ave to live wiv. Free weeks on'y, Crampton stuck it afore 'e applied for a transfer—Taylor, 'e on'y stuck it free d'ys.”

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Redmond made a gesture of exasperation. “Ah-h! come off the perch!” he snarled pettishly, “what sort of old ‘batman’s’ gaff are you trying to ‘get my goat’ with?”

His display of irritation drew an explosive, mischievous cachinnation from the trio.

“Old ‘batman’s’ gaff?” echoed the Cockney grinning, “orl right, my fresh cove—this time next week you’ll be tellin’ us wevver it’s old ‘batman’s’ gaff, or not.”

Outside, the blizzard still moaned and beat upon the windows, packing the wind-driven snow in huge drifts about the big main building. Inside, the canteen roared—

*“Then—I—say, boys! who’s for a drink with me?
Rum, tum! tiddledy-um! we’ll have a fair old spree!”*

McSporran slid off his cot with surprising alacrity. “Here’s ane!” he announced blithely. Hardy, carefully hanging up his spotless, glossy equipment at the head of his cot, turned to the farrier who was likewise engaged in arranging a bridle and a pipe-clayed headrope.

“Wot abaht it, Mac?” he queried briskly.

McCullough, in turn looked at Redmond. “All right!” responded that young gentleman with a boyish shrug and grin, “come on then, you bloomin’ old sponges! let’s wet my transfer. I’ll have time to pack my kit to-morrow, before the West-bound pulls out.”

Upon their departing ears, grown wearily familiar to its monotonous repetition, fell the parrot’s customary adieu, as that disreputable-looking bird swung rhythmically to and fro on its perch.

“Goo’ bye!” it gabbled, “A soldier’s farewell’ to yeh! goo’ bye! goo’ bye!”

CHAPTER II

*Homeless, ragged and tanned,
Under the changeful sky;
Who so free in the land?
Who so contented as I?.*

The vagabond

The long-drawn-out, sweet notes of “Reveille” rang out in the frosty dawn. Reg. No. — Const George Redmond, engaged at that moment in pulling on his “fatigue-slacks” hummed the trumpet-call’s time-honoured vocal parody—

*"I sold a cow, I sold a cow, an' bought a donk-ee—'
Oh—what—a silly old sot you were!"*

The room buzzed like a drowsy hive with hastily dressing men. Breathing hotly on the frosted window-pane next his cot, George rubbed a clear patch and glued his eye to it. The blizzard had died out during the night leaving the snow-drifted landscape frosty, still and clear. A rapidly widening strip of blended rose and pale turquoise on the eastern horizon gave promise of a fine day.

He turned away with a contented sigh and, descending the stairs, fell in with the rest of the fur-coated, moccasined men on "Morning Stable Parade."

Three hours later, breakfast despatched, blankets rolled and kit and dunnage bags packed, he received a curt summons from the sergeant-major to attend the Orderly-room. To the brisk word of command he was "*quick-marched*" "*left-wheeled*," and "*halted*" at "*attention*" before the desk of the Officer Commanding L. Division.

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“Constable Redmond, Sir!” announced the deep-throated, rumbling bass of the sergeant-major; and for some seconds George gazed at the silvery hair and wide bowed shoulders of the seated figure in front of him, who continued his perusal of some type-written sheets of foolscap, as if unaware of any interruption. Elsewhere have the kindly personality and eccentricities of Captain Richard Bargrave been described; “but that,” as Kipling says, “is another story.”

Presently the papers were cast aside, the bowed shoulders in the splendidly-cut blue-serge uniform squared back in the chair, and Redmond found himself being scrutinized intently by the all-familiar bronzed old aristocratic countenance, with its sweeping fair moustache. Involuntarily he stiffened, though his eyes, momentarily overpowered by the intensity of that keen gaze, strayed to the level of his superior’s breast and focussed themselves upon two campaign ribbons there, “North-West Rebellion” and “Ashantee” decorations.

Suddenly the thin, high, cultured voice addressed him—whimsically—sarcastic but not altogether unkindly:

“The Sergeant-Major”—the gold-rimmed pince-nez were swung to an elevation indicating that individual and the fair moustache was twirled pensively—“the Sergeant-Major reports that—er—for the past six months you have been conducting yourself around the Post with fair average”—the suave tones hardened—“that you have wisely refrained from indulging your youthful fancies in any more such—er—dam-fool antics, Sir, as characterized your merry but brief career at the Gleichen detachment, so—er—I have decided to give you another chance. I have here”—he fumbled through some papers—“a request from Sergeant Slavin for another man at Davidsburg. I am transferring you there. Slavin—er—damn the man! damn the man! what’s wrong with him, Sergeant-Major? . . . Two men have I sent him in as many months, and both of ’em, after a few days there, on some flimsy pretext or another, applied for transfers to other detachments. Good men, too. If this occurs again—damme!”—he glared at his subordinate—“I’ll—er—bring that Irish ‘ginthleman’ into the Post for a summary explanation. Wire him of this man’s transfer! . . . All right, Sergeant-Major!”

“About-turrn!—quick-march!” growled again the bass voice of the senior non-com; and he kept step behind George into the passage. “Here’s your transport requisition, Redmond. Now—take a tumble to yourself, my lad—on this detachment. You’re getting what ‘Father’ don’t give to many—a second chance. Good-bye!”

George gripped the proffered hand and looked full into the kindly, meaning eyes. “Good-bye, S.M.!” he said huskily, “Thanks!”

Westward, the train puffed its way slowly along a slight, but continual up-grade through the foothills, following more or less the winding course of the Bow River. Despite the cold, clear brilliance of the day, seen under winter conditions the landscape on either

side of the track presented a rather forlorn, dreary picture. So it appeared to George, anyway, as he gazed out of the window at the vast, spreading, white-carpeted valley, the monotonous aspect of which was only occasionally relieved by sparsely-dotted ranches, small wayside stations, or when they thundered across high trestle bridges over the partly-frozen, black, steaming river.

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Two summers earlier he had travelled the same road, on a luxurious trip to the Coast. The memory of its scenic splendor then, the easy-going stages from one sumptuous mountain resort to another, now made him feel slightly dismal and discontented with his present lot. Eye-restful solace came however with the sight of the ever-nearing glorious sun-crowned peaks of the mighty “Rockies,” sharply silhouetted against the dazzling blue of the sky.

Children’s voices behind him suddenly broke in upon his reverie.

“That man!” said a small squeaking treble, “was a hobo. He was sitting in that car in front with the hard seats an’ I went up to him an’ I said, ‘Hullo, Mister! why don’t you wash your face an’ shave it? we’ve all washed our faces this morning’ . . . We did, didn’t we, Alice?—an’ washed Porkey’s too, an’ he said ‘Hullo, Bo! wash my face?—I don’t have to—I might catch cold.’”

“But Jerry!” said another child’s voice, “I don’t think he could have been a real hobo, or he’d have had an empty tomato-can hanging around his neck on a string, like the pictures of ‘Weary Willie’ an’ ‘Tired Tim’ in the funny papers.”

Then ensued the sounds as of a juvenile scuffle and squawk. Master Jerry apparently resented having his pet convictions treated in this “Doubting Thomas” fashion, for the next thing George heard him say, was:

“Goozlemy, goozlemy, goozlemy! . . . No! he hadn’t got a tomato-can, silly! but he’d got a big, fat bottle in his pocket an’ he pulled the cork out of it an’ sucked an’ I said ‘What have you got in your bottle?’ an’ he said ‘Cold tea’ but it didn’t smell a bit like cold tea. There’s a Mounted Policeman sitting in that seat in front of us. Let’s ask him. Policemen always lock hoboos up in gaol an’ kick them in the stomach, like you see them in the pictures.”

The next instant there came a pattering of little feet and two small figures scrambled into the vacant seat in front of Redmond. His gaze fell on a diminutive, red-headed, inquisitive-faced urchin of some eight years, and a small, gray-eyed, wistful-looking maiden, perhaps about a year younger, with hair that matched the boy’s in colour. Under one dimpled arm she clutched tightly to her—upside-down—a fat, squirming fox-terrier puppy. Hand-in-hand, in an attitude of breathless, speculative awe, they sat there bolt upright, like two small gophers; watching intently the face of the uniformed representative of the Law, as if seeking some reassuring sign.

It came presently—a kind, boyish, friendly smile that gained the confidence of their little hearts at once.

“Hullo, nippers!” he said cheerily.

“Hullo!” the two small trebles responded.

“What’s your name, son?”

“Jerry!”

“Jerry what?”

An uneasy wriggle and a moment’s hesitation then—“Jeremiah!” came a small—rather sulky—voice.

Breathing audibly in her intense eagerness the little girl now came to the rescue.

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"Please, policeman?" she stopped and gulped excitedly—"please, policeman?—he doesn't like to be called that. . . . It isn't *his* fault. He always throws stones at the bad boys when they call him that. Call him just 'Jerry.'"

That gamin, turning from a minute examination of Redmond's spurred moccasins, began to swing his chubby legs and bounce up and down upon the cushioned seat.

"Her name's Alice," he volunteered, with a sidelong fling of his carrot-tinted head. "Yes! she's my sister"—he made a snatch at the pup whose speedy demise was threatened, from blood to the head—"don't hold Porkey that way, Alice! his eyes'll drop out."

But his juvenile confrere shrugged away from his clutch. "Stupid!" she retorted, with fine scorn, "no they won't . . . it's on'y guinea pigs that do that!—when you hold them up by their tails." Nevertheless she promptly reversed that long-suffering canine, which immediately demonstrated its gratitude by licking her face effusively.

The all-important question of the hobo was next commended to his attention, with a tremendous amount of chattering rivalry, and, with intense gravity he was cogitating how to render a satisfactory finding to both factions when steps, and the unmistakable rustle of skirts, sounded in his immediate rear. Then a lady's voice said, "Oh, there you are, children! . . . I was wondering where you'd got to."

The two heads bobbed up simultaneously, with a joyful "Here's Mother!" and George, turning, glanced with innate, well-bred curiosity at a stout, pleasant-faced, middle-aged woman who stood beside them.

"I hope these young imps haven't been bothering you?" she said. "We were in that car behind, but I was reading and they've been having a great time romping all over the place. Oh, well! I suppose it's too much to expect children to keep still on a train."

With a fond motherly caress she patted the two small flaming heads that now snuggled boisterously against her on either side.

"Come now! Messrs. Bubble and Squeak!" she urged teasingly, "march!—back to our car again!"

"Bubble and Squeak" seemed appropriate enough just then, to judge by the many fractious objections immediately voiced by those two small mutineers. They were loth to part with their latest acquaintance and weren't above advertising that fact with unnecessary vehemence. Even the puppy raised a snuffling whine.

"Boo-hoo!" wailed Jerry, "don't want to go in the other car—me an' Alice want to stay here—the policeman's goin' to tell us all about hoboos—he—"

"Oh, dear!" came a despairing little sigh, "whatever—"

Their eyes met and, at the droll perplexity he read in hers, George laughed outright. An explosive frank boyish laugh. He rose with a courteous gesture. "I'm afraid it's a case of 'if the mountain won't come to Mahomet,'" he began, with gay sententiousness. "Won't you sit down?"

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The matron's kindly eyes appraised the bold, manly young face a moment, then, with a certain leisurely grace, she stepped in between the seats and, seating herself, lugged her two small charges down beside her.

"I suppose, under the circumstances, an old woman like me can discard the conventionalities?" she remarked smilingly.

Jerry and Alice leered triumphantly at their victim. "Now!" Jerry shrilled exactly "tell us all about hoboes!"

"They do carry empty tomato-cans, don't they?" pleaded Alice.

It was now their guardian's turn to laugh at his dismay. "You see what you've let yourself in for now?" she remarked.

"Seems I am up against it," he admitted, with a rueful grin, "well! must make good somehow, I suppose?"

With an infinitely boyish gesture he tipped his fur cap to the back of his head and leaned forward with finger-tips compressed in approved story-telling fashion.

"Once upon a time!"—a breathless "Yes-s"—those two small faces reminded him much of terriers watching a rat-hole—"there was a hobo." He thought hard. "He was a very dirty old hobo—he never used to wash his face. He was walking along the road one day when he heard a little wee voice call out 'Hey!'. He looked down and he saw an empty tomato-can on a rubbish heap. Tomato-cans used to be able to talk in those days and the hoboes were very good to them—always used to drink out of them and carry them to save them from walking. This can had a picture of its big red face on the outside. 'Give us a lift?' said the can. 'Where to?' said the old hobo. 'Back to California, where I came from,' said the can. 'All right!' said the old hobo, 'I'm goin' there, too.' And he picked the can up and hung it round his neck and kept on walking till they came to a house. The window of the house was open and they could see a big fat bottle on a little table. 'Ah!' said the old hobo 'here's an old friend of mine!—he's comin' with us, too,' And he shoved his arm through the window and put the bottle in his pocket. By and by they came to a river—'Hey!' said the can, again—"What's up?" said the old hobo—"I'm dry," said the can—"So am I," said the hobo; and he dipped the can in the water and gave it a very little drink. 'Hey!' said the can, 'give us a drop more!'—"Wait a bit!" said the old hobo, and he pulled the cork out of the bottle. 'Don't you pour any of that feller into me!' said the can, 'he'll burn my inside out—an' yours—if you pour him into me I'll open my mouth where I'm soldered and let him run out, and you won't be able to drink out of me any more. Chuck him into the river!—he's no good.'

"'You shut your mouth!' said the old hobo, 'or I'll chuck you into the river!' And he poured some of the stuff out of the bottle into the can—"

At this exciting point poor George halted for breath and mopped his forehead. He felt fully as thirsty as the tomato-can. But the children were upon him, clutching his scarlet tunic:

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"What did he do then?" howled Jerry.

"Eh?" gasped the young policeman,— "oh, he opened his mouth where he was soldered and let the stuff run out. So the old hobo threw him into the river. That's why hoboes always pack a bottle with them now instead of a tomato-can."

He leaned back with a sigh and, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets, smiled wanly at his vis-a-vis.

"There!" he said, with feeble triumph, "I've carried out the sentence."

And it did him good to drink in her mirthful, waggish laugh.

"Yes!" she conceded gaily, "you certainly did great execution, though you look more like a prisoner just reprieved."

Jerry, screwing up his small snub nose leered triumphantly across her lap at Alice. "Goozlemy, goozlemy, goozlemy!" he squeaked, "that man was a real hobo."

His grimace was returned with interest. Alice hugged her puppy awhile contentedly, murmuring in that canine's ear, "What a silly old thing that tomato-can must have been. If I'd been him I'd have kept my mouth shut."

"Cow Run!" intoned the brakeman monotonously, passing through the coaches, "Cow Run next stop!" His eye fell on Redmond. "Wish I'd seen you before, Officer!" he remarked, "I'd have had a hobo for you. Beggar stole a ride on us from Glenbow, back there. The con's goin' to chuck him off here—do you want him?"

"No!" said Redmond shortly, "let the stiff go—I'm going on to Davidsburg—haven't got time to get messing around with 'vags' now."

The train began to slow down and presently stopped at a small station. Mechanically the quartette gazed through the window at the few shivering platform loungers, and beyond them to the irregular, low-lying facade of snow-plastered buildings that comprised the dreary main street of the little town.

Suddenly the children uttered a shrill yelp.

"There he is!" cried Alice, darting a small finger at the window-pane.

"I saw him first!" bawled Jerry.

And, slouching past along the platform, all huddled-up with hands in pockets, George beheld a ragged nondescript of a man whose appearance confirmed Master Jerry's previous assertion beyond doubt.



The children drummed on the window excitedly. Glancing up at the two small peering faces the human derelict's red-nosed, stubble-coated visage contorted itself into a friendly grimace of recognition; at the same time, with an indescribably droll, swashbuckling swagger he doffed a shocking dunghill of a hat.

Suddenly though his jaw dropped and, replacing his battered headpiece, with double-handed indecent haste the knight of the road executed an incredibly nimble "right-about turn" and vanished behind the station-house. Just then came the engine's toot! toot!, the conductor's warning "All aboar-rd!" and the train started once more on its journey westward.

Smiling grimly to himself, the policeman settled back in his seat again and glanced across at the lady. She was shaking with convulsive laughter.

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“Oh!” she giggled hysterically “he—he must have seen your red coat!” another spasm of merriment, “it was as good as a pantomime,” she murmured.

Evincing a keen interest in his soldierly vocation, for awhile she subjected him to an exacting and minute inquisition anent the duties and life of a Mounted Policeman. In this agreeable fashion the time passed rapidly and it was with a feeling of regret that he heard the brakeman announce his destination and rose to take leave of his pleasant companion. The children insisted on bidding their late chum a cuddling, osculatory farewell—Alice tearfully holding up the snuffling Porkey for his share. The train drew up at the Davidsburg platform, there came a chorus of “Good-byes” and a few minutes later George was left alone with his kit-bags on the deserted platform.

CHAPTER III

St. Agnes' Eve. Ah! bitter chill it was.

The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;

The hare limped, trembling, through the frozen grass;

And drowsy was the flock in woolly fold.

ST. AGNES' EVE

Edmond did not have to wait long. Sounding faint and far off came the silvery ring of sleigh-bells, gradually swelling in volume until, with a measured crunch! crunch! of hoofs on packed snow, a smart Police cutter, drawn by a splendid bay team, swung around a bend of the trail and pulled up at the platform. Redmond regarded with a little awe the huge, bear-like, uniformed figure of the teamster, whom he identified at once from barrack gossip.

“Sergeant Slavin?” he enquired respectfully, eyeing the bronzed, clean-shaven face, half hidden by fur cap and turned-up collar.

“Meself, lad!” came a rich soft brogue, “I was afther gettin’ a wire from th’ O.C., tellin’ me he was thransfering me another man. Yer name’s Ridmond, ain’t it?—Whoa, now! T an’ B!—lively wid thim kit-bags, son!—team’s pretty fresh an’ will not shtand.”

They swung off at a spanking trot. George surveyed the white-washed cattle-corral and few scattered shacks which seemed to comprise the hamlet of Davidsburg.

“Not a very big place, Sergeant?” he remarked, “how far’s the detachment from here?”

“On’y ’bout a mile” grunted the individual, squirting a stream of tobacco-juice to leeward, “up on the high ground beyant. Nay! ’tis just a jumpin’ off place an’ shippin’ point for th’ ranches hereabouts. Business is mostly done at Cow Run—East. Ye passed ut, comin’. Great doin’s there—whin th’ cowpunchers blow in. Some burg!”

“Sure looked it!” Redmond agreed absently, thinking of the casual glimpse he had got of the dreary main street.

They were climbing a slight grade. The sun-glare on the snow was intense; the cutter’s steel runners no longer screeched, and the team’s hoofs began to clog up with soft snow.

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"They're 'balling-up' pretty bad, Sergeant!" remarked Redmond. And, as he spoke the "off" horse suddenly slipped and fell, and, plunging to its feet again, a leg slid over the cutter's tongue.

"Whoa, now! whoa!" barked Slavin, with an oath, as the mettled, high-strung animal began to kick affrightedly. Slipping again it sank down in the snow and remained still for some tense moments.

Like a flash Redmond sprang from the cutter, and rapidly and warily he unhooked the team's traces. This done he crept to their heads and slipped the end of the tongue out of the neck-yoke ring. Slavin by this time was also on his feet in the snow, with the situation well in hand. He clucked softly to his team, the fallen horse plunged to its feet again and the next moment all was clear. George, burrowing around in the snow unearthed a big stone, with which he proceeded to tap the team's shoes all round until the huge snow-clogs fell out. In silence the two men hooked up again and were soon on their way.

"H-mm!" grunted the big Irishman at last, eyeing his subordinate with a sidelong glance of approval, "h-mm! teamster?"

"Oh, I don't know, Sergeant" responded Redmond deprecatingly, "of course I've been around teams some—down East, on the old man's farm. . . I don't know that I can claim to be a real teamster—as you judge them in the Force."

"H-mm!" grunted Slavin again, "ye seem tu have th' makin's anyway." He expectorated musingly. "Wan time—down at Coutts 'twas—a young feller was sint tu me for tu dhrive. Mighty chipper gossoon, tu. 'Teamster?' sez I—'Some!' sez he, as if he was a reg'lar gun at th' business—but I'm gen'rally reckoned handier wid a foursome 'n a single team."

"'Oh!' sez I, 'fwhere?' An' he tould me—Regina. Sez I thin 'tis Skinner Adams's undershtudy ye must have bin?—for he was Reg'mentil Teamster Sarjint there, an' sure fw as a great man wid a four-in-hand team."

"'Fwat, ould Skinner Adams?' sez me bould lad, kind av contempshus-like, 'Humph! at shtringin' out four I have Skinner Adams thrimmed tu a peak.' We was dhrivin' from th' station tu th' detachmint—same like tu we're doin' now. Whin we gits in I unhitches an' puts up th' team. 'Give us a hand tu shling th' harniss off!' sez I tu him—an' me shmart Aleck makes a shtab at ut wid th' nigh horse. He was not quite so chipper—thin, an' I noticed his hands thremblin', an' he was all th' time watchin' me close how I did wid th' off harse. I dhraws off wid th' britchin' on me arrum—'Come!' sez I—an' he shtarts in—unbucklin' th' top hame-shtrap.

“‘As ye were!’ sez I ‘that’s enough! I’m thinkin’ th’ on’y ‘four’ you iver shtrung out me young flapdhoodle was a gang av prisoners, an’ blarney me sowl! ye shall go back tu th’ Post right now, an’ du prisoner’s escort agin for awhile.’”

They had now reached the top of the grade where the trail swung due east, and faced a dazzling sun and cutting wind which whipped the blood to their cheeks and made their eyes water.

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“Behould our counthry eshtate!” said Sergeant Slavin grandiloquently, with an airy wave of his arm, “beyant that big pile av shtones on th’ road-allowance.”

He chirped to his team which broke into an even, fast trot, and presently they drew up outside a building typical in its outside appearance of the usual range Mounted Police detachment. It was a fairly large dwelling, roughly but substantially-built of squared logs, painted in customary fashion, with the walls—white, and the shingled roof—red. A strongly-guyed flagstaff jutting out from one gable, and copies of the “Game” and “Fire Acts” tacked on the door gave the abode an unmistakable official aspect. Over the doorway was nailed a huge, prehistoric-looking buffalo-skull, bleached white with the years—the time-honoured insignia of the R.N.W.M.P. being a buffalo-head, which is also stamped on the regimental badge and button.

Dumping off the kit-bags, the two men drove round to the stable in the rear of the main dwelling, where they unhitched and put up the team. The sergeant led the way into the house. Passing through a small store-house and kitchen they emerged into the living room. On a miniature scale it was a replica of one of the Post barrack-rooms, except that the table boasted a tartan-rugged covering, that two or three easy chairs were scattered around, and some calfskin mats partially covered the painted hardwood floor. The walls, for the most part were adorned with many unframed copies of pictures from the brush of that great Western artist, Charles Russell, and black and white sketches cut from various illustrated papers. Three corners of the room contained cots, one of which the sergeant assigned to Redmond. The room, with its big stove, in a way looked comfortable enough, and was regimentally neat and clean and homelike.

George peered into the front room beyond which bore quite a judicial aspect. At one end of it a small dais supported a severe-looking arm-chair and a long flat desk, on which were piled foolscap, blank legal forms, law-books, and the Bible. In front was a long, form-like bench, with a back to it. At the rear of the room were two strongly-built cells, with barred doors. Around the walls were scattered a double row of small chairs and, on a big, green-baize-covered board next the cells hung a brightly burnished assortment of handcuffs and leg-irons.

“Tis here we hould coort,” Slavin informed him, “whin we have any shtiffs tu be thried.”

Opening the front door George lugged in his bedding and kit-bags and, depositing them on his cot, flung off his fur coat, cap, and serge. Slavin divested himself likewise and, as the burly, bull-necked man stood there, slowly filling his pipe, Redmond was able to scan the face and massive proportions of his superior more closely.

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Standing well over six feet, for the presentment of vast, though perchance clumsy, gorilla-like strength, George reflected with slight awe that he had never seen the man's equal. His wide-spreading shoulders were more rounded than square; his deep, arching chest, powerful, stocky nether limbs and disproportionately long, huge-biceped arms seeming to fit him as an exponent of the mat rather than the gloves. Truly a daunting figure to meet in a close-quarter, rough-and-tumble encounter! thought Redmond. The top of his head was completely bald; his thick, straight black brows indicating that what little close-cropped iron-gray hair remained must originally have been coal-black in colour. His Irish-blue eyes, alternately dreamy and twinklingly alert, were deeply set in a high-cheeked-boned, bronzed face, with a long upper-lipped, grimly-humorous mouth. Its expression in repose gave subtle warning that its owner possessed in a marked degree the strongly melancholic, emotional, and choleric temperament of his race. There was no moroseness—no hardness in it, but rather the taciturnity that invariably settles upon the face of those dwellers of the range who, perforce, live much alone with their thoughts. Sheathed in mail and armed, that face and bulky figure to some imaginations might have found its prototype in some huge, grim, war-worn “man-at-arms” of mediaeval times. Redmond judged him to be somewhere in his forties; forty-two was his exact age as he ascertained later.

In curious contrast to his somewhat formidable exterior seemed his mild, gentle, soft-brogued voice. And with speech, his taciturn face relaxed insensibly into an almost genial expression, George noted.

Attracted by a cluster of pictures and photographs above and around the cot in the corner opposite his own, the young fellow crossed over and scanned them attentively. Tacked up with a random, reckless hand, the bizarre collection was typically significant of someone's whimsical, freakish tastes and personality. From the sublime to the ridiculous—and worse—subjects pious and impious, dreamily-beautiful and lewdly-vulgar, comic and tragic, also many splendid photographs were all jumbled together on the walls in a shockingly irresponsible fashion. Many of the pictures were unframed copies cut apparently from art and other journals; from theatrical and comic papers.

George gazed on them awhile in utterly bewildered astonishment; then, with a little hopeless ejaculation, swung around to the sergeant who met his despairing grin with benign composure.

“Whose cot's—”

“'Tis Yorke's,” said Slavin simply. It was the first time he had mentioned that individual's name. He struck a match on the seat of his pants and standing with his feet apart and hands clasped behind his back smoked awhile contentedly.

“Saw ye iver th' like av that for divarsiment?” he continued, with a wave of his pipe at the heterogeneous array, “shtudy thim! an', by an' large ye have th' man himsilf. He's away

on pay-day duty at th' Coalmore mines west av here—though by token, 'tis Billy Blythe at Banff shud be doin' ut, 'stead av me havin' tu sind a man from here. He shud be back on Number Four th' night."

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His twinkling orbs under their black smudge of eyebrow appraised the junior constable with faint, musing interest. “A quare chap is Yorkey,” he continued gently—shielding a match-flame and puffing with noisy respiration—“a good polisman—knows th’ Criminal Code from A tu Z—eyah! but mighty quare. I misdoubt how th’ tu av yez will get along.” He sighed deeply, muttering half to himself, “I may have tu take shteps—this time! . . .”

A rather ominous beginning, thought George. But, curbing his natural curiosity, he resolutely held his peace, awaiting more enlightenment. This not being forthcoming—his superior having relapsed once more into taciturn silence—he turned again to Yorke’s exhibits with pondering interest. Sounding far-off and indistinct in the frosty stillness of the bleak foothills came the faint echoes of a coyote’s shrill “ki-yip-yapping”—again and again, as if endeavouring to convey some insidious message. George continued to stare at the pictures. Gad! what a strange fantastic mind the man must have! he mused—what rotten, erratic desecration to shove pictures indiscriminately together like that! . . . Lack of space was no excuse. Millet’s “Angelus,” “Ally Sloper at the Derby,” a splendid lithograph of “The Angel of Pity at the Well of Cawnpore,” Lottie Collins, scantily attired, in her song and dance “Tara-ra-ra-boom-de-ay,” Sir Frederick Leighton’s “Wedded,” a gruesome depiction of a Chinese execution at Canton, an old-fashioned engraving of that dashing, debonair cavalry officer, “Major Hodson,” of Indian Mutiny fame, George Robey, as a nurse-maid, wheeling Little Tich in a perambulator, the grim, torture-lined face of Slatin Pasha, a ridiculously obscene picture entitled “Two coons scoffing oysters for a wager,” that glorious edifice the “Taj Mahal” of India, and so on. “Divarsiment” indeed!

To this ill-assorted admixture three exceptions only were grouped with any sense of reason. The central picture was a beautifully coloured reproduction of Sir Hubert Herkomer’s famous masterpiece “The Last Muster.” Lovers of art subjects are doubtless familiar with this immortal painting. It depicts a pathetic congregation of old, white-haired, war-worn pensioners attending divine service in the chapel of Old Chelsea Hospital, with the variegated lights from the stained-glass windows flooding them with soft gentle colours. Flanking it on either side were portraits of the original founders of this historical institution in 1692—Charles II (The Merry Monarch) and his kindly-hearted “light o’ love” Sweet Nell Gwynn of Old Drury.

With curiously mixed feelings George finally tore himself away from Yorke’s pathetically grotesque attempt at wall-adornment. Strive as he would within his soul to ridicule, the pictures seemed somehow almost to shout at him with hidden meaning. As if a voice—a drunken voice, but gentlemanly withall—was hiccuping in his ear: “Paradise Lost, old man! (hic) Paradise Lost!”

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And, mixed with it, came again out of the silence of the foothills the coyote's faintly persistent mocking wail—its “ki-yip-yap” sounding almost like “Bah! Yah! Baa!” . . . Some lines of an old quotation, picked up he knew not where, wandered into his mind

Comedy, Tragedy, Laughter and Tears!
Thou'rt rolled as one in the Dust of Years!

With a sigh he turned to his own cot and began to unpack and arrange his kit; in regulation fashion, and with such small faddy fixings customary to men inured to barrack life. Thus engaged the time passed rapidly. Later in the day he assisted the sergeant in making out the detachment's “monthly returns” and diary. This task accomplished, in the gathering dusk he attended “Evening Stables.” There were two saddle-horses beside the previously-mentioned team. A splendid upstanding pair, George thought them. He was good with horses; possessing the faculty of handling them that springs only from a patient, kindly, instinctive love of animals.

“Nay! I thrive mostly,” Slavin was telling him, “buckboard an' team's away handier for a man av weight like meself. Eyah!” he sighed, “tho' time was whin I cud throw a leg over wid th' best av thim. Yorke—he gen'rally rides th' black, Parson, so ye'll take th' sorrel, Fox, for yeh pathrols. He's a good stayer, an' fast. Ye'll want tu watch him at mounthin' tho'—he's not a mane harse, but he has a quare thrick av turnin' sharp tu th' 'off'—just as ye go tu shwing up into th' saddle. Many's th' man he's whiraroo'd round wid wan fut in th' stirrup an' left pickin' up dollars off th' bald-headed.' Well! let's tu supper.”

With the practised hand of an old cook he prepared a simple but hearty repast, upon which they fell with appetites keenly edged with the cold air.

“Are ye anythin' av a cuk?”

Redmond grinned deprecatingly and then shook his head.

“Eyah!” grumbled Slavin, “seems I cannot hilp bein' cuk an' shtandin' orderly-man around here. I thried out Yorkey. . . . Wan day on'y tho'—'tis th' divil's own cuk he is. 'Sarjint!' sez he, 'I'm no bowatchee'—which in Injia he tells me means same as cuk. An' he tould th' trute at that.”

Some three hours later, as they lay on their cots, came to them the faint, far-off *toot!* *toot!* of an engine, through the keen atmosphere.

“That's Number Four from th' West,” remarked Slavin drowsily, “Yorkey shud be along on ut. Well! a walk will not hurt th' man if—”

He chuntered something to himself.

Half an hour elapsed slowly—three quarters. Slavin rolled off his cot with a grunt and strode heavily to the front door, which he opened. Redmond silently followed him and together the two men stepped out into the crisply-crunching hard-packed snow. It was a magnificent night. High overhead in the star-studded sky shone a splendid full moon, its clear cold rays lighting up the white world around them with a sort of phosphorescent, scintillating brilliance.

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Though not of a particularly sentimental temperament, the calm, peaceful, unearthly beauty of the scene moved George to murmur—half to himself:

*“Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky,
That dost not bite so nigh
As benefits forgot, alas!
As benefits forgot.”*

To his surprise came Slavin’s soft brogue echoing the last lines of the old Shakespearian sonnet, with a sort of dreamy, gentle bitterness: “As binifits forghot— forghot!—as binifits forghot! . . . Luk tu that now! eyah! ‘tis th’ trute, lad! . . . for here —unless I am mistuk, comes me bould Yorkey—an’ dhrunk as ‘a fiddler’s —— again. Tchkk! an’ me on’y just afther warnin’ um. . . .”

And, a far-away black spot as yet, down the moonlit, snow-banked trail, indistinctly they beheld an unsteady figure slowly weaving its way towards the detachment. At intervals the night-wind wafted to them snatches of song.

“Singin’, singin’,” muttered Slavin, “from break av mornn ’till jewy eve! . . . Misther B —— Yorke! luks ‘tis goin’ large y’are th’ night.”

Nearer and nearer approached the stumbling black figure, weaving an eccentric course in and out along the line of telephone poles; and, to their ears came the voice of one crying in the wilderness:—

*“O, the Midnight Son! the Midnight Son! (hic)
You needn’t go trottin’ to Norway—
You’ll find him in ev’ry doorway—”*

A sudden cessation of the music, coupled with certain slightly indistinct, weird contortions of the vocalist’s figure, apprised the watchers that a snow-bank had momentarily claimed him. Then, suddenly and saucily, as if without a break, the throbbing, high-pitched tenor piped up again—

“You’ll behold him in his glory If you on’y take a run (hic) Down the Strand—that’s the Land Of the Midnight Son.”

Dewy eve indeed!—a far cry to the Strand! . . . How freakish sounded that old London variety stage ditty ridiculing the nightly silence of the great snow-bound Nor’ West. Redmond could not refrain an explosive, snorting chuckle as he remarked the erratic gait of the slowly approaching pedestrian. As Slavin had opined, he was “going large.” His vocal efforts had ceased temporarily, and now it was the junior constable’s merriment that broke the frosty stillness of the night.

But Slavin did not laugh. Watchfully he waited there—curiously still, his head jutting forward loweringly from between his huge shoulders.

“Tchkk!” he clucked in gentle distaste—“In uniform . . . an’ just afther comin’ off the thrain! . . . th’ like av that now ’tis—’tis scandh’lus! . . .”

Suddenly Redmond shivered, and his mirth died within him. The air seemed to have become charged with a tense, ominous something that filled him with a great dread—of what? he knew not. He felt an inexplicable impulse to cry out a warning to that ludicrous figure, whose crunching moccasins were now the only sounds that broke the uncanny stillness of the night. To him, the whole scene, bathed in the cold brilliance of its moonlit setting, seemed ghostly and unreal—a disturbing dream of comedy and tragedy, intermingled.

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Inwards, between the telephone poles, the man came stumbling along, gradually drawing nigh to the motionless watchers. Halting momentarily, during his progress he made a quick stooping action at the base of one of the poles, as if with vague purpose, which action was remarked at least by Redmond.

Then, for the first time, he seemed to become aware of their presence, and making a pitiful attempt to dissemble his condition and assume a smart, erect military carriage he waved his riding-crop at them by way of salutation. Something in his action, its graceful, airy mockery, trivial though it was, impressed the gestures firmly in Redmond's mind. He became cognizant of a flushed, undeniably handsome face with reckless eyes and mocking lips; a slimly-built figure of a man of medium height, whose natural grace was barely concealed by the short regimental fur coat.

Halting unsteadily within the regulation three paces pending salute, he struck an attitude commonly affected by Mr. Sothern, in "Lord Dundreary," and jauntily twirled his crop, the while he declaimed:—

*"Waltz me round again, Willie, Willie,
Round and round and—"*

"Round!" finished Slavin, with a horrible oath. There seemed something shockingly aboriginal—simian—in the swift, gorilla-like clutch of his huge dangling hands, as they fastened on the throat and shoulder of the drunken man and whirled him on his back in the snow—something deadly and menacing in his hard-breathing, soft-brogued invective:

"Yeh bloody nightingale! come off th' perch! . . . I'm fed up wid yeh!—I'll waltz yeh!—I'll tache yeh tu make a mock av Burke Slavin, time an' again! I'll—"

Redmond interposed, "Steady, Sergeant!" he implored shakily, his hand on his superior's shoulder, "For God's sake—"

But Slavin, in absent fashion, shoved him off. He seemed to put no effort in the movement, but the tense muscular impact of it sent Redmond reeling yards away.

"Giddap, Yorkey! God d——n ye for a dhrunken waster!—giddap! or I'll put th' boots tu yeh!" Terrible was the menace of the giant Irishman's face, his back-flung boot and his snarling, curiously low-pitched voice.

"No! not Burke, old man! . . . ah, don't!" gasped the rich tenor voice pleadingly from the snow—"ah, don't, Burke! . . . remember, remember . . . St. Agnes' Eve—"

*"St. Agnes' Eve. Ah! bitter chill it was,
The—"*

It broke—that throbbing voice with its strange, impassioned appeal. Far away over the snow the faint, silvery ring of a locomotive gong fell upon the ears of the trio almost like the deep, solemn tolling of bells.

Then slowly, and seemingly in pain, the prostrate man arose.

And yet! Redmond mused, sorry a figure as he cut just then, minus fur-cap and plastered with snow, alone with the shame which was his, he had an air, a certain dignity of mien, this man, Yorke, which stamped him far above the common run of men.

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The junior constable, as he noted the dark hair, silvering and worn away at the temples, adjudged him to be somewhere between thirty and forty—thirty-five was his exact age as he ascertained later.

Now, with the air of a fallen angel, he stood there in the cold, snow-dazzling moonlight; his face registering silent resignation as to whatever else might befall him. The sergeant had stepped forward. Redmond looked on, in dazed apprehension. A solemn hush had fallen upon the strange scene, and stranger trio. Their figures flung weird, fantastic shadows across the diamond-sparkling snow-crust. George glanced at Slavin, and that individual's demeanor amazed him still further. The big man's face was transformed. There seemed something very terrible just then in the pathetic working of his rugged features, as if he were striving to allay some powerful inward emotion. Then huskily, but not unkindly—as perchance the father may have spoken to the prodigal son—came his soft brogue:

“Get yu tu bed, Yorkey! get yu tu bed, man! . . . an’ thry me no more! . . .”

Mutely, like a child, Yorke obeyed the order. Glancing at Redmond he turned and walked unsteadily into the detachment.

Perturbed and utterly mystified at the sordid drama he had witnessed, its amazing combination of brutality and pathos, George remained rooted to the spot as one in a dream. Instinctively though, he felt that this was not the first time of its enactment. Mechanically he watched the door close; then sounding far off and indistinct, Slavin's hoarse whisper in his ear brought him down to Mother Earth again with a vengeance:

“Did ye mark him stoop an’ ‘plant’ th’ ‘hootch?”

George nodded. “I wasn't quite wise to what he was at,” he answered.

“Let us go get ut!” said Sergeant Slavin grimly, marching to the spot, “I will not have dhrink brought into th’ detachment! . . . ’tis against ordhers.”

He bent down, straightened up, and turning to Redmond who had joined him exhibited a bottle. He held it up to the light of the moon. It appeared to be about half empty. Extracting the cork, he smelt.

“’Tis whiskey,” he murmured simply—much as Mr. Pickwick said: “It is punch.” He made casual examination of the green and gold label. “‘Burke’s Oirish,’ begob! . . . eyah! a brave ould uniform but”—he turned a moist eye on his subordinate—“a desp’ritly wounded souldier that wears ut—bethter out av pain. ‘Tis an’ ould sayin’: ‘Whin ye meet th’ divil du not turn tail but take um by th’ harns.’ . . . Bho! I thrust the honest face av yeh—I have tuk tu ye since th’ handy lad ye showt yersilf with that team mix-up th’ morn.”

Redmond, mollified, grinned shiveringly. "I don't mind a snort, Sergeant," he said, "it's d——d cold out here. Beer's more in my line though. Salve!"

He took a swallow or two; the bottle changed hands.

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“Eyah!” remarked Slavin sometime later—cuddling the bottle at the “port arms.” “‘Tis put th’ kibosh on many a good man in th’ ould Force has this same dhrink. Th’ likes av Yorkey there”—he jerked his head at the lighted window—“shud never touch ut—never touch ut! . . . Cannot flirrt wid a bottle—’tis wedded they wud be tu ut. Now meself”—he paused impressively—“I can take me dhrink like a ginthleman—can take ut, or lave ut alone.”

Absorptive demonstration followed. Came a long-drawn, smacking “Ah-hh!” “A sore thrial tu me is that same man,” he resumed, “wan more break on his part, as ye have seen this night . . . an’ I musht—I will take shteps wid um.”

“Why don’t you transfer him back to the Post?” queried George, wonderingly, mindful of how swiftly that disciplinary measure had rewarded his own reckless conduct at the Gleichen detachment. “He’s got nothing on you, has he?”

“*Fwhat?*” . . . Slavin, turning like a flash, glared sharply at him out of deep-set scowling eyes, “*Fwhat?*”

Tonelessly, George repeated his query,

Slavin’s glare gradually faded. “Eyah!” he affirmed presently, “he has! . . .” came a long pause—“but not as yu mane ut . . . oh! begorrah, no!” His eyes glittered dangerously and his wide mouth wreathed into an unholy grin, “‘Tis a shmart man that iver puts ut over on me at th’ Orderly-room. . . Fwhy du I not sind him into th’ Post? . . . eyah! fwhy du I not? . . .”

Chin sunk on his huge chest, he mused awhile.

George waited.

“Listen, bhoy!” A terrible earnestness crept into the soft voice. “I’ll tell ye th’ tale. . . . ‘Twas up at th’ Chilkoot Pass—in the gold rush av ‘98. . . . Together we was—Yorkey an’ meself—stationed there undher ould Bobby Belcher. Wan night—Mother av God! will I iver forghet ut? Bittther cowlid is th’ Yukon, lad; th’ like av ut yu’ here in Alberta du not know. Afther tu crazy lost *cheechacos* we had been that day. We found thim—frozen. . . . A blizzard had shprung up, but we shtrapped th’ stiffs on th’ sled an’ mushed ut oursilves tu save th’ dogs.

“I am a big man, an’ shtrong . . . but Yorkey was th’ betther man av us tu that night—havin less weight tu pack. I was all in—dhrowsy, an’ wanted tu give up th’ ghost an’ shleep—an’ shleep. . . . Nigh unto death I was. . . .”

The murmuring voice died away. A shudder ran through the great frame at the remembrance, while the hand clutching the bottle trembled violently. Unconsciously

Redmond shook with him; for the horror Slavin was living over again just then enveloped his listener also.

“But Yorkey,” he continued “wud not let me lie down. . . . God! how that man did put his fishts an’ mucklucks tu me an’ pushed an’ shtaggered wid me’ afther th’ dogs, beggin’ an’ cursin’ an’ prayin’ an’ callin’ me names that ud fairly make th’ dead relations av a man rise up out av their graves. . . . Light-headed he

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got towards th' ind av th' thrail, poor chap! shoutin' dhrill-ordhers an' Injia naygur talk, an' singin' great songs an' chips av poethry—th' half av which I misremimber—excipthim—thim wurds he said this night. 'Shaint Agnus Eve,' he calls ut. Over an' over he kept repeathin' thim as he helped me shtaggerin' along. . . 'God!' cries he, betune cursin' me an' th' dogs an' singin' 'Shaint Agnus Eve'—'Oh, help us this night! let us live, God! . . . oh, let us live!—this poor bloody Oirishman an' me! . . .'"

The sergeant's head was thrown back now, gazing full at the evening star the moonbeams shining upon his upturned, powerful face. Cold as was the night Redmond could see glistening beads of sweat on his forehead. As one himself under the spell of the fear of death, the younger man silently watched that face—fascinated. It was calm now, with a great and kindly peace. Slowly the gentle voice took up the tale anew:

"We made ut, bhoy—th' Post—or nigh tu ut . . . in th' break av th' dawn. . . . For wan av th' dogs yapped an' they come out an' found us in th' snow. . . . Yorkey, wid his arrums round th' neck av me—as if he wud shtill dhrag me on . . . an' cryin' upon th' mother that bore um. . . . Tu men—in damned bad shape—tu shtiffs . . . an' but three dogs lift out av th' six-team we'd shtarted wid. . . . So—now ye know; lad! . . . Fwhat think ye? . . ."

What George thought was: "Greater love hath no man than this." What he said was: "He's an Englishman, isn't he?"

Slavin nodded. "Comes of a mighty good family tu, they say, but 'tis little he iwer cracks on himself 'bout thim. Years back he hild a commission in some cavalry reg'mint in Injia, but he got broke—over a woman, I fancy. He's knocked about th' wurld quite a piece since thin. Eyah! he talks av some quare parts he's been in. Fwhat doin'? Lord knows. Been up an' down the ladder some in *this* outfit—sarjint one week—full buck private next. Yen know th' way these ginthlemin-rankers run amuck?"

"How does he get away with it every time?" queried Redmond. "Hasn't any civilian ever reported him to the old man?"

"Yes! wance—an' 'Father,' th' ould rapparee! he went for me baldheaded for not reporthin' ut tu."

With a sort of miserable heartiness Slavin cursed awhile at the recollection. "Toime an' again," he resumed, "have I taken my hands tu um—pleaded wid um, an' shielded um in many a dhirty scrape, an' ivry toime sez he, wid his ginthlemin's shmile: 'Burke! will ye thry an' overlook it, ould man?' . . . Eyah! he's mighty quare. For some rayson he seems tu hate th' idea av a third man bein' here, tho' th' man' wud die for me. Divil a man can I kape here, anyway. In fwhat fashion he puts th' wind up 'him, I do not know;



they will not talk, out av pure kindness av heart an' rispict for meself, I guess. But—a few days here, an' bingo!—they apply for thransfer. Now ye know ivrythin', bhoy—fwhat I am up against, an' fwhy I will not 'can' Yorkey. Ye've a face that begets thrust—do not bethray ut, but thry an' hilp me. Bear wid Yorke as best ye can—divilmint an' all—for my sake, will yeh?"

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Not devoid of a certain simple dignity was the grim, rugged face that turned appealingly to the younger man's in the light of the moon.

And Redmond, smiling inscrutably into the deep-set, glittering eyes, answered as simply: "I will, Sergeant!"

He declined an offer. "*Nemoyah!* (No) thanks, I've had enough."

For some unaccountable reason, Slavin smiled also. His huge clamping right hand crushed George's, while the left described an arc heavenwards. Came a throaty gurgle, a careless swing of the arm, and—

"Be lay loike a warrior takin' his rist,
Wid his—

"I misrimimber th' tail-ind av ut," sighed Sergeant Slavin, "'Tis toime we turned in."

In silence they re-entered the detachment. Yorke, minus his moccasins, fur-coat and red-serge, lay stretched out upon his cot sleeping heavily, his flushed, reckless, high-bred face pillowed on one outflung arm. Above him, silent guardians of his rest, his grotesque mixture of prints gleamed dusily in the lamp-light.

Into Redmond's mind—sunk into a deep oblivion of dreamy, chaotic thought—came again Slavin's words:

"Shtudy thim picthures, bhoy! an', by an' large ye have th' man himsilf"

Soon, too, he slept; and into his fitful slumbers drifted a ridiculously disturbing dream. That of actually witnessing the terrible scene of the long-dead Indian Mutiny hero, Major Hodson, executing with his own hand the three princes of Oude.

Inshalla! it was done—there! there! against the cart, amidst the gorgeous setting of Indian sunset and gleaming minaret. "*Deen! Deen! Futteh Mohammed!*" came a dying scream upon the last shot—the smoking carbine was jerked back to the "recover"—a moment the scarlet-turbaned, scarlet-sashed English officer gazed with ruthless satisfaction at his treacherous victims then, turning sharply, faced him.

And lo! to Redmond it seemed that the stern, intolerant, recklessly-handsome countenance he looked upon bore a striking resemblance to the face of Yorke.

CHAPTER IV

*Burn'd Marmion's swarthy cheek like fire,
And shook his very frame for ire,*



And—"This to me!" he said,—
MARMION

Early on the morrow it came to pass that Sergeant Slavin, cooking breakfast for all hands, heard Yorke's voice uplifted in song, as that worthy made his leisurely toilet. He shot a slightly bilious glance at Redmond, who, "Morning Stables" finished, lounged nearby.

"Hear um?" he snorted enviously. "Singin'! singin'!—forever singin'!—eyah! sich nonsense, tu."

But, to George, who possessed a musical ear, the ringing tenor sounded rather airily and sweetly—

*"Hark! hark! the lark at Heaven's Gate sings,
And Phoebus 'gins arise,
His steeds to water at those springs—"*

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"Fwhat yez know 'bout that?" Slavin forked viciously at the bacon he was frying.
"Blarney my sow! an' him not up for 'Shtables' at all! . . ."

*"With ev'rything that pretty is:—
My lady sweet, arise! arise!
My lady sweet, arise!"*

"My lady shweet!"—Slavin snorted unutterable things.

Yawning, the object of his remarks sauntered into the kitchen just then, and, deeming the occasion now to be a fitting one, the sergeant introduced his two subordinates to each other.

Yorke, with a bleak nod and handshake, swept the junior constable with a swiftly appraising glance. As frigidly was his salutation returned. Redmond remarked the regular features, suggestive rather of the ancient Norman type, the thin, curved, defiant nostrils and dark, arching eyebrows. The face, with its indefinable stamp of birth and breeding was handsome enough in its patrician mould, but marred somewhat by the lines of cynicism, or dissipation, round the sombre, reckless eyes and intolerant mouth. He had a cool, clear voice and a whimsical, devil-may-care sort of manner that was apparently natural to him, as was also a certain languid grace of movement. He possessed an irritating mannerism of continually elevating his chin and dilating his curved nostrils disdainfully in a sort of soundless sniff. Beyond a slight flush he showed little trace of his previous night's dissipation.

"Where do you hail from?" he enquired of George with casual interest over the mess-table later.

"Ontario," replied George laconically, "my people are farmers down there."

For a moment Yorke's arched brows lifted in puzzled surprise—came a repetition of his offensive sniffing mannerism; and he stared pointedly away again. It was difficult to be more insulting in dumb show.

George, mindful of his promise to Slavin, groaned inwardly. "I am going to hate this fellow" he thought.

The sergeant, from the head of the table, kept a keen watch upon the pair.

"An' fwhat?" came his soft brogue, by way of diversion, "an' fwhat made yu' take on th' Force?"

"Oh, I don't know!" Wearily, George shoved his hands deep into his pockets and leant back in his chair. "Old man's pretty well fixed—now. He's a member of the legislature for — County. I was at McGill for some terms—medicine." A hopeless note crept into

his tones. "I fell down on my exams . . . ran amuck with the wrong bunch an' all that—
an'—an' . . . kind of made a mess of things I guess. . . . Went broke—came West. . . .
That's why. . . ."

With a forlorn sort of forced grin he gazed back at his interlocutor. Yorke, unheeding the conversation, continued his breakfast as if he were alone.

"H-mm!" grunted Slavin, summing up the situation with native simplicity, "That's ut, eh?
—but, for all ye have th' spache an' manners av a ginthleman—ranker somehow—
somehow I misdoubt ye're a way-back waster like Misther Yorkey here!"

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That hardened “ginthleman,” absently sipping his coffee, flung a faintly-derisive, patient smile at his accuser. A perfect understanding seemed to exist between the two men. Redmond, musing upon the pathetically-sordid drama he had witnessed not so many hours since, relapsed into a reverie of speculation.

The silence was suddenly broken by the sharp trill of the telephone. Slavin arose lethargically from the mess-table and answered it.

“Hullo! yis! Slavin shpeakin’! Fwat?—all right Nick! I’ll sind a man shortly an’ vag um! So long! Oh, hold on, Nick! . . . May th’ divil niver know ye’re dead till ye’re tu hours in Hivin! Fwhat?—Oh, thank yez! Same tu yez! Well! . . . so long!”

“Hobo worryin’ Nick Lee at Cow Run. Scared av fire in th’ livery-shtable. Go yu’, Yorkey!” He eyed George a moment in curious speculation. “Yu’ had betther go along tu, Ridmond! Exercise yez harse an’”—he lit his pipe noisily—“learn th’ lay av th’ thrails.” He turned to the senior constable. “If ye can lay hould av th’ J.P. there, get this shtiff committed an’ let Ridmond take thrain wid um tu th’ Post. Yu’ return wid th’ harses!”

“Why can’t Redmond nip down there on a way-freight and do the whole thing?” said Yorke, a trifle sulkily. “It seems rot sending two men mounted for one blooming hobo.”

“Eyah!” murmured Slavin with suspicious mildness, “‘tis th’ long toime since I have used me shtripes tu give men undher me wan ordher twice.”

Yorke flashed a slightly apprehensive glance at his superior’s face. Then, without another word, he reached for his side-arms, bridle, and fur-coat. He knew his man.

Redmond followed suit and they adjourned to the stable.

“I saw that beggar yesterday—on my way up,” remarked George, ill-advisedly.

Yorke stared. “The hell you did! . . . why didn’t you vag him then?” he retorted irritably.

Bursting with silent wrath at the “choke-off,” with difficulty Redmond held his peace. In silence they saddled up and leading the horses out prepared to mount. Yorke swung up on the splendid, mettled black—“Parson.” He had an ideal cavalry seat, and as with an easy grace he gently controlled his impatient horse, with an inscrutable, mask-like countenance he watched Redmond and the sorrel “Fox.”

With toe in the leather-covered stirrup the latter reached for the saddle-horn. Poor George! fuming inwardly over one humiliation caused him shortly to be the recipient of another. Too late to his preoccupied mind came Slavin’s warning of the day before.

Like a flash the sorrel whirled to the “off-side” and Redmond, swung off his balance, revolved into space and was pitched on his hands and knees in the snow. Fortunately his foot had slipped clear of the stirrup. In this somewhat ignominious position dizzily he heard Yorke’s mocking tones:

“What are the odds on Fox, bookie? . . . I’d like a few of those dollars when you’ve quite finished picking them all up.”

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With an almost superhuman effort the young fellow controlled himself once more as he arose. Not lightly had he given a promise. Silently he dusted the snow from his uniform and strode over to where the sorrel awaited him. The horse had made no attempt to run away; apparently being an old hand at the game. It now stood eying its dupe, with Lord knows what mirth tickling its equine brain.

Slipping the “nigh” rein through the saddle-fork, then back to the cheek-strap again, George snubbed Fox’s head towards him, making it impossible for the horse to whirl to the “off” as before. Warily and quietly he then swung into the saddle and the two men set off.

A few yards from the front of the detachment Yorke suddenly pulled up and, dismounting, felt around in the snow at the base of a well-remembered telephone-pole. It was Redmond’s hour to jeer now, if he had been mindful to do so. But another usurped that privilege.

A queer choking sound made them both turn round. Slavin, his grim face registering unholy mirth, lounged in the doorway.

“Fwhat ye lukkin for, Yorkey?”

“Oh, nothing!” came that gentleman’s answer.

“Ye’ll find ut in th’ bottle thin.”

Insult was added to injury by the sergeant casually plucking that article from it’s “rist” and chucking it over.

Yorke’s face was a study. “Oh!” cried he dismally, “what wit! . . . give three rousing cheers!” . . . He mounted once more. “Well! there’s no denying you are one hell of a sergeant!”

That worthy one grinned at him tolerantly. “Get yez gone!” he spat back, “an’ du not linger tu play craps on th’ thrail either—th’ tu av yez!”

Long and grimly, with his bald head sunk between his huge shoulders, he gazed after the departing riders. “Eyah! ’tis best so!” he murmured softly, “a showdown—wid no ould shtiff av a non-com like meself tu butt in. . . . An’, onless I am mistuk that same will come this very morn, from th’ luks av things. . . . Sind th’ young wan is as handy wid his dhooks as Brankley sez he is! . . . Thin—an’ on’y thin will there be peace in th’ fam’ly.”

He re-lit his pipe and, shading his eyes from the snow-glare focussed them on two rapidly vanishing black specks. “I wud that I cud see ut!” he sighed, plaintively, “I wud that I cud see ut!”

It was a glorious day, sunny and clear, with the temperature sufficiently low to prevent the hard-packed snow from balling up the horses' feet. The trail ran fairly level along a lower shelf of the timber-lined foothills, which on their right hand sloped gradually to the banks of the Bow River in a series of rolling "downs." Sharply outlined against the blue ether the Sou' Western chain of the mighty "Rockies" reared their rosily-white peaks in all their morning glory—silent guardians of the winter landscape.

Deep down in his soul young Redmond harboured a silent, dreamy adoration for the beauty of such scenes as this. Under different conditions he would have enjoyed this ride immensely. But now—with his mind a seething bitter chaos consequent upon his companion's incomprehensible behavior towards him, he rode in a sort of brooding reverie. Yorke was equally morose. Not a word had fallen from their lips since they left the detachment.

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Right under the horses' noses a big white jack-rabbit suddenly darted across the snow-banked ruts of the well-worn trail, pursuing its leaping erratic course towards a patch of brush on the river side. Simultaneously the animals shied, with an inward trend, cannoning their respective riders together. Yorke reined away sharply and glared.

"Get over!" he said curtly, "don't crowd me!"

He spoke as a Cossack hetman might to his sotnia, and, at his tone and attitude, something snapped within Redmond. To his already overflowing cup of resentment it was the last straw. His promise to Slavin he flung to the winds, and it was replaced with vindictive but cool purpose.

"Showdown!" he muttered under his breath, "I knew it had to come!" He was conscious of a feeling of vast relief. Aloud he responded, blithely and rudely, "Oh! to hell with *you*!"

Yorke checked his horse with a suddenness that brought the animal back onto its haunches. Sitting square and motionless in the saddle for a moment he stared at George with an expression almost of shocked amazement; then his face became convulsed with ruthless passion.

The junior constable had pulled up also, and now wheeling "half-left" and lolling lazily in his saddle with shortened leg stared back at his enemy with an expression there was no mistaking. His debonair young face had altered in an incredible fashion. Although his lips were pursed up with their whistling nonchalance his eyes had contracted beneath scowling brows into mere pin-points of steel and ice. He looked about as docile as a young lobo wolf—cornered.

"Ah!" murmured Yorke, noting the transformation; and he seemed to consider. He had seen that look on men's faces before. Insensibly, passion had vanished from his face; the bully had disappeared; and in his place there sat in saddle a cool, contemptuous gentleman.

"Are you talking back to me?" he said. He did not look astounded now—seemed rather to assume it.

Redmond's scowling brows lifted a fraction. "Talking back?" he echoed, "sure! Who the devil do you think you're trying to come 'the Tin Man' over?"

Reluctantly Yorke discounted his first impressions. Here was no self-conscious bravado. Warily he surveyed George for a moment—the cool appraising glance of the ring champion in his corner scanning his challenger—then, swinging out of the saddle, he dropped his lines and began to unbuckle his spurs.

There was no mistaking his actions. Redmond followed suit. A few seconds he looked dubiously at his horse, then back at Yorke.

“Oh, you needn’t be scared of Fox beating it,” remarked that gentleman a trifle wearily, “he’ll stand as good as old Parson if you chuck his lines down.”

Shading his eyes from the sun-glare he took a rapid survey of their surroundings, then led the way to a wind-swept patch of ground, more or less bare of snow. Arriving thither, as if by mutual consent they flung off caps, side-arms, fur-coats and stable-jackets. Yorke, a graceful, compactly-built figure of a man, sized up his slightly heavier opponent with an approving eye.

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"You strip good" he said carelessly. "Well! what's it to be? . . . 'muck' or 'muffin'?"

"'Muffin' of course!" snapped Redmond angrily, "what d'ye take me for?—a 'rough-house meal ticket'?"

"All right!" said Yorke soothingly, "don't lose your temper!"

It may have been a shrewdly-calculated attempt to attain that end; and yet again it may have been only sheer mechanical habit that prompted him to stretch forth his hands in the customary salute of the ring.

With an inarticulate exclamation of rage the younger man struck the proffered hands aside and led with a straight left for the other's head. Yorke blocked it cleverly and fell into a clinch.

"Ah!" murmured Yorke in his antagonist's ear with a sinister smile, "rotten manners! for just that, my buck, I'll make you scoff 'muffin' 'till you're quite poorly!"

Working his arms cautiously, he sprang clear of the clinch, then, rushing his man and feinting for the ribs, he rocked Redmond's head back with two terrific left and right hooks to the jaw.

The jarring sting of the punches, although dazing him slightly, brought Redmond to his senses, as he realized how vulnerable his momentary loss of temper had rendered him. He now braced himself with dogged determination and, covering up warily, circled his adversary with clever foot-work. Yorke, tearing in again was met with one of the crudest jabs he had ever known—flush in the mouth. Gamely he retaliated with a stinging uppercut and a right swing which, coming home on Redmond's cheek-bone, whirled him off his balance and sent him sprawling.

Dazed, but not daunted, he scrambled to his feet. Yorke, blowing upon his knuckles with all the air of an old-time "Regency blood," waited with heaving chest and scornful, narrowed eyes.

"Want to elevate the sponge?" he queried sneeringly.

"No!" panted George grimly, "it was you started the whole rotten dirty business, and, by gum! I'll finish it!"

Dancing in and out he drew an ineffective left from his opponent and countered with a pile-driving right to the heart. Yorke gave vent to a groaning exclamation and turned pale. He spat gaspingly out of his mashed lips and propped Redmond off awhile; then, suddenly springing in again he attempted to mix it. George was nothing loath, and the two men, standing toe-to-toe, slugged each other with a perfect whirlwind of damaging punches to face and body.

Even in the giddy whirl of combat, in either man's heart now was a wonder almost akin to respect for each other's ring knowledge and gameness. It was not George's first bout by many, but the physical endurance of this hard, clean-hitting Corinthian of a man was an astounding revelation to him; the science of the graceful, narrow-waisted figure was still as quick and as punishing as a steel trap.

Yorke, for his part, reflected with bitter irony how utterly erroneous had been his primary calculations—how Nemesis was hard upon his heels at last in the guise of this relentless youngster, who fought like a college-bred "Charley Mitchell."



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Ding! dong!—hook, jab, uppercut, block, and swing; in and out, back and forth, side-stepping and head-work—one long exhausting round. Flesh and blood could not stand the pace—though it was Redmond now who forced it. Neither of the men was in training and the long strain began to tell upon them both cruelly—especially upon the veteran Yorke. Still, with frosted hair and streaming faces, the sweat-soaked, bruised and bleeding combatants staggered against each other and strove to make play with their weary arms, until utter exhaustion rang the time gong.

Gasping and swaying to and fro, his puffed lips wreathed into a ghastly semblance of his old scornful smile, Yorke dropped his guard and stuck out his chin. He mouthed and pointed to it tauntingly. In spite of himself, a sorry grin flickered over George's battered, weary young face. He mouthed back—speech was beyond either; sagging at the knees he reeled forward and his right arm went poking out in a wobbling, uncertain punch.

It glanced harmlessly over Yorke's shoulder, but the violent impact of his body sent the other heavily to the ground. An ineffectual struggle to maintain his equilibrium and he, too, fell—face downwards, with his head pillowed on Yorke's heaving chest.

CHAPTER V

We're poor little lambs who've lost our way,
Baa! Baa! Baa!
We're little black sheep who've gone astray,
Baa—aa—aa!
Gentlemen-rankers out on the spree,
Damned from here to Eternity,
God ha' mercy on such as we,
Baa! Yah! Bah!
KIPLING

A great peace lay upon the frozen landscape—the deep, wintry peace of the vast, snow-bound Nor'West. A light breeze murmured over the crisping snow, and moaned amongst the pines in the timber-lined spurs of the foothills. High overhead in the sunny, dazzling blue vault of heaven a huge solitary hawk slowly circled with wide-spread, motionless wings, uttering intermittently its querulous, eerie whistle.

Awhile the two exhausted men lay gasping for breath—absolutely and utterly spent. Suddenly Yorke shivered violently and sighed. Redmond raised himself off the prostrate form of his late opponent and, staggering over to the pile of their discarded habiliments, slowly and painfully he donned his fur coat and cap; then, picking up Yorke's, he stumbled over to the latter. The senior constable was now sitting up, with arms drooping loosely over his knees. George wrapped the coat around the bowed shoulders and put on the cap.

“You’re cold, old man!” he said simply. “We’d best get our things on now, and beat it.”

Wearily Yorke raised his head, and, at something he beheld in that disfigured, but unalterably-handsome face, Redmond’s heart smote him.

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Often in the past he had fondly imagined himself nursing implacable, absolutely undying hatreds; brooding darkly over injuries received in fancy or reality, planning dire and utterly ruthless revenge, *etc.* But, deep, deep down in his boyish soul he knew it to be only a dismal failure—that he could not keep it up. His was an impulsive, generous young heart—equally quick to forgive an injury as to resent one. Now in his pity and misery he could have cried—to see his erstwhile enemy so hopelessly broken in body and spirit.

Therefore it did not occur to him that it was sheer sentimental absurdity on his part now to drop on one knee and put his arms around that shivering, pride-broken form.

“Yorkey!” he mumbled huskily, “old man! . . . Yor—”

He choked a bit, and was silent.

Waveringly, a skinned-knuckled, but sinewy, shapely hand crept out and gently ruffled Redmond’s curly auburn hair. Vaguely he heard a voice speaking to him. Could that tired, kind, whimsical voice belong to Yorke? It said: “Reddy, my old son! . . . we’re still in the ring, anyway. . . . Seems—do what we would or could—we couldn’t poke each other out. . . .”

Came a long silence; then: “If ever a man was sorry for the rotten way he’s acted, it’s surely me right now. . . . Got d——d good cause to be p’raps. . . . I handed it to you about the sponge . . . egad! I well-nigh came chucking it up myself—later. My colonial oath! but you’re the cleverest, gamest, hardest-hitting young proposition I’ve ever ruffled it out with! . . . Where’d you pick it up? Who’s handled you?”

George slowly rose to his feet. “Man named Scholes—down East” he answered. He eyed Yorke’s face ruefully and, incidentally felt his own, “I used to do a bit with the gloves when I was at McGill. Talking about sponges!—I only wish we had one now to chuck up—in tangible form.”

He abstracted the other’s handkerchief and, rolling it with his own into a pad dabbed it in the snow. Yorke winced. “Hold still, old thing!” said Redmond, “we’ll have to clean off a bit ere we hit the giddy trail again.”

For some minutes he gently manipulated the pad. “There! you don’t look too bad now. Have a go at me!”

Figuratively, they licked each other’s wounds awhile. Yorke had grown very silent. Chin in hands and rocking very slightly to and fro, all huddled up in his fur coat, he gazed unseeingly into the beyond. His face was clouded with such hopeless, bitter, brooding misery that it worried Redmond. He guessed it to be something far deeper than the memory of their recent conflict. He strove to arouse the other.

“Talk about game cocks!” he began lightly. “Ten years ago, say! you must have been a corker—regular ‘Terry McGovern’.”

“Eh?” Yorke’s far-away eyes stared at him vaguely. “I was in India then. Army light-weight champion in my day. Slavin wasn’t joshing much at breakfast, by gum! . . . Now we’re here! . . . We’re a bright pair!” He made as though to cast snow upon his head, “Ichabod! Ichabod! our glory has departed!”

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He lifted up his tenor voice, chanting the while he rocked—

*"Gentlemen-rankers out on the spree,
Damned from here to Eternity,
God ha' mercy on such as we,
Baa! Yah! Bah!"*

Redmond flinched and raised a weakly protesting hand. "Don't, old man!" he implored miserably, "don't! what's the—"

"Eh!" queried Yorke brutally—rocking—"does hurt?"

*"If the home we never write to, and the oaths we never keep,
And all we—"*

"No! no! no! Yorkey!" George's voice rose to a cry, "not that! . . . quit it, old man! . . . that's one of the most terrible things Kipling ever wrote—terrible because it's so absolutely, utterly hopeless. . . ."

"Well, then!" said Yorke slowly—

"Can you blame us if we soak ourselves in beer?"

"It wasn't beer," muttered Redmond absently, "it was whiskey. Slavic and I drank it." With an effort he strove to arouse himself out of the despondency that he himself had fallen into.

"Listen! . . . Oh! quit that d——d rocking, Yorkey! . . . Listen now! we've put up a mighty good scrap against each other—we'll call that a draw—let's put up another against our—well! we'll call it our rotten luck . . . D——n it all, old man, we're not 'down an' outs' doing duty in this outfit—the best military police corps in the world! . . . Let's both of us quit squalling this eternal 'nobody loves me' stuff! This isn't any slobbery brotherly love or New Jerusalem business, or anything like that, either. I'm not a bloomin' missionary!" He qualified that assertion unnecessarily to prove it. "But let's stick together and back each other up—just us two and old man Slavin—make it a sort of 'rule of three.' We can have a deuce of a good time on this detachment then! . . ."

He spoke hotly, eagerly, with boyish fervour, his soul in his eyes.

Yorke remained silent, with averted eyes. That imploring, wistful, bruised young countenance was almost more than he could stand. George, dropping on one knee beside him put a tremulous hand on the senior constable's shoulder. "What's wrong, Yorkey?" he queried. He shook the bowed shoulder gently. "What's made you consistently knock every third buck that's been sent here? 'till they got fed up, and

transferred? . . . They tried to put the wind up me about it at the Post. What's bitin' you? I don't seem to get your angle at all!"

"Oh, I don't know!" Yorke coughed and spat drearily. "Kind of rum reason, you'll think. Long story—too long—dates back. Listen then! Ten years back, in the pride of my giddy youth, I held a Junior Sub's commission in the ——— Lancers—in India. This is just a synopsis of my case, mind! . . . Well! the regiment was lying at Rawal Pindi, and—I guess I kind of ran amuck there—got myself into a rotten *esclandre*—entirely my own fault I'll admit:

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*Man is fire, and Woman is tow,
And the Devil, he comes and begins to blow—*

the same old miserable business the world's fed up with. Since then seems I've kind of made a mess of things. Burke Slavin's about right—his estimate of me.” He sighed with bitter, gloomy retrospection. “I've always had a queer, intolerant sort of temperament. If I'd lived in the days of the Indian Mutiny I guess I'd have been in 'Hodson's Horse'.” (Redmond started, remembering his curious dream.) “He was a man after my own heart,” Yorke continued slowly, “resourceful, slashing sort of beggar . . . he ruffled it with a high hand. Bold and game as Sherman, or Paul Jones, but as ruthless as Graham of Claverhouse. He put the ever-lasting fear into the rebels of Oude—something like Cromwell did in Ireland. My old Governor served through the Mutiny—he's told me stories of him. My God!”

He drew his fur coat closer round him. “Well!”—Redmond watched the sombre profile—“as I was saying . . . I 'muckered'. . . . Since then, with the years, I guess I've been climbing down the ladder of illusions till I'm right in the stoke-hole, and Old Nick seems to grin and whisper: 'As you were! my cashiered Sub.—As you were!' every time I chuck a brace and try to climb up again. How's that for a bit of cheap cynicism?”—the low, bitter laugh was not good to hear—“Man!”—the brooding eyes narrowed—“I've sure plumbed the depths—knocking around, with the right to live. Port Said, Buenos Aires, Shanghai. . . . I've certainly travelled. Some day I'll throw the book at you. Now—substance and ambition gone by the board long ago, and mighty little left of principle I guess—I am—what I am—everything except a prodigal, or a remittance-man—I never worried them at Home—that way. . . .”

He spoke with a sort of reckless earnestness that moved his hearer more than that individual cared to show. Redmond felt it was useless to offer mere conventional sympathy in a case like this. He did the next best thing possible—he remained silently attentive and let the other run on.

“You take three men now—stationed in the same detachment,” resumed Yorke wearily, “by gum! they're thrown together mighty close when you come to think of it. It's different to the Post, where there's a crowd. Life's too short to start in explaining minutely just what that difference is. Fact remains! . . . to get along and pull together they've got to like each other—have something in common—give and take. Otherwise the situation becomes d——d trying, and trouble soon starts in the family.”

“By what divine right I should consider myself qualified to—to—Oh! shut up, you young idiot! . . .” Redmond, forehead pressed into the speaker's shoulder, giggled hysterically in spite of himself—“Shut up! d'you hear? or I'll knock your silly block off!”

The two bodies shook, with their convulsive merriment. “You can’t do it! old thing,” came George’s smothered rejoinder, “and you know darned well you can’t—now! . . . Go on, you bloomin’ Hodson!—proceed!”

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Yorke gave vent to a good-natured oath. "Hodson? . . . you do me proud, my buck! . . . Well now!—this 'three men in a boat' business! . . . I'll admit I 'rocked' it with Crampton. I virtually abolished him because—oh! I couldn't stick the beggar at all. I simply couldn't make a pal of him. He was fairly good at police work, but a proper cad, in my opinion. Always swanking about the palatial residence he'd left behind in the Old Country. He called it 'is 'ome' at that. Typical specimen of the middle-class snob. Followed Taylor. Thick-headed, serious-minded sort of fool. Had great veneration for 'his juty.' No real knowledge of the Criminal Code, and minus common sense, yet begad! the silly beggar tried to be more regimental than the blooming Force is itself. I systematically put the wind up to him 'till he got cold feet and quit."

Redmond recalled the fact that Taylor had been his predecessor. "Followed!" he echoed mockingly, looking up at his handiwork.

Yorke, with a twisted smile glanced down at the bruised, but debonair young face. Benevolently he punched its owner in the back. "Followed . . . a certain young fellow, yclept 'Nemesis'," he said, "I sized you up for one of these smart Alecks—first crack out of the box, and egad! I think I'm about right."

Said Redmond, "How about our respected sergeant? we seem to have forgotten him."

"Slavin?" ejaculated the senior constable; and was silent awhile. There was no levity in him now. Slowly he resumed, "I guess as much as it's humanly possible for two men to know each other—down to the bedrock, it's surely Burke Slavin and I. Should too, the years we've been together. The good old beggar! . . . We slang each other, and all that . . . but there's too much between us ever to resent anything for long."

"I know," said Redmond simply, "he told me himself—last night."

"Eh?" queried Yorke sharply. "My God! . . . Tchkk!" he clucked, and burying his hands in his face he gave vent to a fretful oath. "My God!" he repeated miserably, "I'd forgotten—last night! . . . I sure must have been 'lit' . . . to come that over old Burke. . . ."

"You sure were!" remarked Redmond brutally.

"Keats' 'St. Agnes' Eve'! . . . Oh, Lord!" . . . He drew in his breath with a sibilant hiss, "There seems something—something devilish about—"

"I know! I know!" breathed Yorke tensely, "what . . . you mean." His haggard eyes implored Redmond's. "No! no! never again . . . I swear it. . . ."

There came a long, painful silence. "See here; look!" began Yorke suddenly. He stopped and surveyed George, a trifle anxiously. "Mind! . . . I'm not trying to justify myself but—get me right about this now. Don't you ever start in making a mistake about

Slavin—blarney and all. No, Sir! I tell you when old Burke runs *amok* in those tantrums he's a holy fright. He'd kill a man. Might as well run up against a gorilla."

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A vision of the huge, sinister, crouching figure seemed to rise up in Redmond's mind—the great, clutching, *simian* hands.

"In India," continued Yorke, "we'd say he'd got a touch of the 'Dulalli Tap.' The man doesn't know his own strength. I was taking an awful chance—getting his goat like that last night. It's a wonder he didn't kill me. He's man-handled me pretty badly at times. Oh, well! I guess it's been coming to me all right. Neither of us has ever dreamt of going squalling to the Orderly-room over our . . . differences. I don't think Burke's ever taken the trouble to 'peg' a man in his life. Not his way. 'I must take shteps!' says he, and 'I will take shteps!' and when he starts in softly rubbing those awful great grub-hooks he calls hands—together! . . . well! you want to look out."

Lighting a cigarette he resumed reminiscently: "They were a tough crowd to handle up in the Yukon. The devil himself 'd have been scared to butt in to that 'Soapy Smith' gang; but, by gum! they were afraid of Slavin. He doesn't drink much now, but he did then—mighty few that didn't—up there—and I tell you, even our own fellows got a bit leery of him when he used to start in 'trailing his coat.' They were glad when he 'came outside.' That's one of the reasons why he's shoved out on a prairie detachment. He wouldn't do at all for the Post. He never reports in there more than he has to—dead scared of the old man, who's about the only soul he is afraid of on earth. The O.C.'s awful sarcastic with him at times, and that gets Burke's goat properly. He sure does hate getting a choke-off from the old man."

He grinned guiltily. "That's why he prefers to wash the family linen strictly at home—what little there is. But, sarcasm and all, the O.C. gives him credit for being onto his job—and it's coming to him, too. He's quick acting and he's got the Criminal Code well-nigh by heart. Regular blood-hound when he starts in working up a case."

He yawned, and rising stiffly to his feet stretched his cramped limbs. "We-ll! Reddy, my giddy young hopeful!—Now we've fallen on each other's ruddy necks and kissed and wept and had a heart-to-heart talk we'll—"

"Aw, quit making game, Yorkey! Is it a go? You know what I said?"

Strangely compelling, Yorke found that bruised, eager, wistful young face, with its earnest, honest eyes. "All right!" he agreed, with languid bonhomie. "You've certainly earned the office of Dictator, and, as I remarked—we really have quite a lot in common. Mind, though, you don't repent of your bargain. One thing!" the curved, defiant nostrils dilated faintly, "Seems the world always has use for us runagates in one capacity. It's just the likes of us that compose the rank and file of most of the Empire's military police forces. Who makes the best M.P. man, executing duty, say, in a critical life-and-death hazard? The cautious, upright, model young man, with a tender regard for a whole skin and a Glorious Future? Or the poor devil who's lost all, and doesn't care a d——n? We

tackle the world's dangerous, dirty criminal work and—swank and all—Society don't want to forget it.”

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He pointed to their horses who were playfully rearing and biting at each other in equine sport. "Look at old Parson and Fox tryin' to warm themselves? Bloomin' fine example we've set 'em. Well! *allons! mon camarade*, let's up and beat it."

CHAPTER VI

*A deed accursed! Strokes have been struck before
By the assassin's hand, whereof men doubt
If more of horror or disgrace they bore;
But this foul crime, like Cain's, stands darkly out.*

THOMAS TAYLOR

Hastily dressing, the two policemen mounted and took the trail once more. Side by side as they rode along, in each man's heart was an estimate of the other vastly different from that with which they started out that memorable morning.

Yorke, his spirits now fully recovered, became quite companionably communicative, relating picturesque, racy stories of India, the Yukon, and other countries he had known. George, in receptive mood, listened in silent appreciation to one of the most fascinating *raconteurs* he had ever met in his young life. Incidentally he felt relieved as he noted his comrade now tactfully avoiding morbid egotism—dwelling but lightly upon the milestones that marked his chequered career.

The bodily stiffness and soreness, consequent upon their recent bout, was now well-nigh forgotten, though occasionally they laughingly rallied each other as the sharp air stung their bruised faces. They were just surmounting the summit of a long, steep grade in the trail.

Said Redmond dubiously: "See here; look! I'm darned if I like getting the freedom of the City of Cow Run sportin' such a pretty mug as this! How many more miles to this giddy burg, old thing?"

Yorke grinned unfeelingly. "Hard on nine miles to go yet. We're about half way. *Isch ga bibble!* . . . open your ditty-box and sing! you blooming whip-poor-will."

"A werry heart goes all the way,
But a sad one tires in a mile a';
A—"

The old lilt died on his lips. With a startled oath he reined in sharply and, shielding his eyes from the sun-glare, remained staring straight in front of him. They had just topped the crest of the rise. The eastward slope showed a low-lying, undulating stretch of snow-bound country, sparsely dotted with clumps of poplar and alder growth, through which the trail wound snake-like into the fainter distance. Southwards, below the rolling,

shelving benches, lay the river, a steaming black line, twisting interminably between frosty, bush-fringed banks.

No less startled than his companion, Redmond pulled up also and stared with him. Not far distant on the trail ahead of them they beheld a dark, ominous-looking mass, vividly conspicuous against the snow. Suddenly the object moved and resolved itself unmistakably into a horse struggling to rise. For an instant they saw the head and the fore-part of the body lift, and then flop prone again. Close against it lay another dark object.

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"Horse down!" snapped Yorke tersely. "Hell!" he added, "looks like a man there, too! come on quick!"

Responding to a shake of the lines and a fierce thrust of the spurs, their horses leapt forward and they raced towards their objective.

"Steady! steady!" hissed Yorke, checking his mount as they drew near the fallen animal and its rider, "pull Fox a bit, Red! Mustn't scare the horse!"

Slackening into a walk, they flung out of saddle, dropped their lines, crouched, and crept warily forward. The horse, a big, splendid seal-brown animal, had fallen on its right side, with its off fore-leg plunged deep in a snow-filled badger-hole. The body of the man lay also on the off-side with one leg under his mount. The stiffened form was a ghastly object to behold, being literally encased in an armour-like shell of frozen, claret-coloured snow.

At the approach of the would-be rescuers the poor brute whinnied pitifully and made another ineffectual attempt to rise. Yorke flung himself onto the head and held it down, while George dived frantically for the man's body, and tugged until he had got the leg from under.

"Hung up! by God!" gasped the former, "his foot's well-nigh through the stirrup!"

Redmond, ex-medical student, made swift examination. "Dead!" he pronounced with finality, "Good God! dead as a herring! The man's been dragged and kicked to death!" He made a futile effort to release the imprisoned foot.

"No! no!" cried Yorke sharply, "no use doing that if he's dead. Coroner's got to view things as they are."

The horse began to struggle again painfully. Peering down the badger-hole they could see the broken bone of its leg protruding bloodily through the skin. Yorke released one hand and reached for his gun.

"Poor old chap!" he said, "we'll fix you. Quick Red! pull the body as far back as the stirrup-legadeiro'll go! That'll do! There, old boy! . . ."

And with practised hand he sent a merciful bullet crashing through brain and spinal cord. The hind legs threshed awhile, but presently, with a muscular quiver they stiffened and all was still. Yorke, releasing his hold struggled to his feet, and the two men stared pityingly at what lay before them. What those merciless, steel-shod hoofs had left of the head and the youthful body indicated a man somewhere in his twenties. His ice-bound outer clothing consisted of black Angora goatskin chaps and a short sheepskin coat.

“Can’t place him—like this,” muttered Yorke, after prolonged scrutiny, “but I seem to know the horse.”

Suddenly he uttered a sharp exclamation—something between a groan and a cry. Redmond, startled at a new horror apparent on the other’s ghastly face, clutched him by the arm.

“What’s up?” he queried tensely.

Yorke struggled to speak. “Fox!” he gasped presently—“this morning. . . . I never told you. My God!—You might have got hung up like this, too.”

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"No! no! Yorkey!" Redmond almost shouted the disclaimer, "Slavin wised me up to that trick of his yesterday. I forgot. It was my own fault I got piled like that. Forget it, old man! I say forget it!"

He shook the other's arm with a sort of savage gentleness.

A look of vague relief dawned on Yorke's haggard face. "Ay, so!" he murmured, and paused with brooding indecision. "That's absolved my conscience some, but not altogether."

They remained silent awhile after this. Presently Yorke pulled himself together and spoke briskly and decisively. "Well, now! we'll have to get busy. Blair's place is only about three miles from here—nor'east—they're on the long-distance 'phone. Doctor Cox of Cow Run's the coroner for this district. If I can get hold of him I'll get him to come out right-away—and I'll notify Slavin."

Catching up his horse he swung into the saddle. "I'll be back here on the jump. You stick around, and say, Reddy, you might as well have a dekko at the lay of things while you're waiting. Where he came off the perch, how far he's been dragged, and all that. Be careful though, keep well to the side and don't foul up the tracks. And don't get too far away, either!"

He galloped off and soon disappeared over a distant rise. Left to himself George mounted Fox and set to work to follow out the senior constable's instructions.

"Well?" queried Yorke, swinging wearily out of his saddle an hour or so later, "How'd you make out? Find the place where he flopped? Rum sort of perch you've got there—you look like Patience on a monument!"

George, seated upon the rump of the dead horse, nodded and grunted laconic response: "Sure. 'Bout two miles down the trail there. How'd you get along, Yorkey? Did you raise Slavin and the coroner?"

"Got Slavin all hunkadory," said the senior constable briefly, "he should be here soon, now. Dr. Cox'd just left for Wilson's, two miles this side of Cow Run. They're on the 'phone, too; so I left word there for him to come on here right away." He seated himself alongside the other.

Awhile they carried on a desultory, more or less speculative conversation anent the fatality, until they grew morbidly weary of contemplating the poor broken body. Yorke slid off the dead horse suddenly.

"Wish Slavin were here!" he said, "let's take a dekko from the top of the rise, Reddy, see'f we can see him coming. I'm getting cold sitting here."



Redmond, nothing loath, complied. Mounting, they turned back to the summit of the ridge. Reaching it, the jingle of bells smote their ears, and they espied the Police cutter approaching them at a rapid pace.

“Like unto Jehu, the son of Nimshi!” murmured Yorke, “he’s sure springing old T and B up the grade.”

Sergeant Slavin pulled up his smoking team along-side his two mounted subordinates. “So ho, bhoys!” was his greeting, “fwhat’s this bizness?”

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Yorke rapidly acquainted him with all the details. At one point in his narration he had occasion to turn to George: "That's how it was, Reddy?" And the latter replied, "That's about the lay of it, Yorkey."

The sergeant listened, but absently. To them it did not seem exactly to be an occasion for levity; but they could have sworn that, behind an exaggerated grimness of mien, he was striving to suppress some inward mirth, as his deep-set Irish eyes roved from face to face.

"Yez luk as if yez had been hung up an' dhragged tu—th' pair av yez," he remarked casually.

Remembrance smote the two culprits. They exchanged guilty glances and swallowed the home-thrust in silence.

Slavin clucked to his team. "Walk-*march*, thin!" said he.

Wheeling sharply about, they started down the trail again, the cutter following in their wake. If their consciences would have permitted them to glance back they would have remarked their superior's face registering unholy delight.

Out of the corner of his mouth Redmond shot, tensely, "Dye think he—"

"Oh!" broke in Yorke resignedly, sotto voce. "You can't fool him! . . . *Isch ga bibble*, anyway!"

"Yorkey!" an' "Reddy!" that worthy was mumbling tu himself—over and over again, "Yorkey!" an' "Reddy!" "'Tis so they name each other—now! Blarney me sow! 'Tis come about! Fifty-fifty, tu—from th' mugs av thim. Peace, perfect peace, in th' fam'ly at last! Eyah! I wud have given me month's pay-cheque for a ring-side seat." He sighed deeply.

They reached the fatal spot. Slavin, his levity gone, stepped out of the cutter and, retaining the lines of his restive team, stared long at the gruesome spectacle before him, with a sort of callous sadness.

"These tu must have lain here th' night," he remarked, indicating the frost-rimed forms, "have yez sized things up? Got th' lay av fwhere ut happened?"

Redmond made affirmative response.

"Can you place him, Sergeant?" queried Yorke.

"Eyah! Unless I am vastly mishtuk. Whoa, now! shtand still, ye fules! Fwhat yez a-scared av? Here, Yorkey! hold T an' B a minnut!"

He pushed over his lines to the latter and, producing a pair of leather-cased brand-inspector's clippers, he cropped bare a circular patch on the defunct horse's nigh shoulder. Shorn of the thick, seal-brown winter hair, the brand was now plainly visible. Enlightenment came to Yorke in a flash, as he peered over his superior's shoulder.

"D Two!" he gasped, "I knew I'd seen that horse somewhere! It's 'Duster,' Larry Blake's horse. Tchkk! this must be him. My God!"

"Shure!" snapped Slavin testily. "Wake up! Is yeh're mem'ry goin', man? One av yeh're own cases last month, tu!" He tenderly pocketed the clippers. "Yes! ye shud know him!"—dryly—"lukked troo th' bottom av a glass wid him often enough."

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"Let's see if he's got any letters or anything in his pockets—to make sure!" began Redmond eagerly. Suiting the action to the word he bent down to investigate. But Slavin intruded a huge arm. "Hould on, bhoy!" he said, with all an old policeman's fussiness over rightful procedure. "Du not touch! That is th' coroner's bizness. Did they not dhrill that inta yeh at Regina?"

He stared thoughtfully at the corpse. "Dhrink an' th' divil! eyah! dhrink an' th' divil!"—sadly. "Larry, me pore bhoy! niver more will ye come a-whoopin' ut out av Cow Run on yeh 'Duster' horse . . . shpificated belike an' singin' 'Th' Brisk Young Man." Austerely he glanced at Yorke, "'Tis a curse, this same dhrink!"

"How do you know the poor beggar was drunk?" queried the latter, a trifle sulkily. "He may have been as sober as you or I."

"Shpeak for yehsilf!" retorted Slavin dryly, "Ah! this must be Docthor Cox comin' now!"

A cutter containing two men was approaching them rapidly. Presently it drew up alongside the group and a short, rotund gentleman, clad in furs, sprang out and came swiftly, bag in hand. He was middle-aged, with a gray moustache and kind, alert, dark eyes. Greeting the policemen quietly, he turned to the broken body.

"Tchkk! good God!" He shook his head sadly. Redmond thought he had never seen a medical man so unprofessionally shocked. Presently he straightened up and turned to Slavin. "Can you identify him, Sergeant?"

That worthy nodded. "Eyah! 'tis Larry Blake, I'm thinking Docthor. Best frisk him now an' see, I guess. Maybe he has letthers."

Hastily diving into his bag the coroner produced a pair of long keen scissors and slit the short, frozen sheepskin coat. In the breast-pocket of the coat underneath, amongst other miscellany two old letters rewarded his search. He glanced at the superscriptions and handed them up to Slavin.

"Larry Blake it is," he said. He felt the soggy, pulped head. "Skull's stove right in. Any one of these smashes would have sufficed to kill him." He clipped the hair around a ghastly gaping crevice at the base of the head.

Suddenly he peered closely, uttered an exclamation, peered again and drew back. "Sergeant!" he said sharply, "D'ye see that?—No need to ask you what that is!" In an unbroken portion of the back of the skull he indicated a small, circular orifice. The trio craned forward and made minute examination. Slavin ejaculated an oath and glanced up at Yorke—almost remorsefully.

"I take ut all back," he said. Meeting the coroner's blank, enquiring stare he added: "Booze, Docthor—we thought ut might be. . . . Yeh know Larry!"

The physician of Cow Run nodded understandingly. Slavin bent again and made close scrutiny of the bullet-hole. "*Back* av th' head, no powdher marks!" He straightened up. "Docther, are ye thru? All right, thin! Guess we'll book up an' start in."

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Methodically they all produced note-books and entered the needful particulars. The lanky individual who had driven the coroner out brought forward a tarpaulin and spread it on the ground. With some difficulty the over-shoed foot was disengaged from the imprisoning stirrup, the body rolled in the tarpaulin and deposited in the rear of the doctor's cutter. The saddle and bridle were flung into the Police cutter. They then rolled the dead horse clear of the trail.

That night the coyotes held grim, snarling carnival.

Slavin turned to Redmond. "Ye've located th' place, eh?" The latter nodded. "All right, thin, get mounted, th' tu av yez, an' lead on!"

Keeping needfully wide of the broad, claret-bespotted swath in the snow, the party started trailing back. Yorke and George rode ahead. The latter glanced around to make sure of being out of earshot of their sergeant.

"We-ll of all the hardened old cases! . . . Slavin sure does crown 'em!" he muttered to his comrade.

"Hardened!" Yorke laughed grimly. "You should have seen him up in the Yukon! The man's been handling these rotten morgue cases 'till he'd qualify for the Seine River Police. He's got so he ascribes well-nigh everything now to 'dhrink an' th' divil.'" His face softened, "but I know the real heart of old Burke under it all."

About two miles down the trail Redmond halted.

"Here it is!" he said. And he indicated an irregular, blood-soaked, clawed-up patch in the snow where the sanguinary swath ended. They dismounted. Slavin drawing up alongside the coroner's cutter handed over his lines to the teamster.

"Now!" said he, "let's shtart in! . . . Ye must have 'shpotted this on yeh way up, Docthor?" He pointed to the patch.

The latter nodded. "Yes! we thought it must have happened here."

For some few seconds, with one accord the party stared about them at their surroundings. The frozen landscape at this point presented a singularly lonely, desolate aspect. Flat, and for the greater part absolutely bare of brush; save where from a small coulee some half mile to the left of the trail the tops of a cotton-wood clump were visible. Far to the right-hand, more than a mile away, stretched the first of the shelving benches, where the high ground sloped away in irregular jumps, as it were, to the river.

"Best ye shtay fwhere ye all are," cautioned the sergeant, "'till I size up th' lay av things a bit. I du not want th' thracks fouled up. H-mm! let's see now!" He remained in deep,

thoughtful silence a space. “Thravellin’ towards us,” he muttered—“th’ back av th’ head!”

Hands clasped behind bent back, and with head thrust loweringly forward from between his huge shoulders he paced slowly down the trail for some hundred yards. That grim, intent face and the swaying gait reminded Redmond of some huge bloodhound casting about for a scent.

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Halting irresolutely a moment, Slavin presently faced about and returned. "Wan harse on'y!" he vouchsafed to their silent looks of enquiry. "He had not company. Must have been shot from lift or right av th' thrail." He stared around him at the bare sweep of ground. "Now fwhere cud any livin' man find cover here in th' full av th' moon, tu get th' range wid a small arm? He wud show up agin' th' snow like th' ace av shpades an' he thried."

Suddenly his jaw dropped and he stiffened. "Ah-hh!" His eyes rivetted themselves on some object and his huge arm shot out. "Fwhat's yon?"

They all stared in the direction he indicated. Plastered with frosted snow, until it was all but undiscernible against its white background, lay an enormous boulder—a relic, perchance, of some vast pre-historic upheaval. It was situated at an oblique angle to the trail, about a hundred yards distant.

With stealthy, quickened steps Slavin made his way towards it. Tensely they watched him. In each man's mind now was a vague feeling of certainty of something, they knew not what. They saw him reach the boulder, walk round it and stoop, peering at its base for a few moments. Then suddenly he straightened up and beckoned to them.

"Thread in file," he called out warningly. Yorke led, and, treading heedfully in each other's foot-marks, they reached the spot. Slavin silently pointed downwards. There, plainly discernible on the surface of the wind-packed, hard-crusting snow, were the corrugated imprints of overshod feet—coming and going apparently in the direction of the previously mentioned coulee.

Redmond indicated two rounded impressions at the foot of the boulder, with two smaller ones behind. "Must have hunched himself on his knees behind, eh?" he queried in a low voice.

Slavin nodded. The rays of the westering sun coming from back of a cloud glinted on something in the snow, a few feet away from the tracks. It caught Yorke's eyes and with an exclamation he picked it up.

"_—gold, raw gold, the spent shell rolled—"

he quoted. "Here you are, Burke!"

Slavin uttered a delighted oath as he examined the small, bottle-necked shell of the automatic variety. ".38 Luger!" he said. "A high-pressure 'gat' like that is uncommon hereabouts!" Passing it on to the coroner he whistled softly. "My God! Fwhatever sort av a gun-artist is ut that—even allowin' for th' moonlight—can pick a man off thru' th' head wid a revolver at this distance? . . . an' wan shell on'y? . . . 'Soapy Smith' himself cu'dn't have beat this!"



He proceeded to sift some fine, crisp snow in one of the imprints, then, producing an old letter from his pocket, he flattened out the type-written sheets of foolscap therein. Placing the blank side of the sheet face-downwards upon the imprint he pressed down smartly. The result was a very fair impression of the footmark, which he immediately outlined in pencil.

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A strange ominous silence fell upon the group. Deep in wild, whirling conjecture, each man gazed about him. The desolate, sinister aspect of their surroundings struck them with a sudden chill. Yorke voiced the general sentiment.

"My God!" he said in a low voice, "but it sure is dreary!"

With a final, self-satisfying survey at his "lay av things" Slavin stepped well to the side of the incriminating foot-prints. "Come on!" he said "get in file behind me! We will follow this up!"

Silently they obeyed and padded in his rear.

"D——d big feet, whoever owns 'em," remarked Redmond to Yorke.

Slavin heard him. "Ay!" he flung back grimly. "An' they will shtand on th' ddrop yet—thim same feet!"

The tracks returning in the direction of the coulee presented a vast contrast to the approaching imprints. Where the latter denoted an even, steady stride, the former ran in queer, irregular fashion—sometimes bunched together, and at others with wide spaces between.

"On th' double!" remarked Slavin observantly.

"Must have got scairt!"

"Ah!" murmured the coroner, reflectively, "though the Bible doesn't expressly state so, I guess Cain, too, got on the 'double' as you call it—after he killed Abel."

They finally reached the coulee where the tracks, debouching from the steep edge, passed along its rim and presently descended the more shallow end of the draw. Their leader eventually halted at the foot of a small cotton-wood tree where the human foot-prints ended. There in the snow they beheld a hoof-trampled space, which, together with broken twigs, indicated a tethered horse.

This served for comment and speculation awhile.

The sergeant, producing a small tape measure dotted down careful measurements of the over-shod imprints and their length of stride, also the size of the shod hoof-marks.

Redmond drew his attention to blood-stains in several of the latter. "Shod with 'never-slip' calks, Sergeant!" he said. "Must have slipped somewhere and 'calked' himself on the 'coronet,' I guess?"

“Eyah!” muttered Slavin approvingly, “Th’ ‘nigh-hind’ ’tis, note, bhoy! . . . ‘t’will serve good thrailin’ that. Well, let’s follow ut on!”

Wearily his companions plodded on in his wake. The tracks, after following the draw for a short distance, suddenly wound up a steep, narrow path on the left side of the coulee. Reaching the surface of the level ground, they circled until they struck into the main trail east again, about a mile below where the party had left their horses. Here, merged amongst countless others on the well-travelled highway, they became more difficult to trace, though occasionally the faint blood-stains proclaimed their identity.

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Slavin pulled up. "Luks as if he'd shtruck back tu Cow Run again," he said with conviction. "Must have come from there, tu—thracks was goin' and comin' an' ye noticed, fwhin we climbed out av th' coulee back there. We must luk for a harse wid th' nigh-hind badly 'calked.' Yorkey! yu' get back an' tell that Lanky Jones feller tu come on. Hitch yez own harses behint our cutter an' take th' lines." He squinted at the sun and pulled out his watch. "'Tis four o'clock, begob! Twill turn bitther cowl'd whin th' sun goes down."

The coroner smiled knowingly. "Talking about 'calks'!" he remarked; and diving into the deep recesses of his fur coat he produced a comfortable-looking leather-encased flask. "A little 'calk' all round won't hurt us after that tramp, Sergeant!" he observed kindly.

Their transport presently arriving, they proceeded on their way to Cow Run, Yorke and Redmond watching carefully for any tracks debouching from the main trail. Occasionally they dismounted to verify the incriminating hoof-prints which still continued eastward. In this fashion they finally drew to the level of the river, where the trail forked; one arm of it following more or less the winding course of the Bow River back westward. At this junction they searched narrowly until they found unmistakable indication of the blood-tinged tracks still heading in the direction of Cow Run.

"What was that case of yours, Yorkey?" enquired Redmond. "You know—what Slavin was talking about?"

"Mix-up over that horse," replied Yorke laconically, "disputed ownership. A chap named Moran tried to run a bluff over Larry that he'd lost the horse as a colt. They got to scrapping and I ran 'em both up before Gully, the J. P. here. Moran got fined twenty dollars and costs for assaulting Blake. Say! look at that sky! Isn't it great?"

They turned in their saddles and looked westward. Clean-cut against a pale yellow-ochre background and enveloped in a deep purple bloom, the mighty peaks of the distant "Rockies" upreared their eternal snow-capped glory in a salute to departing day. Above, where the opaline-tinted horizon shaded imperceptibly into the deep ultramarine of evening, lay glowing streamers of vivid crimson cloud-bank edged with the gleaming gold of the sunset's after-glow.

It was a soul-filling sight. Against it the sordid contrast of the sinister business in hand smote them like a blow from an unseen hand, as they resumed their monotonous scanning of the trail on its either side.

Yorke presently voiced the impression in both their hearts. "My God!" he murmured "the bitter irony of it! 'Peace on Earth, goodwill towards men' . . . and this!—what?"



CHAPTER VII

*Oh! Bad Bill Brough, a way-back tough
Raised hell when he struck town;
With gun-in-fist met Sergeant Twist—
It sure was some show-down.*

BALLAD OF SERGEANT TWIST

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Cow Run was reached in the gathering dusk. Seen under winter conditions the drab little town looked dreary and uninviting enough as the party negotiated its main street. A frame-built hotel, a livery-stable, a small church, a school-house, a line of false-fronted stores, and some three-score dwellings failed to arouse in George an enthusiastic desire to become a permanent resident of Cow Run.

The corpse they deposited temporarily in an empty shack situated in the rear of the doctor's residence. From long usage this place had come to be accepted as the common morgue of the district. After arranging details with the coroner anent the morrow's inquest, and carefully searching the dead man, the sergeant and his two subordinates repaired to the livery-stable to put up their horses.

Nicholas Lee, the keeper of this establishment greeted them with wheezy cordiality, apportioned to them stable-room and guaranteed especial care of their horses. In appearance that worthy would have made a passable understudy for the elder Weller, being red-faced, generous of girth and short of breath. In addition to his regular calling he filled—or was supposed to fill—the office of “town constable” and pound-keeper. A sort of village “Dogberry.” Incidentally it might be mentioned that he also could have laid claim to be a “victim of circumstances”; having but recently contracted much the same sort of hymeneal bargain as did the Dickensian character. The sympathy of Cow Run, individually and collectively, was extended to him on this account.

From his somewhat garrulous recital of the day's events it was satisfactorily evident to his hearers that wind of the murder had not struck Cow Run as yet. For obvious reasons Slavin had enjoined strict secrecy upon Lanky Jones, Lee's stable-hand.

“Ar!” wheezed Lee. “It's a good job yu' fellers is come. That ther ‘Windy Moran's’ bin raisin’ hell over in the hotel th’ las’ two days. He got to fightin’ ag’in las’ night with Larry Blake—over that hawss. Bob Ingalls an’ Chuck Reed an’ th’ bunch dragged ‘em apart an’ tol’ Larry to beat it back to his ranch—which he did. Windy—they got him to bed, an’ kep’ him ther all night, as he swore he’d shoot Larry. He’s still over ther, nasty-drunk an’ shootin’ off what he’s goin’ t’ do.”

He rubbed his hands in gleeful anticipation, gloating deeply in his throat: “Stirrin’ times! ar! stirrin’ times! . . . Now—’bout that ther hobo, Sargint—”

“Aw! damn th’ hobo!” exploded Slavin impatiently. “Here, Nick! show me Windy's harse. Fwhat? Niver yeh mind fwhat for . . . now! Yu’ll know all ‘bout that later.”

His native curiosity balked, the old gossip, with a slightly injured air, indicating a big sorrel saddle-horse standing in a stall opposite the Police team. Slavin backed the animal out. It seemed to be lame. With fierce eagerness they examined its “nigh-hind” leg—and found what they sought for.

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For there—where the hair joins the hoof, technically known as the “coronet”—was a deep, jagged wound, such as is caused usually by a horse slipping and jabbing itself with sharp-pointed shoe-calks. The hoof itself was stained a dull red where the blood had run down. Slavin picked up a fore-foot and exhibited to them the round-pointed, screwed-in calks, commonly known as “neverslips.” He took the measurements of the shoe and glanced at his note-book.

Finally, with a significant gesture and amidst dead silence, he thrust the book back in his pocket. Handing over the horse to Lee he bade him tie it up again.

Wordlessly, the trio exchanged mystified glances. “See here; look, Nick!” Slavin grasped the livery-man’s fat shoulder and looked grimly into the startled, rubicund face. “I’m a-goin’ tu put a question tu yeh, an’ ’member now. . . . I want yeh tu think harrd! . . . Now—whin Larry Blake came in tu saddle-up an’ pull out last night was that ther sorrel o’ Windy’s still in th’ stable—or not?”

“Eh?” gasped Lee at last, “I dunno! Me nor Lanky wasn’t around when Larry pulled out. We was over t’ th’ hotel, Sarjint.”

Slavin released the man’s shoulder with a testy, balked gesture. “Yes! enjoyin’ th’ racket an’ dhrunk like th’ rist, I guess! . . . ’Tis a foine sort av town-constable yez are!”

Nick Lee maintained his air of injured innocence. “I came round here ‘bout midnight, anyways!” he protested. “I always do—jes’ t’ see ’f everythin’s all right. That hawss was in then, I will swear—’cause I ’member his halter-shank’d come untied and I fixed it. Ev’rythin’ in th’ garden was lovely ‘cep’ fur that ‘damned hobo sneakin’ round. He was gettin’ a drink at th’ trough an’ I chased him. But he beat it up into th’ loft an’—I’m that scared of fire,” he ended lamely, “I never lock up fur that.”

Slavin nodded wisely. “Yes! I guess he made his getaway from yu’—easy. Mighty long toime since yuh’ve bin able tu dhrag yeh’re guts up that ladder—lit alone squeege thru’ th’ thrap-dhure. Bet Lanky does all th’ chorin’.” He glanced around him impatiently, “But this here’s all talk—it don’t lead nowheres. Hullo! this is Gully’s team, ain’t it?” He indicated a splendid pair of roans standing in a double stall nearby.

“Yes!” said Lee, “he pulled in las’ night t’ catch th’ nine-thirty down t’ Calgary. He ain’t back yet.”

“Fwas he—” Slavin checked himself abruptly—“fwhat toime did he get in here?”

“‘Bout nine.”

“Fwhat toime ‘bout fwas ut whin this racket shtarted up betune Windy an’ Larry?”

“Oh, I dunno, Sarjint!—’bout nine, may be—as I say I—”

“Come on!” said the sergeant, abruptly, to his men, “let’s go an’ eat. Luk afther thim harses good, Nick,” he flung back in a kind tone.

Outside in the dark road they gathered together, bandying mystified conjecture in low tones. “‘Tis no use arguin’, bhoys,” snapped Slavin at last, wearily, “we’ve got tu see Chuck Reed an’ Bob Ingalls an’ Brophy av th’ hotel. Their wurrd goes—they’re straight men. If they had Windy corralled all night, as Nick sez . . . fwhy! . . . that let’s Windy out.”

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He was silent awhile, then: "That harse av Windy's," he burst out with an oath, "I thought 't'was a cinch. Somethin' passin' rum 'bout all this. There's abs'lutely no mistake 'bout th' harse. Somebody in this god-forsaken burg must ha' used him tu du th' killin' wid. Well, let's get on."

Suddenly, as they neared the hotel, a veritable bedlam of sound fell upon their ears, apparently from inside that hostelry—men shouting, a dog barking, and above all the screeching, crazed voice of a drunken man.

The startled policemen dashed into the front entrance, through the office and across the passage into the bar beyond, from whence the uproar proceeded.

"Help! Murder! Pleece!" some apparently high-strung individual was bawling. A ludicrous, but nevertheless dangerous, sight met their eyes.

A motley crowd, composed mainly of well-dressed passengers from off the temporarily-stalled West-bound train and a sprinkling of townsfolk, were backed—hands up—into a corner of the bar by a big, hard-faced man clad in range attire who was menacing them with a long-barrelled revolver. He was dark-haired and swarthy, with sinister, glittering eyes. One red-headed, red-nosed individual had apparently resented parting with the drink that he had paid for; as in one decidedly-shaky elevated hand he still clutched his glass, its whiskey and water contents slopping down the neck of his nearest unfortunate neighbour.

"Mon!" he apologized, in tearful accents, "Ah juist canna help it!"

"Pitch up!" the "bad man" was shrieking, "Pitch up! yu' ——s!—That d——d Blake—that d——d Gully! Stealin' my hawss away'f me an' gittin' me fined! I'll git back at somebody fur this! *Pleece!* yes!—yeh kin holler '*Pleece!*'—Let me get th' drop on th' red-coated, yelluh-laigged sons of ——! Ah-hh!"—His eyes glittered with his insane passion, "Here they come! Now! watch th' ——s try an' arrest me!"

Fairly frothing at the mouth, the man, at that moment working himself into a frenzy, was plainly as dangerous as a mad dog. Drunk though he undoubtedly was, he did not stagger as he stepped to and fro with cat-like activity, his gun levelled at the policemen's heads. It was an ugly situation. Slavin and his men taken utterly by surprise hesitated, as well they might; for a single attempt to draw their sidearms might easily bring inglorious death upon one or another of them.

We have noted that on a previous occasion Redmond demonstrated his ability to think and act quickly. He upheld that reputation now. Like a flash he ducked behind Slavin's broad shoulders and backed into the passage. Picking up at random the first missile available—to wit—an empty soda-water bottle, he tip-toed swiftly along the passage to a door opening into the bar lower down. This practically brought him broadside-on to

his man. A moment he peered and judged his distance then, drawing back his arm he flung the bottle with all his force. At McGill he had been a base-ball pitcher of some renown, so his aim was true. The bottle caught its objective full in the ear. With a scream of pain the man staggered forward and clutched with one hand at his head, his gun still in his grip sagging floorwards.

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Instantly then, Yorke, who was the nearest, sprang at him like a tiger and, ranging one arm around his enemy's bull neck, strove with the other to wrest the gun from his grasp. It was a feat however, more easily imagined than accomplished—to disarm a powerful, active man. The tense fingers tightened immediately upon the weapon and resisted to their uttermost. Slavin and Redmond both had their side-arms drawn now, but they were afraid to use them, on Yorke's account. The combatants were whirling giddily to and fro, the muzzle of the gun describing every point of the compass.

Taking a risky chance, Slavin, watching his opportunity suddenly closed with the struggling men and, raising his arm brought the barrel of his heavy Colt's .45 smashing down on the knuckles of the crazed man's gun-hand. Instantaneously the latter's weapon dropped to the floor.

Bang! The cocked hammer discharged one chamber—the bullet ricocheting off the brass bar-rail deflected through a cluster of glasses and bottles, smashing them and a long saloon-mirror into a myriad splinters. But few of the company there escaped the deadly flying glass, as badly-gashed faces immediately testified. It all happened in quicker time than it takes to relate.

“‘Crown’ him!” gasped Yorke, still grimly hanging onto his man, “‘Crown’ the —— good and hard!”

Redmond sprang forward, grasping a small, shot-loaded police “billy,” but Slavin interposed a huge arm.

“Nay!” he said sharply, and with curious eagerness, “Du not ‘chrown’ um bhoy! lave um tu me!” And he grasped one of the big, struggling man's wrists firmly in a vise-like grip. “Leggo, Yorkey!”

The latter obeyed with alacrity, and stooping he picked up the fallen gun. He had an inkling of what was coming.

“Ah-hh!” Slavin gloated gutterally, as he whirled his victim giddily around and brought the man up facing him with a violent jerk—“Windy Moran, avick!”—softly and cruelly—“me wud-be cock av a wan-harse dump!—me wud-be ‘bad-man’! . . . Oh, yes! ‘tis both shockin’ an’ brutil tu misthreat ye I know but—surely, surely yeh deserve somethin’ for all this!” And he drew back his formidable right arm.

Smack! The terrific impact of that one, terrible open-handed slap nearly knocked his victim through the bar-room wall. The head rocked sideways and the big body turned completely round. Eyes rushing water and one profile now resembling a slab of bloodied liver, the man reeled about in a circle as if bereft of sight.



“Oh-hh!—Ooh!—No-o!—Ah-hh!” The wild, moaning cry for quarter came gaspingly out of puffed, blood-foamed lips. But there was no mercy in Slavin. He looked round at the wrecked bar, the glass-slashed bleeding faces of his men and the rest of the saloon’s occupants. He thought upon many things—how near ignoble death many of them had been but a few minutes before—upon insult and threat flaunted at them by a drunken, ruffling braggadocio!—and he jerked the latter to him once more.

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But his two subordinates jumped forward and made violent protest. “Steady!” It was Yorke now who appealed for leniency—“Go easy, Burke! for God’s sake! You’ve handed him one good swipe—if he get’s another like that he’ll be all in—won’t be able to talk. Let it go at that!”

The sergeant remained silent, breathing thickly and glaring at his prisoner with sinister, glittering eyes, and still retaining the latter’s wrist in his iron grip. But eventually the force of Yorke’s reasoning prevailed with him. Drawing out his hand-cuffs he snapped them on the man’s wrists and haled him roughly out of the bar into the hotel office. The crowd, recovering somewhat from their scare, would have followed, but he curtly ordered them back and closed the door.

“Brophy!” He beckoned the angry, frightened hotel-proprietor forward. “Is Bob Ingalls and Chuck Reed still in town?”

“Sure!” replied the latter, “They was both in here ‘bout half an hour ago, anyways.”

Slavin turned to Yorke. “Go yu an’ hunt up thim fellers an’ bring thim here!” he ordered.

“Ravin’—clean bug-house! that’s what he is!” wailed Brophy. “That bar o’ mine! oh, Lord! Yu’ll git it soaked to yu’ this time, Windy, an’ don’t yu’ furgit it!”

The prisoner paid no attention to the landlord’s revilings. Slumped down in a chair he had relapsed into a sort of sulky stupor, though he cringed visibly whenever Slavin bent on him his thoughtful, sinister gaze.

Presently Yorke returned, bringing with him two respectable-looking men, apparently ranchers, from their appearance.

Slavin nodded familiarly to them. “Ingalls!” he addressed one of them “I’m given tu undhershtand that yuh an’ Chuck Reed there tuk charge av this feller—” he indicated the prisoner—“last night, whin he had that racket wid Larry Blake in th’ bar? Fwhat was they rowin’ over?”

“That hawss o’ Blake’s mostly,” was Ingalls’ laconic answer. “Course they was slingin’ everythin’ else they could dig down an’ drag up, too.” He chewed thoughtfully a moment, “We had some time with ‘em,” he added.

“Shore did!” struck in Reed. “We was scared fur Larry, so we told him to beat it home—which he did—an’ then we got Windy up to bed an’ stayed with him nigh all night.”

Slavin looked at Brophy interrogatively. “Yuh can vouch for this, tu, Billy? He’s bin in yu’re place iver since th’ throuble smarted?”

Brophy nodded. “Yes! d——n him! I wish he had got out before this bizness started. Yes! he’s bin here right along, Sarjint! why?—what’s up?”

Slavin evaded the direct question for the moment. Silently awhile he gazed at the three wondering faces. “Now, I’ll tell yez!” he said slowly. And briefly he informed them of the murder—omitting all detail of the clues obtained later. They listened with wide eyes and broke out into startled exclamations. The prisoner struggled up from the chair, his bruised, ghastly face registering fear and genuine astonishment. Redmond shoved him back again.

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"If any feller thinks—" Moran relapsed into maudlin, hysterical protestations of innocence, calling upon the Deity to bear witness that he was innocent and had no knowledge whatever of how Blake came to his death.

Eventually silence fell upon all. Slavin cogitated awhile, then he turned to Brophy. "Who else was in, Billy? Out av town fellers I mean, fwhin this racket occurred betune these tu? Thry an' think now!"

Brophy pondered long and presently reeled off a few names. Slavin heard him out and shook his head negatively. "Nothin' doin' there!" he announced finally, "Mr. Gully was in, yuh say? Did he see anythin' av this row?"

"Cudn't help it, I guess," replied Brophy. "He just come inta th' office for his grip while it was a-goin' on. He beat it out quick for th' East-bound as had just come in. Said he was runnin' down to Calgary. He ain't back yet. Guess he wudn't want to go gettin' mixed up in anythin' like that, either—him bein' a J. P."

Slavin looked at Yorke. "Let's have a luk at that gun av Moran's!" he remarked. "Fwhat is ut?"

Yorke handed the weapon over. "Smith and Wesson' single-action," he said. "Just that one round gone."

"Nothin' doin' agin'," muttered Slavin disappointedly. He broke the gun and, ejecting the shells put all in his pocket. He then turned to Moran. "D——d good job for yu'—havin' this alibi, Mister Windy!" he growled, "don't seem anythin' on yu' over this killin'—as yet! But yez are goin' tu get ut fwhere th' bottle got th' cork for this other bizness, me man!"

And he proceeded to formally charge and warn his prisoner.

"Give us a room, Brophy!" he said, "a big wan for th' bunch av us—an' lave a shake-down on th' flure for this feller!"

Preceded by the landlord the trio departed upstairs, escorting their prisoner. Alone in the room they discussed matters in lowered tones; Slavin and Yorke not forgetting to compliment Redmond on his presence of mind—or, as the sergeant put it: "Divartin' his attenshun."

The big Irishman scratched his chin thoughtfully. "I must go wire th' O.C. report av all this. Sind Gully comes back on th' same thrain wid Inspector Kilbride to-morrow. Thin we can go ahead—wid two J.P.s tu handle things. Yuh take charge av Mr. Man, Ridmond! Me an' Yorke will go an' eat now, an' relieve yuh later."

CHAPTER VIII

“The Court is prepared, the Lawyers are met,
The Judges all ranged, a terrible show!”
As Captain Macheath says,—and when one’s arraigned,
The sight’s as unpleasant a one as I know.

THE INGOLDSBY LEGENDS.

“Orrrdher in Coort!” rang out Sergeant Slavin’s abrupt command. It was about ten o’clock the following morning. The hotel parlour had been hastily transformed into a temporary court-room. A large square table had been drawn to one end of the room and two easy chairs placed conveniently behind it. Fronting it was a long bench, designed for the prisoner and escort. In the immediate rear were arranged a few rows of chairs, to accommodate the witnesses and spectators.

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The sergeant's order, prompted by the entrance of the two Justices of the Peace, was the occasion of all present rising to attention, in customary deference to police-court rules. One of the newcomers, dressed in the neat blue-serge uniform of an inspector of the Force, was familiar to Redmond as Inspector Kilbride, who had been recently transferred to L Division from a northern district. He had close-cropped gray hair and a clipped, grizzled moustache. Though apparently nearing middle-age he still possessed the slim, wiry, active figure of a man long inured to the saddle.

The appearance of his judicial confrere fairly startled George. He was a huge fellow, fully as tall and as heavy a man as Slavin, though not so compactly-built or erect as the latter. Still, his wide, loosely-hung, slightly bowed shoulders suggested vast strength, and his leisurely though active movements indicated absolute muscular control. But it was the strangely sombre, mask-like face which excited Redmond's interest most. Beneath the broad, prominent brow of a thinker a pair of deep-set, shadowy dark eyes peered forth, with the lifeless, unwinking stare of an owl. Between them jutted a large, bony beak of a nose, with finely-cut nostrils. The pitiless set of the powerful jaw was only partially concealed by an enormous drooping moustache, the latter reddish in colour and streaked with gray, like his thinning, carefully brushed hair. His age was hard to determine. Somewhere around forty-five, George decided, as he regarded with covert interest Ruthven Gully, Esq., gentleman-rancher and Justice of the Peace for the district.

The two Justices took their places with magisterial decorum, the witnesses seated themselves again, and, all being ready, the sergeant opened the court with its time-honoured formula.

The inspector glanced over the various "informations" and handed them over to his confrere for perusal. A brief whispered colloquy ensued between them, and then the local justice settled himself back in his chair, chin in hand. Inspector Kilbride addressed the prisoner who had remained standing between Yorke and Redmond, and in a clear, passionless voice proceeded to read out the several charges.

"Do you wish to ask for a remand, Moran?" he enquired, "to enable you to procure counsel?"

"No, sir!" Moran's sullen, insolent eyes suddenly encountering a dangerous, steely glare from Kilbride's gray orbs he wilted and immediately dropped his belligerent attitude. "No use me hirin' a mouthpiece," he added, "as I'm a-goin' t' plead guilty t' all them charges."

"Ah!" The inspector thoughtfully conned over the "informations" once more. "Sergeant Slavin," said he presently, "what are the particulars of this man's disorderly conduct?"

He listened awhile to the sergeant's evidence, occasionally asking a question or two, but Mr. Gully remained in the same silent, brooding, inscrutable attitude which he had

adopted at the commencement of the proceedings. Though apparently listening keenly, his shadowy eyes betrayed no interest whatever in the case.

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Of that face Yorke had once remarked to Slavin: "That beggar's mug fairly haunts me sometimes. . . . He's a good fellow, Gully,—but, you know—when he gets that brooding look on his face . . . he's the living personification of a western Eugene Aram."

And Slavin, engaged in shredding a pipeful of tobacco had mumbled absently "So?—Ujin Airum!—I du not mind th' ould shtiff—fwhat was his reg'minthal number?"

The sergeant finished his evidence; Kilbride swung round to his fellow-justice once more and they held a whispered consultation, the latter making emphatic gestures throughout the colloquy. This ending the inspector turned to the prisoner.

"You have pleaded guilty to each of these charges. Have you anything to say?—any explanation to offer for your reckless, disorderly conduct?"

The prisoner swallowed nervously and shuffled with his feet. "Guess I was drunk," he said finally, "didn't know what I was doin'."

The inspector's grey eyes glittered coldly. "So?" he drawled ironically, "the sergeant's evidence is to the contrary. It would appear that you were not so very drunk. You were neither staggering nor incapable at the time. It was merely a rehearsal of a cheap bit of dime novel sort of bar-room, rough-house black-guardism that no doubt in various other places you have got away with and emerged the swaggering hero. Where do you come from? Whom are you working for now?"

"Havre, Montana. I'm ridin' fur th' North-West Cattle Company."

"Ah! well, let me tell you that sort of stuff doesn't go over on this side, my man." He considered a moment and picked up a Criminal Code. "In view of your pleading guilty to these charges, and therefore not wasting the time of this court unnecessarily, I propose dealing with you in more lenient fashion than you deserve. For being unlawfully in possession of firearms you are fined twenty dollars and costs. For 'pointing fire-arms,' fifty dollars and costs. On the charge of 'resisting the police in the execution of their duty' you are sentenced to six months imprisonment with hard labour in the Mounted Police Guard-room at Calgary. You are also required to make restitution for all damage caused as the result of your fracas."

Moran squirmed and mumbled: "If I've got t' do time on the one charge I might as well do it on th' rest, an' save th' money fur t' pay fur th' damage."

"Very good!" agreed the inspector coldly. He bent again to his confrere and they conferred awhile. Then he turned to the prisoner. "Thirty days hard labour then—on each of the first two charges—sentences to run concurrently." He paused a space, resuming sternly: "And let me tell you this, Moran: in view of certain wild threats uttered by you in public you have narrowly escaped being charged with the greatest of all

crimes. It is indeed a fortunate thing for you that you have been able to produce a reliable alibi. All right, Sergeant! you can close the court. Make out that warrant of commitment and I and Mr. Gully will sign it later. We're going over to see the coroner."

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The two Justices arose and passed out, the few witnesses and onlookers drifting aimlessly in their wake. Slavin lowered himself ponderously into the chair just vacated by the inspector, lit his pipe, and, whistling softly, commenced to fill out a legal form. Yorke and Redmond also took the opportunity to indulge in a quiet smoke as they chatted together in low tones. The former good-naturedly tossed a cigarette over to the prisoner, with the remark: "Have a smoke, Windy—it's the last you'll get for some time."

Moran, slumped in a tipped-back chair, blew a whiff of smoke from a lop-sided mouth. "Six months!" chanted he lugubriously, "an' they call this a free country!—free hell!—

*"Oh, bury me out on th' lone prair-ee,
Where th' wild ki-oot'll howl over me,—*

"—might as well an' ha' done with it!"

They all laughed unsympathetically. "'Tis mighty lucky for yuh thim sintences run concurrently instid av consecutively," was the sergeant's rejoinder, "or ut'd be eight months yez ud be doin' stid av six."

The front legs of Moran's chair suddenly hit the floor with a crash. "Lookit here, boys," he said earnestly, "that ther big mag'strate—him as you call Gully—is that his real name? Wher does he come from? What countryman is he?"

"English!" answered Yorke shortly. "Why? D'ye think an Englishman has to run around with a blooming alias?"

"Well, now, yu' needn't go t' git huffy with a man!" expostulated Moran, with an injured air. "Th' reason I'm askin' yu' is this": He paused impressively, with puckered, thoughtful eyes. "That same man—if it ain't him—is th' dead spit of a man as once hit — County, in Montana 'bout ten years back. Dep'ty Sheriff—I can't mind his name now. It was a hell of a tough county that—then. Th' devil himself 'ud ha' bin scairt t' start up in bizness ther." He shook his head slowly. "But I tell yu'—when Mr. Man let up with his fancy shootin' it was th' peaceablest place in th' Union. Th' rough stuff'd drifted —what was left above ground. He dragged it too, later. I never heered wher he went."

"Ah!" remarked Slavin pityingly, knocking out his pipe. "Th' few shots av hootch ye had tu throw into yu' last night tu get ye're Dutch up must be makin' ye see double, me man. If th' rough stuff he run into there was on'y th' loikes av yersilf he must have shtruck a soft snap." He arose. "Put th' stringers on him agin, Ridmond, an' take um upstairs an' lock um up! Yu'll be escort wid um tu Calgary whin th' East-bound comes in—an' see here, look! . . . I want ye tu be back here agin as soon as iver ye can make ut back. Tchkk!" he clucked fretfully, "I wish this autopsy an' inquest was thru', so's we cud git down tu bizness. Phew! this dive's stuffy—let's beat ut out a bit!"

Standing on the sidewalk they gazed casually at the slowly approaching figures of Inspector Kilbride and Mr. Gully. The two latter appeared to be engaged in a vehement, though guarded conversation—stopping every now and again, as if to debate a point.

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"Here cometh Moran's 'dep'ty sheriff,'" was Yorke's facetious comment.

"By gum, though!" Redmond ejaculated, "the beggar would make a good stage marshal, wouldn't he? . . . with that Bret Harte, forty-niner's moustache and undertaker's mug, and top-boots and all, what?"

"And a glittering star badge," supplemented Yorke dramatically, "don't forget that! and two murderous-looking guns slanted across his hips and—"

"Arrah, thin! shut up, Yorkey!" hissed the sergeant in a warning aside, "they'll hear yez. Here they come."

Presently the five were grouped together. Inspector Kilbride's stern features were set in a thoughtful, lowering scowl. Mr. Gully's tanned, leathery countenance looked curiously mottled.

"Sergeant!" The inspector clicked off his words sharply. "This is a bad case. We've just been viewing the body—Mr. Gully and I." With mechanical caution he glanced swiftly round. "Let's get inside and go over things again," he added.

Seated in the privacy of the hotel parlour the crime was discussed from every angle with callous, professional interest. Kilbride and Slavin did most of the talking, though occasionally Gully interpolated with question and comment. He possessed a deep, booming bass voice well-suited to his vast frame. His speech, despite a slightly languid drawl, was unquestionably that of an educated Englishman. Yorke and Redmond maintained a respectful silence in the presence of their officer, except to answer promptly and quietly any questions put directly to them.

Personal revenge they decided eventually could be the only motive. Robbery was out of the question, as the personal belongings of the dead man had been found to be intact, including a valuable diamond ring, about a hundred and fifty dollars in bills, and his watch, papers, etc. A jovial, light-hearted young rancher, hailing originally from the Old Country, a bachelor of more or less convivial habits, he had enjoyed the hearty good-will of the country-side, incurring the enmity of no one, with the exception of Moran, as far as they knew. The latter's alibi having established his innocence beyond doubt, no definite clues were forthcoming as yet, beyond the foot-prints, the horse, and the "Luger" shell. Moran, too, they ascertained had ridden in alone, and was not in the habit of chumming with anyone in particular. Slavin had prepared a list of all known outgoing and incoming individuals on and about the date of the crime. This was carefully conned over. All were, without exception, well-known respectable ranchers, and citizens of Cow Run, to whom no suspicion could be attached.

"No!" commented the inspector wearily, at length. "In my opinion this has been done by someone living right here in this burg—a man whom we could go and put our hands on

this very minute—if we only had something to work on. You’ll see . . . it’ll turn out to be that later. Just about the last man you’d suspect, either. Cases like this—where the individual has nerve enough to stay right on the job and go about his business as usual—are often the hardest nuts to crack. You remember that Huggard case, Sergeant?”

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Many years previous he and Slavin had been non-coms together in the Yukon, and other divisions of the Force, and now, delving back into their memories of crime and criminals, they cited many old and grim cases, more or less similar to the one in hand. Yorke and Redmond listened eagerly to their narration, but Gully betrayed only a sort of taciturn interest. If he had any experiences of his own, he apparently did not consider it worth while to contribute them just then; though to Slavin and Yorke he was known to be a man who had travelled far and wide.

“Ah!” remarked the inspector, a trifle bitterly. “If only some of these smart individuals who write fool detective stories, with their utterly impracticable methods, theories, and deductions, were to climb out of their arm-chairs and tackle the real thing—had to do it for their living—they’d make a pretty ghastly mess of things I’m thinking. It all looks so mighty easy—in a book. You can see exactly how the thing happened, put your hand on the man who did it, and all that, right from the start. And you begin to wonder, pityingly, why the police were such fools as Dot to have seen through everything right away.”

He paused a moment, continuing: “This is a law-abiding country. Crimes like this are exceptional. We’re bound to get to the bottom of this sooner or later. When we do—there’ll be quite a lot of things crop up in our minds that we’ll be wondering we never thought of before. Let me have another look at that paper imprint of that over-shoe, Sergeant!”

Silently, Slavin handed it over. Kilbride scrutinized it carefully, and again went over all notes and figures connected with the crime. “Must have been a tall man—possibly six feet, or over, from the length of the stride,” he muttered, “and heavy, from the depth of the imprint.” He noted the distance from the big boulder to where the body had first fallen. “Gad! what shooting! . . . The man must have been a holy fright with a revolver—to have confidence in himself to be able to kill at that range. I’ve never known anything like it. Well! . . . One sure thing”—he laughed grimly—“you can’t go searching every decent citizen here for a Luger gun, or demanding to measure his feet—without reasonable suspicion. Why! It might be you, Sergeant—or Mr. Gully, here . . . you’re both big men. . . .”

Long afterwards, well they remembered the inspector’s random jest—how Gully, with one hand slid into his breast, and the other dragging at his great drooping moustache (mannerisms of his) had joined in the general laugh with his hollow, guttural “Ha! ha!”

The inspector’s levity suddenly vanished. “That old fool of a livery-stable keeper, Lee, or whatever his name is . . . if only he, or someone had been around when the horse was brought back that night! D——n it! there must have been somebody around, surely. That’s what this case hinges on.”

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He looked at his watch. "Well! Work on that—to your utmost, Sergeant. Stay right with it until you get that evidence. You'll drop onto your man sooner or later, I know. That train should be in soon, now. I'll have to get back. The Commissioner's due from Regina, sometime today, and I've got to be on hand. Wire the finding of the inquest as soon as it's over, and send in a full crime-report of everything!"

He glanced casually at the bruised faces of Yorke and Redmond. "You men must have had quite a tussle with that fellow, Moran!" he remarked whimsically. "You seem to have come off the best, Sergeant. You're not marked at all."

"Some tussle all right, Sorr!" agreed that worthy evenly, his tongue in his cheek. "Yu' go git yu're prisoner, Ridmond, an' be ready whin that thrain comes in. Come back on the next way-freight west, if there's wan behfure th' passenger. We'll need yez."

Gully murmured some hospitable suggestion to Kilbride, and the two gentlemen strolled into the wrecked bar. The train presently arrived and departed eastwards, bearing on it the inspector, Redmond, and his prisoner.

"Strange thing," the officer had remarked musingly to Slavin, just prior to his departure, "I seem to know that man Gully's face, but somehow I can't place him. He introduced himself to me on the train coming up. Of course I'm familiar with his name, as the J.P. here, but I can't recall ever meeting him before."

Sometime later, Slavin and Yorke, who had just returned from the gruesome autopsy and were busily making arrangements for the afternoon's inquest, heard a loud, cackling commotion out in the main street. They immediately stepped outside the hotel to see what was the matter.

Advancing towards them, and puffing with exertion and importance, they beheld Nick Lee, haling along at arm's length an unkempt individual whom they judged to be the hobo who had disturbed his peace of mind. A small retinue of dirty urchins, jeering loafers, and barking dogs brought up the rear. The village "Dogberry" drew nigh with his victim and halted, as empurpled as probably the elder Weller was, after ducking Mr. Stiggins in the horse-trough.

"Sarjint!" he panted triumphantly "I did clim up that ther ladder! I did git thru' th' trap-door! . . . an'—I did ketch that feller!" Suddenly his jaw dropped, and he wilted like a pricked bladder. "Why! what's up?" he queried with a crestfallen air, as he beheld Slavin's angry, worried countenance.

"Damnation!" muttered the latter softly and savagely to Yorke. "This means another thrip tu Calgary—wid this 'bo'—an' me not able tu shpare ye just now. Fwhat wid all this other bizness I'd forgotten all 'bout him. An' we'd vagged him sooner Ridmond might have taken th' tu av thim down tugither. Da——." The oath died on his lips and he

remained staring at the hobo as a sudden thought struck him. His gaze flickered to Yorke's face, and his subordinate nodded comprehensively.

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Slavin beckoned to Lee. "Take um inside the hotel parlour, Nick," he ordered, "fwhere we hild coort this mornin.' Yorkey, yu' go an' hunt up Mr. Gully. I don't think he's pulled out yet, has he, Nick?" He spoke now with a certain grim eagerness.

The livery-man made a gesture in the negative, and Yorke departed upon his quest. Slavin ushered Lee and the hobo into the room. To the sergeant's surprise he beheld the justice sitting at the table writing. He concluded that that gentleman must have just stepped in from the rear entrance of the hotel, or the bar, during his own and Yorke's temporary absence.

At the entrance of the trio Gully raised his head and, with the pen poised in his fingers, sat perfectly motionless, staring at them strangely out of his shadowy eyes. His face seemed transformed into a blank, expressionless mask. The sergeant leaned over the table and spoke to him in a rapid aside.

"Ah!" murmured Mr. Gully, and he remained for a space in deep thought. "Sergeant," he began presently, "I'll have to be pulling out soon. Before we start in with this man . . . will you kindly step down to Doctor Cox's with these papers and ask him to sign them?"

It seemed an ordinary request. Slavin complied.

Returning some ten or fifteen minutes later he noticed Lee was absent. The magistrate answered his query. "Sent him round to throw the harness on my team," he drawled, as he pored over a Criminal Code, "he'll be back in a moment—ah! here he is." And just then the latter entered, along with Yorke. The hobo was sitting slumped in a chair, as Slavin had left him. With one accord they all centred their gaze upon the unkempt delinquent. Ragged and unwashed, he presented a decidedly unlovely appearance, which was heightened by his stubble-coated visage showing signs as of recent ill-usage. His age might have been anything between thirty and forty.

The sergeant, a huge, menacing figure of a man, stepped forward and motioned to him to stand. "Now, see here; look, me man!" he said slowly and distinctly, a sort of tense eagerness underlying his soft tones, "behfure I shtart in charrgin' ye wid anythin' I'm goin' tu put a few questions tu ye in front av this ginthleman"—he indicated the justice—"He's a mag'strate, so ye'd best tell th' trute. Now—th' night behfure last—betune say, nine an' twelve o'clock . . . fwhere was ye?"—he paused—"Think harrd, an' come across wid th' straight goods."

A tense silence succeeded. The hobo, the cynosure of a ring of watchful expectant faces, mumbled indistinctly, "I was sleepin'—up in th' loft o' th' livery-stable."

"Did yeh—" Slavin eyed the man keenly—"did yeh see—or hear—any fella take a harse out av th' shtable durin' that time?"



Gully moved slightly. With the mannerism he affected, his left hand dragging at his moustache and his right slid between the lapels of his coat, he leaned forward and fixed his eyes full upon the hobo's battered visage.

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Meeting that strange, compelling gaze the latter: stared back at him, his face an ugly, expressionless mask. He shuffled with his feet. "Why, yes!" he said finally, "I did heer a bunch o' fellers come in. They was a-talkin' all excited-like 'bout a fight, or sumphin'. They was a-hollerin', 'Beat it, Larry! beat it!' t' somewun, an' I heered some feller say: 'All right! give us my —— saddle!' an' then it sounded like as if a horse was bein' taken out. I didn't heer no more after that—went t' sleep. I 'member comin' down 'bout th' middle o' th' night t' git a drink at th' trough. This feller come in then,"—he indicated Lee. "He hollered sumphin' an' started in t' chase me . . . so I beat it up inta th' loft agin'." He shivered. "'T'was cold up ther—I well-nigh froze," he whined.

The sergeant exhausted his no mean powers of exhortation. It was all in vain. The hobo protested that he had neither seen nor heard anyone else taking out, or bringing in, a horse during the night.

Slavin finally ceased his efforts and glowered at the man in silent impotence. "How come yez tu get th' face av yez bashed up so?" he demanded.

"Fell thru' one o' th' feed-holes up in th' loft," was the sulky response.

"Fwhat name du ye thtravel undher?"

"Dick Drinkwater."

"Eh?" the sergeant glanced critically at the red, bulbous nose. "Fwhat's in a name?" he murmured. "Eyah! fwhat's in a name?"

Glibly the tramp commenced an impassioned harangue, dwelling upon the hardness of life in general, snuffling and whining after the manner of his kind. How could a crippled-up man like him obtain work? He thrust out a grimy right hand—minus two fingers. He had been a sawyer, he averred.

Slavin sniffed suspiciously. "Ye shtink av whiskey, fella!" he said sharply. "That nose, yeh name, an' a hard-luck spiel du not go well together. Fwhere did yu' get yu're dhrink?"

The hobo was silent. "Come across," said Slavin sternly, "fwhere did ye get ut?"

"I had a bottle with me when I come off th' train," said the other, "ther was a drop left in an' I had it just now."

In the light of after events, well did Slavin and Yorke recall the furtive appealing glance the hobo threw at Gully; well did they also remember certain of Kilbride's words: "There'll be quite a lot of things crop up in our minds that we'll be wondering we never thought of before."



The justice cleared his throat. "Sergeant" came his guttural, booming bass, "suppose! —suppose!" he reiterated suavely "on this occasion we—er—temper justice with mercy —ha! ha!" His deep hollow laugh jarred on their nerves most unpleasantly. "I need a man at my place just now," he went on, "to buck wood and do a little odd choring around. Times are rather hard just now, as this poor fellow says. If you insist—er—why, of course I've no other option but to send him down . . . you understand? I would not presume to dictate to you your duty. On the other hand . . . if you are not specially anxious to press a charge of vagrancy against this man I—er—am willing to give him a chance to obtain this work—that he insists he is so anxious to find."

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Slavin's face cleared and he emitted a weary sigh of relief. "As you will, yeh're Worship," he said. "T'will be helpin' me out, tu . . . yeh undhershtand?" His meaning stare drew a comprehensive nod from Gully. "I have not a man tu shpare for escort just now."

He turned to the hobo. "Fwhat say yu', me man?" was his curt ultimatum, "Fwhat say yu'—tu th' kindniss av his Worship? Will yeh go wurrk for him? . . . Or be charged wid vagrancy?"

The offer was accepted with alacrity. In the hobo's one uninjured optic shone a momentary gleam of intelligence, as he continued to stare at Gully, like a dog at its master. The gleam was reflected in a pair of shadowy, deep-set eyes, unblinking as an owl's.

Gully arose and looked at Lee. "All right then! you can hitch up my team, Nick!" he said, and that rotund worthy waddled away on his mission. "Come on, my man" he continued to the hobo, "we'll go round to the stable." He turned to Slavin and Yorke, shedding his magisterial deportment. "Well, good-bye, you fellows!" he said, with careless bonhomie. He lowered his voice in an aside to Slavin. "Sergeant, I trust I shall see, or hear from you again shortly. I would like to hear the result of the inquest and—er—how you are progressing with the case."

A few minutes later they heard the silvery jingle of his cutter's bells gradually dying away in the distance. Slavin aroused himself from a scowling, brooding reverie. "G——d d——n!" he spat out to Yorke, from between clenched teeth, "ther' goes another forlorn hope. 'Tis no manner av use worryin' tho'—let's go get that jury empannelled!" He uttered a snorting chuckle as a thought seemed to strike him. "H-mm! Gully must be getthin' tindher-hearthed! Th' last vag we had up behfure him he sint um down for sixty days."

CHAPTER IX

*Take order now, Gehazi,
That no man talk aside
In secret with his judges
The while his case is tried,
Lest he should show them—reason
To keep a matter hid,
And subtly lead the questions
Away from what he did.*

KIPLING.

“Hullo!” quoth Constable Yorke facetiously, “behold one cometh, with blood in her eye! Egad! Don’t old gal Lee look mad? Like a wet hen. I guess she’s just off the train and Nick hasn’t met her. There’ll be something doing when she lands home.”

It was about ten o’clock on the following morning. The three policemen (Redmond had returned on a freight during the night) were standing outside the small cottage, next the livery-stable, the abode of Nick Lee and his spouse. After a casual inspection of their horses they were debating as to possible suspects and their next course of action. Yorke’s remarks were directed at a stout, red-faced, middle-aged woman who was just then approaching them. She looked flustered and angry and was burdened down with parcels great and small. As she halted outside the gate one of the packages slipped from her grasp and fell in the mud. Unable to bend down, she gazed at it helplessly a moment. Yorke, stepping forward promptly, picked up the parcel, wiped it and tucked it under her huge arm.

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"Thank ye, Mister Yorke," she ejaculated gratefully, "'tis a gentleman ye are," she glowered a moment at the cottage, "which is more'n I kin say fur that mon o' mine, th' lazy good-fur-nothin', . . . leavin' me t' pack all these things from th' train!"

Like a tug drawing nigh to its mooring—and nearly as broad in the beam—she came to anchor on the front steps and kicked savagely at the door. A momentary glimpse they got of Nick Lee's face, in all its rubicund helplessness, and then the door banged to. From an open window soon emerged the sounds as of a domestic broil.

"Talk av Home Rule, an' 'Th' Voice that breathed o'er Eden'," murmured Slavin. "Blarney me sowl! just hark tu ut now?"

From the cottage's interior came several high-pitched female squawks, punctuated by the ominous sounds as of violent thumps being rained upon a soft body, and suddenly the portal disgorged Lee—in erratic haste. His hat presently followed. Dazedly awhile he surveyed the grinning trio of witnesses to his discomfiture; then, picking up his battered head-piece he crammed it down upon his bald cranium with a vicious, yet abject, gesture.

"Th' missis seems onwell this mornin'," he mumbled apologetically to Slavin, "I take it yore not a married man, Sarjint?"

"Eh?" ejaculated that worthy sharply, his levity gone on the instant. "Who—me?" Blankly he regarded the miserable face of his interlocutor, one huge paw of a hand softly and surreptitiously caressing its fellow, "Nay—glory be! I am not."

"Har!" shrilled the Voice, its owner, fat red arms akimbo, blocking up the doorway, "Nick, me useless man! ye kin prate t' me 'bout arrestin' hoboos. I tell ye right now—that hobo that was a-bummin' roun' here t'other mornin's got nothin' on you fur sheer, blowed-in-th'-glass laziness."

"Fwhat?" Slavin violently contorting his grim face into a horrible semblance of persuasive gallantry edged cautiously towards the irate dame—much the same as a rough-rider will "So, ho, now!" and sidle up to a bad horse. "Mishtress Lee," began he, in wheedling, dulcet tones, "fwhat mornin' was that?"

That lady, her capacious, matronly bosom heaving with emotion, eyed him suspiciously a moment. "Eh?" she snapped. "Why th' mornin' after th' night of racket between them two men at th' hotel. Th' feller come bummin' roun' th' back-door fur a hand-out—all starved t' death—just before I took th' train t' Calgary." She dabbed at the false-front of red hair, which had become somewhat disarranged. "La, la!" she murmured, "I'm all of a twitter!"

“Some hand-out tu,” remarked Slavin politely, “from th’ face av um. . . . Fwhat was ut ye handed him, Mishtress Lee, might I ask?—th’ flat-iron or th’ rollin’ pin?”

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"I did not!" the dame retorted indignantly. "I gave him a cup of coffee an' sumphin' t' eat—he was that cold, poor feller—an' I arst him how his face come t' be in such a state. He said sumphin' 'bout it bein' so cold up in th' loft he come down amongst th' horses 'bout midnight—t' get warmed up. He said he was lyin' in one o' th' mangers asleep when a feller brought a horse in—an' th' light woke him up an' when he went t' climm outa th' manger th' horse got scared an' pulled back an' musta stepped on this feller's foot—fur th' feller started swearin' at him an' pulled him outa th' manger an' beat him up an'—"

But Slavin had heard enough. With a most ungallant ejaculation he swung on his heel and started towards the stable, beckoning hastily to Yorke and Redmond to follow.

"Yu hear that?" he burst out on them, with lowered, savage tones. "I knew ut—I felt ut at th' toime—that shtinkin' rapparee av a hobo was lyin'—whin he said he did not renumber a harse bein' brought back. We must go get um—right-away!" His grim face wore a terribly ruthless expression just then. "My God!" he groaned out from between clenched teeth, "but I will put th' third degree tu um, an' make um come across this toime! Saddle up, bhoys! while I go an' hitch up T an' B. Damnation! I wish Gully's place was on the phone!"

Some quarter of an hour later they were proceeding rapidly towards Gully's ranch which lay some fifteen miles west of Cow Run, on the lower or river trail. A cold wind had sprung up and the weather had turned cloudy and dull, as if presaging snow, two iridescent "sun-dogs" indicating a forthcoming drop in the temperature.

Yorke and Redmond, riding in the cutter's wake, carried on a desultory. Jerky conversation anent the many baffling aspects of the case in hand. Gully's name came up. His strange personality was discussed by them from every angle; impartially by Yorke—frankly antagonistically by Redmond.

"Yes! he is a rum beggar, in a way," admitted Yorke, "not a bad sort of duck, though, when you get to know him—when he's not in one of his rotten, brooding fits. He sure gets 'Charley-on-his-back' sometimes. Used to hit the booze pretty hard one time, they say. Tried the 'gold-cure'—then broke out again"—he lowered his voice at the huge, bear-like back of the sergeant—"all same him. I don't know—somehow—it always seems to leave em' cranky an' queer—that. Neither of 'em married either—'baching it,' living alone, year after year, and all that, too."

"Better for you—if you took the cure, too!" George flung at him grinning rudely. He neck-reined Fox sharply and dodged a playful punch from his comrade. "Yorkey, old cock, I'm goin' to break you from 'hard stuff' to beer—if I have to pitch into you every day."

“You’re an insultin’, bullyin’ young beggar,” remarked Yorke ruefully. “I’ll have to ‘take shteps,’ as Burke says, and discipline you a bit, young fellow-me-lad! I don’t wonder the old man pulled you in from Gleichen. Come to think of it, why, you’re the bright boy that they say well-nigh started a mutiny down Regina! We heard a rumour about it up here. Say, what was that mix-up, Reddy?”

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George chuckled vaingloriously. "All over old 'Laddie'," he said. "'Member that white horse? I forget his regimental number, but he was about twenty-five years old. You remember how they'd taught him to chuck up his head and 'laugh'? I was grooming him at 'midday stables.' Old Harry Hawker was the sergeant taking 'stables' that day. He was stalking up and down the gangway, blind as a bat, with his crop under his arm, and his glasses stuck on the end of his nose—peering, peering. Well, old Laddie happened to stretch himself, as a horse will, you know, stuck out his hind leg, and old Harry fell wallop over it and tore his riding-pants, and just then I said 'Laugh, Laddie!' and he chucked his old head up and wrinkled his lips back. Of course the fellows fairly howled and Harry lost his temper and let in to poor old Laddie with his crop. It made me mad when he started that and I guess I gave him some lip about it. He 'pegged' me for Orderly-room right-away for insubordination.'

"I pleaded 'not guilty' and got away with it, too. Got all kinds of witnesses—most of 'em only too d——d glad to be able to get back at Harry for little things. Laddie was a proper pet of the Commissioner's. He used to go into No. Four Stable and play with the old beggar and feed him sugar nearly every day."

Yorke laughed mischievously, and was silent awhile. "Gully's knocked about a deuce of a lot," he resumed presently. "Now and again he'll open up a bit and talk, but mostly he's as close as an oyster—and the way he can drop that drawl and come out 'flat-footed' with the straight turkey—why, it'd surprise you! You'd think he was an out and out Westerner, born and bred. He's a mighty good man on a horse, and around cattle—and with a lariat. I don't know where the beggar's picked it up. He claims he's only been in this country five years. Talks mostly about the Gold Coast, and Shanghai, and the Congo. A proper 'Bully Hayes' of a man he was there, too, I'll bet! He never says much about the States, though I did hear him talking to a Southerner once, and begged, it was funny! You could hardly tell their accents apart.

"Oh, he's not a bad chap to have for a J.P. It's mighty hard to get any local man to accept a J.P.'s commission, anyway. They're most of 'em scared of it getting them in bad with their neighbours. Gully—he doesn't care a d——n for any of 'em, though. He'll sit on any case. It's a good thing to have a man who's absolutely independent, like that. I sure have known some spineless rotters. No, we might have a worse J.P. than Gully."

"Oh, I don't know," rejoined Redmond thoughtfully, "may be he's all right, but, somehow . . . the man's a kind of 'Doctor Fell' to me—has been—right from the first time I 'mugged' him. Chances are though, that it's only one of those false impressions a fellow gets. What's up?"

Yorke, shading his eyes from the cutting wind was staring ahead down the long vista of trail. "Talk of the Devil!" he muttered, "why! here the —— comes!" Aloud, he called out

to Slavin. “Oh, Burke! here comes Gully—riding like hell, I know that Silver horse of his.”

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And, far-off as yet, but rapidly approaching them at a gallop, they beheld a rider.

"Sure is hittin' th' high spots," remarked the sergeant wonderingly, "fwhat th' devil's up now?"

Gradually the distance lessened between them and presently Gully, mounted upon a splendid, powerfully-built gray, checked his furious pace and reined in with an impatient jerk, a few lengths from the police team. Redmond could not help noticing that Gully, for a heavy man, possessed a singularly-perfect seat in the saddle, riding with the sure, free, unconscious grace of an *habitué* of the range. He was roughly dressed now, in overalls, short sheepskin coat, and "chaps."

He shouted a salutation to the trio, his usually immobile face transformed into an expression of scowling anxiety. "Hullo!" he boomed, his guttural bass sounding hoarse with passion, "You fellows didn't meet that d——d hobo on the trail, I suppose? . . . I'm looking for him—in the worst way!"

He flung out of saddle and strode alongside the cutter. "About two hours ago—not more, I'll swear—I pulled out to take a ride around the cattle—like I usually do, every day. I left the beggar busy enough, bucking fire-wood. I wasn't away much over an hour, but when I got back I found he'd drifted—couldn't locate him anywhere.

"Then I remembered I'd left some money lying around—inside the drawer of a bureau in my bedroom—'bout a hundred, I guess—in one of these black-leather bill-folders. Sure enough, it's gone, too. Damnation!"

He leaned up against the cutter and mopped his streaming forehead. "I was a fool to ever attempt to help a man like that out," he concluded bitterly. "It serves me right!"

"Well," said Slavin, with an oath, "th' shtiff cannot have got far-away in that toime. I want um as bad as yuh, Mr. Gully. We were on th' way tu yu're place for um. See here; luk!"

Gully heard him out and whistled softly at the conclusion of the narrative. "Once collar this man, Sergeant," said he, "and—you've practically got your case. Make him talk?"—the low, guttural laugh was not good to hear—"Oh, yes! . . . I think between us we could accomplish that all right! . . . Yes-s!"

His voice died away in a murmur, a cruel glint flickered in his shadowy eyes, and for a space he remained with folded arms and his head sunk in a sort of brooding reverie. Suddenly, with an effort, he seemed to arouse himself. "Oh, about that inquest, Sergeant," he queried casually, "what was the jury's finding? I was forgetting all about that."

"Eyah; on'y fwhat yuh might expect," replied the latter. "Death by shootin', at th' hand av some person unknown. I wired headquarters right-away." He made a slightly

impatient movement. “Well, we must get busy, Mr. Gully; this shtiff connot be far away. Not bein’ on th’ thrail, betune us an’ yu’, means he’s either beat ut shtraight south from yu’re place an’ over th’ ice tu th’ railway-thrack, or west a piece, an’ thin onto th’ thrack. Yu’ll niver find a hobo far away from th’ line. He’d niver go thrapsein’ thru’ th’ snow tu th’ high ground beyant. Yuh cud shpot him plain for miles—doin’ that—comin’ along.”

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"He's wearing old, worn-out boots," said Yorke, "got awful big feet, too, I remember. Of course this trail's too beaten up from end to end to be able to get a line on foot-prints. We might work slowly back to your place, though, Mr. Gully, and keep a lookout for any place where he may have struck south off the trail, as the Sergeant says."

It seemed the only thing to do. The party moved leisurely forward, Gully riding ahead of the cutter, Yorke and Redmond in its wake, as before, well-spread out on either side of the well-worn trail. Here, the snow was practically undisturbed, affording them every opportunity of discovering fresh foot-prints debouching from the main trail. It was rather exacting, monotonous work, necessitating cautious and leisurely progress; but they stuck to it doggedly until sometime later they rounded a bend in the river and came within sight of Gully's ranch, about a mile distant.

Presently that gentleman pulled up and swung out of saddle. "Half a minute," he said, "my saddle's slipping! I want to tighten my cinch."

The small cavalcade halted. Slavin's restless eyes roving over the expanse of unbroken snow on his left hand, suddenly dilated, and he uttered an eager exclamation, pointing downwards with outflung arm.

"Ah," said he grimly, "here we are, I'm thinkin'!" And he clambered hastily out of the cutter.

Yorke and Redmond, dismounting swiftly, stepped forward with him and examined minutely the unmistakably fresh imprints of large-sized feet angling off from the trail towards the bank of the frozen river.

"Hob-nailed boots!" ejaculated Yorke. "Guess that must be him, all right, Mr. Gully?"

The latter bent and scrutinized the imprints. "Sure must be," he rejoined, with conviction. "A man walking out on the range is a curiosity. I can't think how I could have missed them—coming along. But I guess I was so mad, and in such a devil of a hurry I didn't notice much. I made sure of catching up to him somewhere on the trail."

Slavin beckoned to Redmond and, much to that young gentleman's chagrin, bade him hold the lines of the restless team, while he (Slavin), along with Yorke and Gully, started forwards trailing the footprints. Arriving at the river's edge they slid down the bank and followed the tracks over the snow-covered ice to the centre of the river. Here was open water for some distance; the powerful current at this point keeping open a ten-foot wide steaming fissure. The tracks hugged its edge to a point about four hundred yards westward, where the fissure closed up again and enabled them to cross to the opposite bank. Clambering up this their quest led them across a long stretch of comparatively level ground to the fenced-in railway-track.

Ducking under the lower strand of wire they reached the line. At the foot of the graded road-bed, Slavin, who was ahead, halted suddenly and uttered an oath. Stooping down he picked up something and, turning round to his companions exhibited his find. It was a small, black-leather bill-folder—empty.

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Gully regarded his lost property with smouldering eyes, and he uttered a ghastly imprecation. "Yes, that's it," he said simply, "beggar's boned the bills and chucked this away for fear of incriminating evidence—in case he was nabbed again, I suppose. The bills were mostly in fives and tens—Standard Bank—I remember."

They climbed up onto the track to determine whether the foot-prints turned east or west; but further quest here proved useless, on account of its being a snow-beaten section-hand trail.

Slavin balked again, swore in fluent and horrible fashion. For a space he remained in brooding thought, then he turned abruptly to his companions.

"Come on," he jerked out savagely, "let's get back."

In silence they retraced their steps and eventually reached their horses. Here the sergeant issued curt orders to his men.

"'Tis onlikely th' shtiff can have got very far away—in th' toime Mr. Gully tells us," he said, "an' he cannot shtay out in th' opin for long this weather. Get yu're harses over th' ice, bhoys, an' make th' thrack. Ye'll find an' openin' in th' fence somewheres. Thin shplit, an' hug th' line—west, yu', Yorkey—as far as Coalmore—yu', Ridmond—back tu Cow Run. Yez know fwhat tu du. Pass up nothin'—culverts, bridges, section-huts—anywhere's th' shtiff may be hidin'. If yez du not dhrop onto um betune thim tu places—shtay fwhere yez are an' search all freights. 'Phone th' agent at Davidsburg if yez want tu get me. I'm away from there now—to wire east an' west. Thin—I'm goin' tu ride freight awhile, up an' down th' thrack. I can get Clem Wilson tu luk afther T an' B. We must get this man, bhoys."

"Look here, Sergeant," broke in Gully good-naturedly, "as this is partly on my account I feel it's up to me to try and do what little I can do to help you in this case. There's not much doing at the ranch just now, so, if you've no objection, I'll put Silver along with your team and come with you. As you say—we've simply got to get this fellow, somehow."

"Thank ye, Mr. Gully," responded Slavin gratefully, "betune th' bunch av us we shud nail th' shtiff all right."

"Should!" agreed the magistrate, enigmatically, "'stiff's' the word for him." He glanced up at the lowering sky. "Hullo! It's beginning to snow again—you found those tracks just in time, Sergeant."

Six days elapsed. Six days of fruitless, monotonous work. The evening of the seventh found the trio disconsolately reunited in their detachment. Their quest had failed. Slavin, not sparing himself, had worked Yorke and Redmond to the limits of their

endurance, and they, fully realizing the importance of their objective, had responded loyally.

Gully, apparently betraying a keen interest in the case, had gone out of his way to assist them—both on the railroad and in scouring the country-side. They were absolutely and utterly played out, and their nerves were jangled and snappy. No possible hiding-place had been overlooked—yet the hobo—Dick Drinkwater—the one man who undoubtedly held the key to the mysterious murder of Larry Blake—had disappeared as completely as if the earth had swallowed him up.

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The horses cared for, and supper over, Yorke and Redmond lay back on their cots and *blague'd* each other wearily anent their mutual ill-luck. Slavin, critically conning over a lengthy crime-report on the case that he had prepared for headquarters, flung his composition on the table and leant back dejectedly in his chair.

"Hoboes?" quoth he, darkly, and tongue-clucked in dismal fashion. "Eyah! I just fancy I can hear th' ould man dishcoursin' tu Kilbride av th' merry, int'restin' ways an' habits av th' genus—hobo—whin he get's this report av mine. . . . Like he did wan day whin he was doin' show-man round th' cells wid a bunch av ould geezers av 'humanytaruns.' I mind I was Actin' Provo' in charge av th' Gyard-room at th1 toime."

He sighed deeply, folded up the report and thrust it into an official envelope. "Well, bhoys," he concluded, "we have done all that men can'—for th' toime bein' anyways."

Yorke laughed somewhat mirthlessly and gazed dreamily up at his pictures. "Sure have," he agreed languidly; "from now on, though, I guess we'll just have to take a leaf out of Micawber's book—'wait for something to turn up,' eh, Reddy, my old son?"

There was no answer. That young worthy, utterly exhausted, had drifted into the arms of Morpheus.

CHAPTER X

*A jest's prosperity lies in the ear
Of him that hears it, never in the tongue
Of him that makes it.*

SHAKESPEARE.

Number Six, from the East, drew up at the small platform of Davidsburg and presently steamed slowly on its way westward, minus three passengers.

"Well, bhoys," said Sergeant Slavin to his henchmen, "here we are—back tu th' land av our dhreams wanst more. Glory be! But I'm glad tu be quit av that warrm, shtinkin' courthroom. Denis Ryan—th' ould rapparee, he wint afther us harrd—in that last case. Eyah! But I thrimmed um in th' finals. Wan Oirishman cannot put ut over another wan."

He softly rubbed his huge hands together. "Five years! That'll tache Mishter Joe Lawrence tu go shtickin' his brand on other people's cattle! But—blarney me sowl! Ryan sure is a bad man tu run up agin when he's actin' for th' defence."

The trio had just returned from a Supreme Court sitting where they had been handling their various cases. It was a gloriously sunny day in June. A wet spring, succeeded by

a spell of hot weather, had transformed the range into a rolling expanse of green, over which meandered bunches of horses and cattle, their sleek hides and well-rounded bodies proclaiming abundant assimilation of nourishing pasture.

To men who for the past week had of necessity been confined within the stifling atmosphere of a crowded court-room, their present surroundings appealed as especially restful and exhilarating. During their absence their horses had been enjoying the luxury of a turn-out in the fenced pasture at the rear of the detachment, where there was good feed and a spring.

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The murder of Larry Blake the previous winter still remained a baffling mystery. Locally it had proved, as such occurrences usually do, merely a proverbial nine days wonder. Long since, in the stress and interest of current events, it had faded more or less from the minds of all men, excepting the Mounted Police, who, though saying little concerning it, still kept keenly on the alert for any possible clue. Equally mystifying was the uncanny disappearance of the hobo—Drinkwater. So far that individual had succeeded in eluding apprehension, although minute descriptions of him had been circulated broadcast to police agencies throughout Canada and the United States.

“Eyah!” Sergeant Slavin was wont to remark sagely: “’Tis an ould saying bhoys—’Murdher will out’—we’ll sure dhrop onto it sooner or lather, an’ thin belike we’ll get th’ surprise av our lives—for I firmly believe, as Kilbride said—’t’will prove tu be some lokil man who had a grudge agin’ pore Larry for somethin’ or another. So—just kape on quietly watchin’—an’ lish’nin, an’ we’ll nail that fella yet.”

Just now that worthy was surveying his subordinates with a care-free smile of bonhomie. “Guess we’ll dhrop into th’ shtore on our way up” suggested he, “see’f there’s any mail, an’ have a yarn wid ould MacDavid.”

Half way up the long, winding, graded trail that led to the detachment, the trio turned into another trail which traversed it at this point. Following this for some few hundred yards westward they reached the substantial abode of Morley MacDavid, who was, as his name suggested, the hamlet’s oldest settler and its original founder.

His habitation—combining store, post-office, and ranch-house—was a commodious frame dwelling, unpretentious in appearance but not wanting in evidences of prosperity. Its rear presented the usual aspect of a ranch, with huge, well-built barns and corrals. Although it was summer, many wide stacks of hay and green oats, apparently left over from the previous season, suggested that he was a cautious man with an eye to stock-feeding during the winter months. To neglect of the precaution of putting up sufficient feed to tide over the severe weather might be attributed most of the annual ranching failures in the West. The MacDavid establishment bore a well-ordered aspect, unlike many of the unthrifty, ramshackle ranches, of his neighbours. The fencing was of the best, and there were no signs of decay or dilapidation in any of the buildings. Dwarf pines were planted about and a Morning Glory vine over-ran the house, giving the place an air of restful domesticity. As they entered the store the trio noticed a saddle-horse tied to the hitching-rail outside.

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They were greeted jovially by MacDavid himself. Lounging behind his store-counter, with his back up against a slung pack of coyote skins, he was listening in somewhat bored fashion to a talkative individual opposite. He evidently hailed their arrival as a welcome diversion. In personality, Morley MacDavid was an admirable type of the western pioneer. A tall, slimly-built, but wiry, active man of fifty, or thereabouts, with grizzled hair and moustache. Burnt out and totally ruined three successive times in the past by the depredations of marauding Indians, the fierce, indomitable energy of the broken man had asserted itself and enabled him finally to triumph over all his mischances. Aided in the struggle by his devoted wife, who throughout the years had bravely faced all dangers and hardships with him, he had eventually accumulated a hard-won fortune. In addition to the patronage that he received from the local ranches, he conducted an extensive business trading with the Indians from the big Reserve in the vicinity. A man of essentially simple habits, through sentiment or ingrained thriftiness, he disdained to abandon the routine and the scenes of his former active life, although his bank-balance and his holdings in land and stock probably exceeded that of many a more imposing city magnate.

The newcomers, disposing themselves comfortably upon various sacked commodities, proceeded to smoke and casually inspect the voluble stranger. He was a tallish, well-built man nearing middle-age, with a gray moustache, a thin beak of a nose, and a bleached-blue eyes. He was dressed in an old tweed suit, obviously of English cut, a pair of high-heeled, spurred riding-boots and a cowboy hat. Vouchsafing a brief nod to the visitors he continued his conversation with MacDavid.

"Ya-as," he was drawling, "one of the most extraordinary shots you ever heard of, Morley! I was between the devil and the deep sea—properly. There was the bear—rushing me at the double and there was the cougar perched growling up on the rock behind me. I made one jump sideways and let the bear have it—slap through the brain, and . . . that same shot, sir, ricocheted up the face of the rock and killed the cougar—just as he was in the act of springing! By George, y'know, it was one of the swiftest things that ever happened!"

A tense silence succeeded the conclusion of this thrilling narrative.

MacDavid re-lit his pipe and puffed thoughtfully awhile. "Eyah," he remarked reminiscently, "feller does run up against some swift propositions now an' again. I mind one time I was headin' home from Kananaskis, an' a bear jumped me from behind a fallen log. The lever of me rifle jammed so, all I could do was to beat it—in a hurry—an' I sure did hit th' high spots, you bet! It was in th' early spring an' th' snow still lay pretty deep, but—I'd got a twenty yards start of that bear, an' I finally beat him to it an' made my get-away."

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The stranger whistled incredulously. “Wha-a-tt!” he almost shouted, “D’ye mean to tell me that bear got within twenty yards of you and couldn’t catch you? Why, man! It’s incredible!”

“Fact,” replied MacDavid calmly, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, “It was this way: It was near th’ edge of th’ bush where th’ bear first jumped me, an’—just as we hit th’ open ground—one o’ them warm Chinook winds sprung up behind us, travellin’ east. . . .

“Man!” He paused impressively. “The way that wind started in to melt th’ snow was a corker—just like lard in a fryin’-pan. But—I just managed to keep ahead of it an’ while I had a good, hard surface of snow to run on, the bear—why he was sloppin around in th’ slush in my wake—couldn’t get a firm foothold, I guess. . . .”

His keen blue orbs stared full into the bleached ones of his vis-a-vis.

“I figure that there Chinook an’ me an’ th’ bear must have been all travellin’ ‘bout th’ same line of speed—kind of swift. After a mile or two of it, th’ bear—he got fed up an’ quit cold,” he ended gravely. “Why—what’s your hurry, Fred?”

But that individual, feebly raising both arms with a sort of hopeless gesture, suddenly grabbed up his mail and beat a hasty retreat to his horse.

The hoof-beats died away and MacDavid turned to the grinning policemen. “Fred Storey,” he said, in answer to their looks of silent enquiry. “Runs th’ R.U. Ranch, out south here. Not a bad head, but”—he sighed deeply—“he’s such an ungodly liar. I can’t resist gettin’ back at him now an’ again—just for luck. He’s up here on a visit—stayin’ with th’ Sawyers.”

“H-mm!” ejaculated Yorke, “seems to me I’ve got a hazy recollection of meeting up with that fellow before—somewhere. In a hotel in High River, I think it was. Beggar was yarning about Cuba, I remember.”

“Bet it was hazy all right,” was Redmond’s sarcastic rejoinder, “like most of your bar-room recollections, Yorkey.” He gave vent to a snorting chuckle. “That ‘D’you know? Ya! ya!’ accent of his reminds me of that curate in ‘The Private Secretary.’ I saw it played to Toronto, once.”

At this juncture the door opened, and a trio of Indians padded softly into the store with gaily-beaded, moccasined feet. Two elderly bucks and a young squaw. The latter flashed a shy, roguish grin at the white men, and then with the customary effacement of Indian women withdrew to the rear of the store. Squatting down, all huddled-up in her blanket, she peered at them with the incurious, but all-seeing stare of her tribe. George got an impression of beady black eyes and a brown, rounded, child-like face framed in a dazzling yellow kerchief.



The two bucks, with a momentary gleam of welcome wrinkling their ruthless, impassive features, exchanged a salutation with MacDavid in guttural Cree, which language the latter spoke fluently. They were clothed in the customary fashion of their tribe—with a sort of blanket-capote garment reaching below the knee, their lower limbs swathed in strips of blanket, wound puttee-wise. Battered old felt hats comprised their head-gear, below which escaped two plaited pig-tails of coarse, mane-like, black hair, the latter parted at the nape of the neck and dangling forward down their broad chests.

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Slavin and Yorke hailed them familiarly. The elder buck rejoiced in the sonorous title of “Minne-tronk-ske-wan,” but divers convictions for insobriety under the Indian Liquor Act, and the facetious tongue of Yorke, had contorted this into the somewhat opprobrious nickname of “Many Drunks.” His companion was known as “Sun Dog.”

They now proceeded to shake hands all around. “How! Many Drunks!” shouted Yorke. Pointing to Redmond, he added “oweski skemoganish” (new policeman). With a ferocious grin, intended for an ingratiating smile of welcome, Many Drunks advanced upon George, with outstretched hand. In a rapid aside Yorke said: “Listen, Reddy, to what he says, he only knows six or seven words of English, but he’s as proud as Punch of ’em—always likes to get ’em off on a stranger. Don’t laugh!”

Within a pace of Redmond that gentleman halted. “How!” he grunted, and, pausing impressively drew himself up and tapped his inflated chest, “Minne-tronk-ske-wan! . . . great man!—me—”

And then Redmond nearly choked, as Many Drunks, with intense gravity, proudly conferred upon himself the most objectionable title that exists in four words of the English language—rounding that same off with a majestic “Wah! wah!”

Turning, George beheld himself the target of covert grins from the others, who evidently were familiar with Many Drunks’ linguistic attainments. Sun Dog merely uttered “How! Shemoganish.” He did not profess ability to rise to the occasion like his companion.

Yorke, who was evidently in one of his reckless, rollicking moods, proceeded to make certain teasing overtures to Many Drunks. His knowledge of Cree being nearly as limited as that worthy’s knowledge of English, he enlisted the aid of MacDavid as interpreter. The dialogue that ensued was something as follows:

“Tell him I’m fed up with the Force and am thinking seriously of going to live on the reserve—*monial nayanok-a-weget*—turn ’squaw-man’—’take the blanket.’”

MacDavid translated swiftly, received the answer, and turned to Yorke. “He says ‘*Aie-ha!*’ (yes) You make good squaw-man.”

“Ask him—if I do—if he’ll *muskkatonamwat* (trade) me the young lady over in the corner there, for two bottles of *skutiawpwe* (whiskey).”

“He says ‘*Nemoyah!*’ (no)—if he does that, you’ll turn around and *kojipyhok* (arrest) him for having liquor in his possession.”

“Tell him—*Nemoyah!* I won’t.”

“He says *Aie-hat ekwece!* (Yes, all right) you can have her. Says she’s his brother’s wife’s niece. But he says you must give him the two bottles of *skutiawpwe* first, though.”

The object of these frivolous negotiations had meanwhile covered her head with the blanket, from the folds of which issued shrill giggles. Sun Dog, who had been listening intently with hand scooped to ear (he was somewhat deaf), now precipitated himself into the discussion. Violently thrusting his elder companion aside he commenced to harangue MacDavid in an excited voice and with vehement gestures of disapprobation of the whole proceedings. The trader translated swiftly:

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“He says *Nemoyah!*—not to give the bottles to Many Drunks, as when he gets full of *skutiawpwe* he raises hell on th’ reserve, an’ there’s no livin’ with him. Says he beats up his squaw an’ starts in to scalp th’ dogs an’ chickens.”

“Shtop ut!” bawled Slavin, “d’ju hear, Yorkey? . . . shtoolin’ th’ nitchie on tu commit a felony an’ th’ like, thataways!” He sniffed disgustedly. “*Skutiawpwe* an’ squaws! . . . blarney me sowl! but ye’ve a quare idea av a josh. ‘Tis a credit y’are tu th’ Ould Counthry, an’ no error. I do not wondher ye left ut.”

“Sh-sh!” said that gentleman soothingly, “coarsely put, Burke! coarsely put! . . . Say Wine and Women, guv’nor! Wine and Women! If you were in India, Burke, they’d make you Bazaar-Sergeant—put you in charge of the morals of the regiment. Both items are all right—always providing you don’t get a lady like Misthress Lee for a chaser. How’d you like to be in Nick’s shoes? What ‘shteps’ would you take?”

Slavin stared at his tormentor, blankly, a moment. “Shteps?” he ejaculated sharply, “fwhat shteps?” . . . He leant back with a fervent sigh and softly rubbed his huge hands together. “Long wans, avick! . . . eyah, d——d long wans, begorrah!”

Many Drunks now realizing that he was merely the victim of a joke, scowled in turn upon Yorke. Muttering something to MacDavid he backed up against the wall and, squatting down, proceeded philosophically to fill his pipe.

“What’s that he said?” queried Yorke of the interpreter, “I couldn’t catch it.”

The latter grinned. “He says—of all the white men he’s ever met in his time, Stamixotokon[1] and my self are the only ones he’s ever known to tell th’ truth.”

“It’s my belief the beggar’d flirt with Mrs. Lee, himself, if he only got the chance” said Redmond laconically, “d’you recollect that day he picked her parcel up for her—how nice she was to him?”

“Eyah,” said Slavin darkly, “I remimber ut! That man”—he darted an accusing finger at Yorke—“wud thry tu come th’ Don Jewan wid anything wid a shkirrt on—from coast to coast. *Flirrt?* Yeh’re tellin’ th’ trute, bhoy, yeh’re tellin’ th’ trute! He’d a-made a good undhershtudy for ould Nobby Guy, down Regina.”

He settled himself comfortably and lit his pipe. “Eyah, th’ good ould days, th’ good ould days!” he resumed reminiscently, between puffs, “Hark now till I tell ye th’ tale av ould Nobby!”

“Is that the man they used to Josh about, down Regina?” enquired Redmond. “Used to say ‘I’m a man of few words’?”

Slavin nodded affirmatively. “That’s him, Sarjint in charge av th’ town station he was—years back. This is—whin I was Corp’ril at headquarters. A foine big rooster av a man was Nobby, wid a mighty pleasant way wid um—’specially wid th’ ladies. Wan night—blarney me sowl! Will I iver forghet ut? Nobby ‘phones up th’ Gyard-room reporthin’ th’

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Iroquois Hotel on fire, an' requestin' th' O.C. for a shquad av men tu help fight ut, an' kape th' crowd back. So down we wint, a bunch av us. It sure was a bad fire all right. No lives was lost, but th' whole shebang was burnt tu th' ground. Kapin' th' crowd back was our hardest job. Du fwhat we cud, we cud not make some av th' silly fules kape back clear av th' danger-zone—wimmin an' all, bedad!

“By and by, a section av the wall tumbles an' quite a bunch av people got badly hurt—Nobby amongst thim. We dhragged thim out as quick as we cud an' laid them forninst th' wall av a buildin' near-by—awaithin' some stretcher-bearers. Nobby'd got his leg bruk, but he seemed chipper enough an' chewed th' rag wid us awhile. Next tu him was a wumman—cryin' something pitiful—she'd got her leg bruk, tu. Nobby rised him up on his elbow an' lukked at her.

“Now, 'tis powerful dhry wurrk, bhoys, fightin' fire, an' may be Nobby—well, I cannot account for ut otherwise—him havin' th' nerve' tu du' fwhat he did—onless p'raps 't'was just th' natch'ril tindher-hearthedness av th' man—thryin' for tu comfort her. Afther that wan luk tho', Nobby he 'comes tu th' halt,' so tu shpake, an' 'marks time' awhile considherin'—for becod, she was a harrd-lukkin ould case—long beyant mark av mouth.

“Presintly, sez he: 'I'm a man av few wurrds!—'tis of then I have kissed a *young* wumman!'—an' he thwirls th' big buck moustache av um very slow—'fwhy shud I not kiss an ould wan? . . .'—*an' he did*. . . .

“That's how th' man's throuble shtarted. Brought ut all on umsilf. Course at th' toime, fwhy! she slapped th' face av um an' called um all manner av harrd names—but, all th' same! she must have liked ut, for while they was convalescin' she was everlashtingly sendhin Nobby notes an' flowers an' such like. But for all that Nobby wud have no thruck wid her, for all she was a widder, well fixed—wid a house av her own an' lashuns av money. Whin they was both out av hospital she was afther urn again, an' du fwhat he cud he cud not shake that wumman.

“Th' ind av ut was, Nobby reports sick, an' th' reg'minthal docthor, ould 'Knockemorf' Probyn, gives um th' wance over. He luks over some papers an' sez he: 'A change an' a rist is fwhat yu' need, Sarjint Guy. There's a dhraft leavin' next week for Herschell Island[2]—I think I will mark yu up fur ut.'

““*Herschell Island?*” sez pore Nobby, an' wid that he let's out a howl.

““Tut, tut!” sez ould Knockemorf, who was wise tu th' man's throuble. 'Tis safer off there'll yu'll be, man, than here, I'm thinkin'.”



“He was shtandin’ by th’ Gyard-room gate that day-week whin th’ dhraft marched out on their way tu enthrein—Nobby amongst thim. ‘Good-bye, Docthor!’ he calls out, tears in th’ eyes av um, ”Tis sendhin me tu me grave y’are, God forgive yez!’

“‘Nonsince!’ shouts Knockemorf. ‘Say yeh prayers an’ kape yeh bowils opin, me man, an’ ye will take no harm!’

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“Some sind-off! well!—time wint on, an’ wan day I gets a letther from me ould friend, Ginger Johnson, who was stationed there tu, tellin’ me all th’ news. Nobby, sez he, was doin’ fine, fat as a hog, an’ happy as a coon in a melun patch. Wan day, sez he, a buck av th’ name av Wampy Jones comes a runnin’ inta th’ Post, wid th’ face av a ghost an’ th’ hair av um shtickin shstraight up. Said a Polar bear’d popped out forninst a hummock an’ chased um—like tu th’ tale av Morley, here. Nobby, sez Johnson, on’y grins at th’ man, an’ sez he: ‘That’s nothin’!’ An’ thin he shtarts in tellin’ thim all ‘bout this widder at Regina.”

[1] Note by Author—The late Colonel Macleod, who for many years was Commissioner of the R.N.W.M. Police. He was greatly respected and trusted by all the Indian tribes.

[2] Note by Author—This island is in the Arctic Circle. The most northerly post of the R.N.W.M. Police.

CHAPTER XI

Methought I heard a voice cry,
“Macbeth shall sleep no more!”
MACBETH

The sergeant’s story evoked a general laugh from his hearers. He arose and knocked the ashes out of his pipe. “Come on, bhoys!” said he. “Let’s beat ut. Morley here’s a respectable married man—we’ve bin demoralisin’ him an’ his store long enough, I’m thinkin’.”

Pocketing his packet of mail he and his subordinates stepped to the door, MacDavid casually following them outside. Tethered to the hitching-post, they noticed, were the team of scare-crow cayuses belonging to Sun Dog and Many Drunks.

“Poor beggars look as if a turn-out on the range wouldn’t do them any harm,” remarked Redmond.

The thud of hoof-beats suddenly fell upon their ears and, turning, they beheld Gully on his gray horse loping past them, about twenty yards distant. Apparently in a hurry, he merely waved to them and rode on, heading in the direction of his ranch. And then occurred a startling, sinister incident which no man there who witnessed it ever forgot.

Suddenly, with the vicious instinct of Indian curs, three dogs which had been sprawling in the shade of the dilapidated wagon-box sprang forward simultaneously in a silent, savage dash at the horse’s heels. The nervous animal gave a violent jump, nearly unseating its rider, who pitched forward onto the saddlehorn.

They heard his angry, startled oath, and saw him jerk his steed up and whirl about, then, quick as conjuring, came a darting movement of his right hand between the lapels of his coat and a pistol-barrel gleamed in the sun.

The curs, by this time, were flying back to the shelter of the wagon-box, but ere they reached it—crack! crack! crack! three shots rang out in quick succession, and three lumps of quivering canine flesh sprawled grotesquely on the prairie.

The startled spectators stared aghast. Startled—for, though all of them there were more or less trained shots, such swift, deadly gunmanship as this was utterly beyond their imaginations. Gully had made no pretence at aiming. With a snapping action of his wrist he had seemed to literally fling the shots at the retreating dogs. It was the practised whirl and flip of the finished gun-man.

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No less astounding was the uncanny legerdemain displayed in drawing from and replacing the weapon in its place of concealment. The Indians, attracted from the store by the sounds of shooting, began gabbling and gesticulating affrightedly, but when MacDavid spoke to them sharply in Cree they retreated inside again.

Some distance away, glaring at the dead dogs, the justice sat in his saddle, and from beneath his huge moustache he spat a volley of most un-magisterial oaths, delivered in a snarling, nasal tone foreign to the ears of his listeners. A minute or so he remained thus, then his baleful eyes met the steady, meaning stare of the motionless quartette and his face changed to a blank, irresolute expression. He made a motion of urging his horse forward, then, checking it abruptly, he wheeled about, loping away in his original direction.

The trader was the first one to find his voice. "Well, my God!" he ejaculated. "Did you ever see th' like o' that?"

His companions remained curiously silent. "Gully!" he continued, with vibrating voice, "whoever'd a-thought that that drawlin' English dude could shoot like that? . . . Fred Storey should have been here. . . ." Still getting no response to his remarks he glanced up wonderingly. The three policemen were staring strangely at each other, and something in their expression startled him.

"Eh! Why! What's up?" he queried sharply.

Then Slavin spoke grimly. "Let's go luk at thim dogs," was all he vouchsafed.

They stepped forward and inspected the carcasses critically. "Fifty yards away, if he was a foot!" said Redmond, "and he dropped them in one! two! three! . . ."

"Slap through the head, too!" muttered Yorke. "Burke!"—he added suddenly. Slavin met his eye with a steady, meaning stare; then, at something he read in his subordinate's face, the sergeant's deep-set orbs dilated strangely and he swung on his heel.

"Aye!" he ejaculated with an oath "I was forghettin' thim—come bhoys! let's go luk for thim. Shpread out, or we may miss the place."

"Empty shells," explained Yorke to the others, "automatic ejection—you remember, Reddy! We may find them."

Keeping a short distance apart, they sauntered forward, trying to recall the spot Gully had shot from. For awhile, with bent heads, they circled slowly about each other, carefully scrutinizing the short turf. Presently the trader uttered a low exclamation. "Here's th' place!" he said, pointing downwards. The others joined him and they all

gazed at the cluster of deeply-indented hoof-marks, indicating where the horse had propped and whirled about.

“Aha!” said Redmond, suddenly.

“Got ut?” queried Slavin.

For answer George dropped a small discharged shell into the other’s outstretched palm. The sergeant made swift examination. A shocking blasphemy escaped him, and for an instant he jerked back his arm as if to fling the article away, then, recovering himself with an effort, he handed it to Yorke, who peered in turn.

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The latter made a wry face. "Hell!" he ejaculated disgustedly, "it's a 'Savage' this—thirty-two at that!" He lowered his voice. "The other was a thirty-eight Luger—what?"

"Time an' agin," Slavin was declaiming in impotent rage and with upraised fist,— "Time an' ag'in—have we shtruck a lead on this blasted case—on'y tu find ut peter out agin. . . . Oh! how long, O Lord? how long? . . ."

MacDavid stopped in turn. "Here's th' other two, Sarjint," he said. Slavin dropped the shells into his pocket and for a space he remained in deep thought. Then he turned to the trader.

"Morley," he said quietly, "yu're not a talker, I know, but—anyways! . . . I ask ye now . . . ye'll oblige me by shpakin' av this tu no man—yet awhile. . . . I have me raysons—onnershstand?"

The eyes of the two men met, and question and answer were silently exchanged in that one significant look.

MacDavid nodded brief acquiescence to the others request. "Aye!" he replied reflectively, "I think I do—now. . . ."

The sergeant turned to his men. "Come on, bhoy!" he said. "Let's beat ut home. I'm gettin' hungry."

They bid the trader adieu, and trudged away in the direction of the detachment. They had covered some quarter of a mile in silence when Slavin, who was in the lead, suddenly halted and whirled on his subordinates with a mirthless laugh.

"Windy Moran, begod!" he burst out, "mind fwhat he said that day 'bout Gully an' that dep'ty sheriff bizness? . . . not so——'Windy' afther all, I'm thinkin', eh?"

For some few seconds they stared at him, aghast. They had forgotten Moran.

"Say, Burke, though?" ejaculated Yorke incredulously. "Good God! somehow the thing seems impossible . . . not the 'sheriff' business so much . . . the other—Gully!—a J.P.—a man of his class and standing! . . . Why! whatever motive—"

"He may have two guns," broke in Redmond.

"Eyah," agreed Slavin, grimly, "he may. . . . A Luger's a mighty diff'runt kind av a gun tu other authomatics . . . an' th' man that shot Larry Blake ain't likely tu be fule enough tu risk packin' ut around—for a chance tu thrip um up some day."

For awhile the trio cogitated in silence; each man striving desperately to arrive at some logical solution to the extraordinary problem that now faced them.



“Bhoys!” said Slavin presently, “there’s no doubt there is . . . somethin’ damnably wrong ‘bout all this. But, all th’ same, fact remains, ye cannot shtart in makin’ th’ Force a laughin’ stock by charrgin’ a man av Gully’s position wid murdher—widout mighty shtrong evidence tu back ut. An’ sizin’ things up—fwhat have we got, afther all, . . . right now . . . tu shwear out a warrant on? . . . Nothin’, really, ‘cept that he’s shown us he’s a bad man wid a gun! A damned bad break that was, tho’, an’ I’ll bet he’s sorry for that same, tu. Mind how he kept on thravellin’, widout comin’ back tu shpake wid us?”

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He shook his head slowly, in sinister fashion, and stared at their troubled faces in turn. "See here; luk," he resumed solemnly, with lowered voice, "honest tu God, in me own mind I du believe he is th' man that done ut." He paused—"but provin' ut's a diff'runt matther. We must foller this up an' get some shtronger evidence yet—behfure we make th' break."

Suddenly he uttered a hollow chuckle. "Kilbride!" he ejaculated. "Mind his josh that day —'bout it might be me, or Gully?—an how Gully laughed, tu, wid th' hand of um like this?"

Napoleonic fashion he thrust his huge fist between the buttons of his stable-jacket.

"Yes, by gad!" said Yorke reflectively. "I sure do, now. And I'll bet he had his right hand on his gun, too! Force of habit, I guess, if he's an ex-deputy-sheriff. From what little he's dropped he's sure knocked around some, I know. Hard to say where, and what the beggar hasn't been in his time. This accounts for him being so blooming close about the Western States. It's always struck me as being queer, that, because, say, look at the slick way he rides and ropes! He's never picked that up in five years over on this Side—and that's all he claims he's been in Canada."

"Besides" chimed in Redmond, eagerly, "that yarn of his about that hobo swiping his dough, Sergeant! 'Frame-up,' p'raps, . . . gave it to him and told him to beat it? . . ."

"Aw, rot!" said Yorke, disgustedly. He sniffed, with his peculiar mannerism, "that's dime-novel stuff, Red. D'ye think he'd be fool enough to risk that, with the chances of the fellow being picked up any minute and squealing on him?" He was silent a moment. "Rum thing, though," he murmured, "the way that hobo did beat us to it."

"'Some lokil man,' sez Kilbride," remarked Slavin musingly. "Just th' last one ye'd think av suspectin'. An' Gully, begod, sittin' right there! . . . talk 'bout nerve! . . ."

"But, good heavens!" burst out Yorke. "Whoever would have suspected him?" He laughed a trifle bitterly. "It's all very well for us to turn round now and say 'what fools we've been,' and all that. If we'd have been the smart, 'never-make-a-mistake' Alecks, like we're depicted in books, why, of course we'd have 'deducted' this right-away, I suppose? Oh, Ichabod! Ichabod! An Englishman, too, by gad! I'll forswear my nationality."

"Whatever could he have on Larry, though?" was Redmond's bewildered query. "Say, that sure was a hell of a trick of his—using Windy's horse—while the two of them were scrapping—trying to frame it up on him!"

"Eyah," soliliquised the sergeant sagely. "'Twill all come out in th' wash. Whin cliver, educated knockabouts like Gully du go bad; begob, they make th' very wurrst kind av

criminals. They kin pass things off wid th' high hand an' kape their nerve bettther'n th' roughnecks—ivry toime.

“Think av that terribul murdherer, Deeming—an' thim tu docthors—Pritchard an' Palmer, colludge men, all av thim. An' not on'y men, but wimmin, tu. 'Member Mrs. Maybrick? All movin' in th' hoighth av society!”

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He was silent a moment, then his face fell. "I must take a run into th' Post an' see th' O.C. 'bout this," he resumed. "'Tis an exthornary case. There's just a possibility we may be all wrong—jumphin' at conclusions tu much. Th' ould man! . . . I think I can see th' face av um. He'll shling his pen across th' Ord'ly-room. 'Damn th' man! Damn th' man!' he'll cry. 'Go you now an' apprehend um on suspicion thin! Fwhy shud I kape a dog an' du me own barkin'?' An' thin he'll think betther av ut an' chunt 'Poppycock, all poppycock! . . . As you were, Sarjint'—an' thin he'll call in Kilbride. Eh! fwhat yez laughin' at, yeh fules?" he queried irritably.

In spite of the gravity of the situation, the expression on their superior's cadaverous face just then—its droll mixture of apprehension and perplexity was more than Yorke and Redmond could stand. Awhile they rocked up against each other—a trifle hysterically; it was the reaction to nerves worked up to a pitch of intense excitement.

"Yez gigglin' idjuts!" growled Slavin. "Come on, let's get home! No use us shtandin here longer—gassin' like a bunch av ould washer-wimmin full av gin an' trouble."

In silence they trudged on to the detachment. "'Ome, sweet 'ome! be it never so 'umble!" quoth Yorke, as they reached their destination, "Hullo! who's this coming along?" Shading his eyes with his hand he gazed down the trail. "Looks like Doctor Cox and Lanky."

The trio stared at the approaching buckboard which contained two occupants. "Sure is," said Redmond, "out to some case west of here, I suppose."

They hailed the physician cheerily, as presently he drew up to the detachment. "Fwhere away, Docthor?" queried Slavin. "Will ye not shtop an' take dinner wid us, yu' an' Lanky? 'Tis rarely we see yez in these parts now."

"Eh, sorry!" remarked that gentleman, climbing out of the rig and stretching his cramped limbs, "got to get on to Horton's, though. One of their children's sick. Thanks, all the same, Sergeant." Glancing round at his teamster he continued in lowered tones, "There's a little matter I'd like to speak to you fellows about."

"Sure!" agreed Slavin, quickly. "Come inside thin, Docthor."

The party entered the detachment and, seating themselves, gazed enquiringly at their visitor. For a space he surveyed them reflectively, a perturbed expression upon his usually genial countenance. His first words startled them.

"It's about your J.P., Mr. Gully," he began. "This incident, mind, is closed absolutely—as far as he and I are concerned; but, under the circumstances, which to say the least struck me as being mighty peculiar, I—well! . . . I don't think it's any breach of medical etiquette on my part telling you about it."

“For some time past now I’ve been treating Gully for insomnia. Man first came to me seemingly on the verge of a nervous breakdown through it.

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"I prescribed him some pretty strong opiates—strong as I dare—and for a time he seemed to get relief. But a couple of days ago he came around and—my God! . . . Say! if I hadn't known him for a man who drinks very little I'd have sworn he was in the D.T.'s."

The doctor's rotund figure stiffened slightly in his seat, and his genial face hardened to a degree that was in itself a revelation to his audience. Without any semblance of bravado he continued quietly, "I hope I possess as much physical pluck as most men—I guess you fellows aren't aware of it, but many years back I too wore the Queen's uniform—Surgeon in the Navy. I served in that Alexandria affair, under Charlie Beresford."

"Well, as I was saying, . . . Gully came into my surgery that day, raving like a madman. He's a big, powerful devil, as you know. I'll confess I was a bit dubious about him—watched him pretty close for a few minutes, for he acted as if he might start running amok. 'I can't sleep!' he kept yelling at me, 'I can't sleep, I tell you! . . . That dope you're giving me's no good. . . . Christ Almighty! give me a shot of cocaine, Cox, or morphine, and get me a supply of the stuff and a needle, will you? I'll pay you any amount!'

"Naturally, I refused, I'm not the man to go laying myself open to anything like that. Well! Good God! The next minute the man came for me like a lunatic—clutching out at me with those great hands of his and with the most murderous expression on his face you can imagine. I backed away to the medicine cabinet and caught hold of a pestle and told him I'd brain him with it if he touched me. I threatened I'd lay an information against him for assault, and that seemed to quiet him down. He began to expostulate then, and eventually broke down and apologised to me—in the most abject fashion. Begged me to overlook his loss of control, and all that. Of course I let up on him then. A local scandal between two men in our position wouldn't do at all. I gave him a d——d good calling down, though, and finally advised him to go away somewhere for a complete rest and change. But he wouldn't agree to that—seemed worried over his ranch. Said he'd worked up a pretty good outfit and couldn't think of leaving his stock in somebody else's hands at this time of the year—couldn't afford it in fact. Anyway—that's his look-out. But, as a matter of fact, if that man doesn't take my advice, why . . . he's going to collapse. I know the symptoms only too well. That's the curse of men living alone on these homesteads—brooding, and worrying their heads off. It seems to get them all eventually in—"

Breaking off abruptly he glanced at his watch. "Getting late!" he ejaculated, jumping up, "I must be getting on to that case."

"Docthor!" said Slavin, reflectively, "'tis a shtrange story ye've been tellin' us. Ye'll be comin' back this way, I suppose—lather in th' day?"

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The physician nodded.

"I'd like fur ye tu dhrop in agin, thin," continued the sergeant slowly, "if ye have toime? There's a little matther I wud like tu dishcuss wid yu'—'tis 'bout that same man."

Doctor Cox glanced sharply at the speaker's earnest, sombre face. A certain sinister earnestness underlay the simple words, and it startled him.

"Very good, Sergeant!" he agreed, "I'll call in on my way back. Well! good-by, all of you, for the time being!"

They followed him outside and watched the rig depart on its journey westward. It was Redmond who broke the long silence.

"Well, sacred Billy! What do you know about that?" he ejaculated tensely.

And the trio turned and looked upon each other strangely, their faces registering mutual wonderment and conviction.

"Sleep?" murmured Yorke, "No, by gum! . . . no more could Macbeth, with King Duncan and Banquo on his chest o' nights! . . . Well, that settles it!"

But Slavin made a gesture of dissent. "As you were, bhoys!" was his sober mandate. "Sleepishness's no actual proof . . . but it's a pointer. Th' iron's getthin' warrm—eyah! d——d warrm! . . . but we cannot shtrike yet."

CHAPTER XII

But a truce to this strain; for my soul it is sad,
To think that a heart in humanity clad
Should make, like the brutes, such a desolate end,
And depart from the light without leaving a friend.
Bear soft his bones over the stones!
Though a pauper, he's one whom his Maker yet owns!
"THE PAUPER'S DRIVE."

They ate dinner more or less in silence. Slavin had relapsed into one of his fits of morose taciturnity. At the conclusion of the meal, Yorke and Redmond drew a bench outside, and for awhile sat in the sun, smoking.

"He's got 'Charley-on-his-back' properly to-day," remarked the sophisticated Yorke, with a sidelong jerk of his head, "old beggar's best left alone, begad! when he' get's those fits on him." He sniffed the fresh air and gazed longingly out over the sunlit, peaceful landscape, flooded with a warm, sleepy, golden haze of summer. "Lord! but it's a peach

of a day” he continued, “say, gossip mine, did you think to get that fishing-tackle at Martin’s this morning?”

George nodded affirmatively. Yorke rose and stepped indoors. “Say, Burke,” he said persuasively, “there’s not much doing this afternoon—how’s chances for me and Reddy going down to the Bend for a bit? The water looks pretty good just now. You’ll want to have a lone chin with the Doctor, anyway, no use us sticking around.”

The sergeant, engrossed in a crime-report, acceded gruffly to the request. “Run thim harses in first, tho’!” he flung after his subordinate, “an’ du not yu’ men get tu far away down-shtream, in case I might want yez.”

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"That's 'Jake,'" was Redmond's comment, a moment later, "no use trying fly-fishing to-day, though, Yorkey—too bright. We'd better fish deep. Here, you get the rods all fixed up, and catch some grasshoppers, and I'll chase out in the pasture and run the horses in."

Some half an hour later found them trudging down the long slope below the detachment that led to the nearest point of the Bow River. Here the river described a sharp bend southward for some distance, ere resuming its easterly course. Arriving thither, they fished for awhile in blissful content; their minds for the time-being devoid of aught save the sport of Old Izaak. Picking likely spots for deep casts, they meandered slowly down-stream, keeping about twenty yards apart. At intervals, their piscatorial efforts were rewarded with success. Four fine "two-pounders" of the "Cut-Throat" species had fallen to Yorke's rod—three to Redmond's. Then, for a time the fish ceased to bite.

"Here!" said Yorke suddenly. "I'm getting fed up with this! I can't get a touch. There's a big hole farther down, just up above Gully's place. Let's try it! He and I pulled some good 'uns out of there, last year."

Eventually they reached their objective. At this point the force of the current had gradually, with the years, scooped out a large, semicircular portion of the shelving bank. Also, a spit of gravel-bar, jutting far out into the water, had stranded a small boom of logs and drift-wood; the whole constituting a veritable breakwater that only a charge of dynamite could have shifted. In the shelter of this and the hollowed-out bank, a huge, slow eddy of water had formed, apparently of great depth.

As Yorke had advertised it—it did look like a likely kind of a hole for big trout. "You wouldn't think it," said he now, "but there's twenty feet of water in that pot hole." He put down his rod and slowly began to fill his pipe. "You can have first shot at it, Red," he remarked, "I'll be the unselfish big brother. You ought to land a good 'un out of there. Aha! what'd I tell you?"

Redmond's gut "leader" had barely sunk below the surface when he felt the thrilling, jarring strike of an unmistakably heavy fish. The tried, splendid "green-heart" rod he was using described a pulsating arc under the strain. He turned to Yorke gleefully. "By gum! old thing, I've sure got one this time," he said, "bet you he's ten pound if he's an ounce. Hope the line'll hold!"

Simultaneously they uttered an excited exclamation, as a huge, silvery body darted to the surface, threshed the water for the fraction of a second, and then dived.

"Look out!" cried Yorke. "Give him line, Red, give him line! Play him careful now, or you'll lose him!"

The reel screeched, as Redmond let the fish run. Then—without warning—the line slacked and the rod straightened. George, giving vent to a dismayed oath, reeled in until the line tautened again, and the point of the rod dipped.

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"What's up?" queried Yorke, "he's still on, isn't he?"

"Yes," growled Redmond miserably, "feels as if I'm snagged though. He's there right enough—I can feel him jumping. Damnation! That's the worst of stringing three hooks on your leader. One of 'em's snagged on something below, I guess. Here! hold the rod a minute, Yorkey!"

The latter complied. George unbuttoned and threw off his stable-jacket and began taking off his boots. Yorke contemplated his comrade's actions in speechless amazement. "Why, what the devil?—" he began—

"I'm not going to lose that fish," mumbled Redmond sulkily, as he threw off his clothes, "I'll get him by gum! if I have to dive to the depths of Hell."

"Say, now! don't be a fool!" cried Yorke, "that water's like ice, man! You'll get cramped, and then the two of us'll drown. We-ll, of all the idiots!—"

George, by this time stripped to the buff, crept gingerly to the edge of the shelving bank. In his right hand he grasped—opened—a small pen-knife. "Aw, quit it!" he retorted rudely, "I'll only be under a minute—hold the line taut—straight up and down, Yorkey, so's I can see where to dive."

He drew a deep breath, and then, with the poise of a practised swimmer, dived—cutting the water with barely a splash. For the space of a half-minute Yorke stared apprehensively at the swirling eddy, beneath which the other had vanished. The line still remained taut. Then he gave a gasp of relief, as Redmond's head re-appeared, and that young gentleman swam to the side. Extending a hand, the senior constable lugged his comrade to terra firma.

"That's good!" he ejaculated fervently. "D——n the fish, anyway! I guess you couldn't make—" He broke off abruptly, and remained staring at the dripping George with startled eyes. The latter's face registered unutterable horror, and he shook as with the ague. Speech seemed beyond him. He could only mouth and point back to the gloomy depths whence he had just emerged.

"Here!" cried Yorke, with an oath, "whatever is the matter, Reddy? Man! you look as if you'd seen a ghost!"

Then his own face blanched, as the shivering George bubbled incoherently, "B-b-body! b-b-body! My God, Yorkey! th-there's a s-s-stiff d-down th-there! Ugh! I d-d-dived right onto it!"

For a brief space they remained staring at each other; then, a strange light of understanding broke over Yorke's face, and he made a snatch at Redmond's clothes.

"Come!" he jerked out briskly. "Get 'em on quick, Red, else you'll catch your death of cold—never mind about drying yourself—you can change when you get back."

In shivering silence his comrade commenced to struggle into his underclothes and "fatigue-slacks." Yorke snapped the line and reeled in the slack. "Stiff!" he kept ejaculating "stiff! Yes, by gad! and I can make a pretty good guess who that stiff is! . . . Burke'll have all the evidence he wants—now. You beat it, Reddy, as soon as you're fit and get him. A run'll warm you up. The grappling-irons are back of the stable. And say! tell him to bring a good long rope. Lord, I hope Doctor Cox hasn't left yet. I'll stay here, Reddy. Hurry up!"

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An hour or so later, a morbidly expectant group gathered on the river-bank. Redmond, luckily, had reached the detachment just prior to the coroner's departure, and that gentleman now comprised one of a party. Slavin had hitched his team to a cotton-wood clump nearby, and was now busily rigging the double set of three-pronged grappling-irons. When all was ready, he motioned to his companions to stand back, and then, with a preliminary whirl or two, flung the irons into the pool, some distance ahead of the spot indicated by Redmond.

Slowly and ponderously he began the dragging recover, with the muscular skill of a man long inured to the gruesome business. His first effort was unsuccessful—weeds and refuse were all he salvaged. He tried again, with the same result. Cast after cast proved futile. After the last failure he turned and glowered morosely upon Redmond.

“‘Tis either dhrunk or dhramin’ ye must be, bhoy! There’s nothin’ there. I’ve a good mind,” he added slowly “a d——d good mind tu shove ye undher arrest for makin’ a friv’lus report tu yeh superior!”

Yorke now came to his comrade’s rescue. “By gum, Burke,” he flashed out “if you’d seen his mug when he came up out of that hole you wouldn’t have thought there was anything frivolous about it, I can tell you!”

Poor George voiced a vehement protest, in self defense. “Good God, Sergeant!” he expostulated, “d’you think I’d come to you with a yarn like that? I tell you it is there. Have another try. Sling farther over to the right here!”

Grumblingly, the latter complied, and began the slow recover. Suddenly, the rope checked. Slavin strained a moment, then he turned around to the expectant group. “Got ut!” he announced grimly. “I can tell by th’ feel av ut. Tail on tu th’ rope there, all av yez! Now! Yeo! Heave ho!”

Like a tug of war team they all bowed their backs and strained with all their might; but their efforts proved futile. “Vast heavin!” said Slavin, breathing heavily. “‘Tis shtuck somehow—I will have tu get th’ team an’ double-trees. Get a log off’n that breakwater, bhoys, so’s th’ rope will not cut inta th’ edge av th’ bank.”

He crossed over to the horses. “Now!” said he, some minutes later, as he backed up the team and made all fast to the double-trees. “Yu’, Reddy, an’ Lanky, guide th’ rope over th’ log. Yu’, Yorkey, get th’ feel av ut, an’ give me th’ wurrd. I du not want to break ut.”

Yorke leant over the edge of the bank, loosely feeling the rope. “All right!” he announced.

Slavin, edging his team cautiously forward, and taking the strain to avoid a violent jerk, clucked to them. With a scramble, and a steady heave of their powerful hind-quarters, they started.

With bated breath the watchers gazed at the rope—creeping foot by foot out of the discoloured water.

“Keep a-going!” Yorke shouted to Slavin. “It’s coming up, all right!”

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It came. Arising slowly and sullenly out of the depths they beheld a horrible, dripping, shapeless something that eventually resolved itself into a human body—clothed in torn rags and matted with river-refuse.

Then, to the salvagers, came the most astounding and sinister revelation of all. Startled oaths burst from them as they beheld now what had retarded their first pull. Bound tightly to the body with rusted wire was a huge, hand-squared block of stone. The sergeant's last and successful cast had resulted in two prongs of the grappling-irons catching in the enveloping wire.

Slowly and cautiously the whole hideous bulk was finally drawn up the shelving bank and over the log and onto dry ground. Yorke shouted, and Slavin, checking the horses, detached the rope from the double-trees. Handing the lines over to Lanky Jones he joined the others, who were critically examining their gruesome catch. To their surprise, although the features were unrecognisable, the corpse was not so decomposed as they had first imagined, the ice-cold water having preserved it to a certain extent. Still firmly hooked to the rags of clothing—a ludicrously grim joke—was the huge jumping, gasping trout which Redmond had struck and lost.

Suddenly Yorke uttered a low exclamation. “Burke! Burke!” he said tensely, “there you are! . . . Look at the right hand”

The eyes of all were centered on the grimy, stiffened, clawlike fist. They saw that two of the fingers were missing. An exultant oath burst from Slavin. “By G——!” he said, with grim conviction, “it’s him all right!—that pore hobo shtiff—Dick Drinkwater. Eyah! fwhat’s in a name? Fwhat’s in a name?” He pointed to the grinning jaws. “Luk at th’ gold teeth av um, tu!” he added.

The coroner was examining the almost fleshless skull. He gave a cry of anger and dismay. “Good God!” he gasped. “Look here, all of you! . . . This man’s been shot through the head, too!” He indicated the small, circular orifice in the occiput, and its egress below the left eye.

“Only an exceedingly powerful, high-pressure weapon could have done that,” he continued significantly, “both holes are alike—bullet hasn’t ‘mushroomed’ at all.”

“Eyah!” Slavin agreed wearily. “We know fwhat kind av a gun did ut. And luk here!” he added savagely, pointing to the bare feet, “here’s another of Mr. Man’s little jokes—no boots. If they’d have been lift on they’d have shtuck tighter’n glue—in that water. Reddy was ’bout right, Yorkey! Gully, d——n him! did frame us that day. Must have used thim himsilf tu make thim thracks wid—early in th’ mornin’—behfure he met up wid us on th’ thrail. Oh, blarney my sow! Yes! Had us chasin’ for a whole silly week, all for —”

He broke off abruptly, choking with rage. For awhile, in silence, the party gazed at the pitiful, hideous monstrosity that had once been a man. Then the ever-practical Redmond proceeded, with the aid of a large pebble, to burst, strand by strand, the wire which bound the stone to the body.

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"That stone, too!" said the doctor darkly. "Sergeant, in view of what you've been telling me, there seems something very, very terrible about all this. I suppose there's absolutely no doubt in your mind now, who—?"

The Irishman jerked out a great oath. "Doubt!" echoed he grimly, "doubt! So little doubt, Docthor," added he hoarsely, "that we go get 'um this very night."

"Alas, poor Yorick!" said Yorke sadly. "Say, Burke!" he continued in an awe-struck voice "this is like a leaf out of O'Brien's book, with a vengeance. You remember him, that cold-blooded devil who Pennycuik nailed up in the Yukon—used to shoot 'em and shove their bodies under the ice?"

Slavin nodded gloomily. "At Tagish, ye mane? Yeah! I 'member ut. Penny sure did some good wurrk on that case."

Redmond had by this time completed his gruesome task. "There's lots of these blocks lying around Gully's," he remarked, "I've seen 'em. Place's got a stone foundation. Look at the notches he's chipped in this one—to keep the wire from slipping!"

"Eyah!" said Slavin, with grimly-unconscious humour, "Exhibit B. We must hang on to ut, heavy as it us—an' th' wire, tu! Well, people, we'd betther shove this pore shtiff on the buckboard, an' beat ut." He turned to the doctor's laconic factotum. "Come on, Lanky!" he said briskly. "Let's go hitch up."

Presently, when all was ready, Slavin took the lines and the coroner climbed up beside him. The rest of the party followed on foot. A sombre, strange little procession it looked, as it moved slowly westward into the dusky blaze of a blood-red sunset. In the hearts of the policemen grim resolve was not unmingled with certain well-founded forebodings, as they fully realized what a sinister, dangerous mission lay ahead of them that night.

CHAPTER XIII

'Twas then—like tiger close beset
At every pass with toil and net,
'Counter'd, where'er he turns his glare,
By clashing arms and torches' flare,
Who meditates, with furious bound,
To burst on hunter, horse, and hound,—
'Twas then that Bertram's soul arose,
Prompting to rush upon his foes.

SCOTT

The old detachment clock struck nine wheezy notes. Yorke and Redmond, seated at a table busily engaged in cleaning their service revolvers, glanced up at each other sombrely.

“Getting near time,” muttered the former, “the moon should be up soon now. Lanky,” he continued, addressing that individual who was sitting nearby, “what are you and the Doctor going to do? Going back to Cow Run tonight, or what?”

“Don’t think it,” replied the teamster laconically. He glanced towards the open door and assumed a listening attitude. “Th’ Sarjint an’ him’s out there now—chewin’ th’ rag ’bout it—hark to ’em!”

Ceasing their cleaning operations for a space, the two constables listened intently to the raised voices without. “No! no! no!” came Slavin’s soft brogue, in tones of vehement protest to something the coroner had said, “I tell yu’ ’tis not right, Docthor, that yu’ shud run such risk! Wid us ’tis diff’runt—takin’ th’ chances av life an’ death—just ord’nary course av juty. . . .”

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"Oh, tut! tut! nonsense, Sergeant," was the physician's brisk response. "You forget. I've taken those same chances before, too, and, by Jove! I can take 'em again! All things considered," he added significantly, "seems to me—er—perhaps just as well I should be on hand."

Yorke and Redmond exchanged rueful grins. "The old sport!" quoth the latter admiringly. "Damme, but I must say the Doc's game!"

"It's the old 'ex-service spirit'," said Yorke quietly, "rum thing! Always seems to crop out, somehow, when there's real trouble on hand."

Nonchalantly puffing a huge cigar, the object of their remarks presently strolled back into the room, followed by the sergeant. "Behould th' 'last coort av appeal,' Docthor," began Slavin majestically. With a whimsical grin he indicated his subordinates. "Bhoys," he explained, "contrairy tu my wishes, th' Docthor insists on comin' wid us this night. Now fwhat yez know 'bout that?"

"Tried to shake me!" supplemented that gentleman tersely, waving his cigar at the last speaker. "What's this court's ruling?"

A stern smile flitted over Yorke's high-bred features. "Appeal sustained," he announced decisively, "eh, Reddy?"

For answer, his comrade arose and silently wrung the doctor's hand; then, without show of emotion, he resumed his seat and likewise his cleaning operations. Yorke, as silently, duplicated his comrade's actions. The ex-Naval surgeon said nothing; but his eyes glistened strangely as he dropped into an easy chair and proceeded to envelope himself in a cloud of smoke,

Suddenly the nasal voice of the teamster, Lanky Jones, made itself heard. "How 'bout me?" he drawled, "ain't I in on this, too? I kin look after th' hawsses, anyways, fur yeh!"

"Arrah thin! hark tu um?" said Slavin, in mock despair. "Docthor, 'tis a bad example ye're setting All right, thin, Lanky, ye shall come, an' ye wish ut. An' as man tu man—I thank ye! We will all go a 'moonlightin' tugither. Eyah!" he resumed reminiscently, "many's th' toime I mind me ould father—God rist him!—tellin' th' tales av thim days, whin times was harrd in Oireland, an' rints wint up an' th' pore was dhriven well-nigh desprit. How him an' his blood-cousin, Tim Moriarty, lay wan night for an' ould rapparee av a landlord, who'd evicted pore Tim out av house an' home. Tim had an' ould blundherbuss, all loaded up wid bits av nales an' screws an' such-like, wid a terribul big charrge av powther behint ut. Four solid hours did they wait for um—forninst a hedge on th' road he had tu come home by, from Ballymeen Fair.



“By an’ by they hears um a-comin . . . a-hollerin’ an’ laughin’ tu umsilf, an’ roarin’ an’ singin’ ‘Th’ Jug av Potheen.’ Full av ut, tu, by token av th’ voice av um. Tim makes all ready wid th’ blundherbuss. All av a suddint tho’, th’ tchune shtops, an’ tho’ they waits for um for quite a toime, he niver shows up. By an’ by they gets fed up wid lyin’ belly-down in th’ soakin’ rain. ‘H-mm! mighty quare!’ sez me father, ‘I wonder fwat’s happened tu th’ pore ould ginthleman?’ ‘Let us go luk for um?’ sez Tim, wid blood in his oi, ‘tis may be he’s on’y shtoppin’ tu take another dhrink out av th’ jug.’

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"So, up th' road they goes a piece, till they comes tu a bog at th' side av ut. An' there they finds um—head-first shtuck in th' bog—just th' tu feet av um shtickin' out an' which boots Tim sez he can swear tu. 'Begorra!' sez me father, 'that accounts for th' tchune shtoppin' so suddint! Let us luk for th' jug?' Well, they hunts around for th' jug awhile, but all they finds is his ould caubeen. So they shtuck that on wan of his feet, an' Tim, he pins th' warrant av evictmint tu ut, currsin' somethin' fierce th' whiles bekase he was done out av getthin' a shot at the 'ould rapparee wid th' blundherbuss."

Slavin shook his head slowly at the conclusion of the story. "Eyah!" he said wistfully, "many's th' toime have I heard me father tell that same tale. They must have been shtirrin' times, thim!" In characteristic fashion his mood suddenly changed. His face hardened, as with upraised hand he silenced the burst of laughter he had provoked from his hearers. "Ginthlemen!" he resumed quietly, "we're none av us cowards here, but—no need tu remind yu'—fwhat sort av a man we are goin' up against this night."

Unconsciously he drew himself up, with an air of simple, rugged dignity that well became his grim visage and powerful frame. In that hour of impending danger the brave, true, kindly heart of the man stood revealed—a personality which endeared him to Yorke and Redmond beyond any ties of friendship they had known.

Slowly he repeated, "we are none av us cowards here, but—remimber Larry Blake, an' that pore hobo shtiff back in th' shed there. An' remimber thim dogs this mornin'. We du not want tu undherrate um. We du not want tu cop ut like did Wilde, whin he wint tu arrest Charcoal; or Colebrook, whin he tackled Almighty Voice. Maybe he'll just come a-yawnin' tu th' dhure, wid th' dhrawlin' English spache av um, sayin' 'Well, bhoys, an' fwhat's doin'?' An' yet again—may be he's all nerves afther th' bad break he made in front av us this mornin'—expectin' us—eyah!—waithin', watchin' belike, wid his gun in his fisht. Luk at th' way he acted afther his gun play—leery as hell. . . ."

"Yes!" said Yorke thoughtfully, "egad! there was something darned queer in the way he acted, all right. Guess we'd better take carbines along, eh, Burke? . . . in case we get let in for a man hunt. For all we know, he may have beat it already. Another thing—he may start in bucking us about not having a warrant—just to gain time?"

Slavin met the other's suggestion with a grim nod of acquiescence. "Shure! we'll take thim," he said, "but"—his jaw set ruthlessly—"if I wanst get my grub-hooks on um . . . why! 'tis all up!—carbines, or no carbines—warrant or no warrant. Section thirty av th' Code covers th' warrant bizness—in a case like this, anyways. Come on, thin, bhoys, saddle up! An' Lanky!—yu give me a hand wid th' team! we must be getthin'!"

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Presently all was in readiness, and the small, well-armed party left the detachment under the light of a brilliant three-quarter moon. Slavin led in the police buckboard, with the doctor seated beside him, and Lanky Jones crouched behind them. Yorke and Redmond rode in the rear, with their carbines slung at the saddle-horn. It was a hazardous mission they were bound on, as they all fully realized now, knowing the terribly ruthless character of the man they sought to apprehend.

Descending the grade which led to the bend of the river they swung due east at a smart pace, following the winding Lower Trail. This last road ran past Gully's ranch, which lay some three miles distant. As they neared their objective the sergeant slackened his team down to a walking pace.

Suddenly Redmond tongue-clucked to himself in absent fashion. The sound of it roused Yorke out of the sombre reverie into which he had fallen.

"What's up, Red?" queried he waggishly, in a low voice, "dreaming you're taking that dive again, or what?"

"No!" muttered George abstractly in the same key. "I was thinking what a rum, unfathomable old beggar Slavin is. Fancy him springing that comical old yarn at such a time as this?"

"Ah!" murmured his comrade reflectively. "When you come to know Burke as well as I do you'll find he's generally got some motive for these little things—blarney and all. You laughed, didn't you? Guess we all of us gave the giddy 'ha! ha'.' Felt quite chipper after it, too, the bunch of us . . . well then?"

"Sh-sh!" came the sergeant's back-flung, guarded growl, "quit your gab there! We're gettin' nigh, bhoys—here's th' brush forninst his place . . . must go mighty quiet an' careful now."

Looming up dark and forbidding ahead of them they beheld the all-familiar sight of the huge, shadowy thicket of pine and Balm o' Gilead clumps that fringed the west end of Gully's ranch. Entering its gloomy depths, they felt their way slowly and cautiously along the stump-dotted trail. At intervals, from somewhere overhead, came the weird, depressing hoot of a long-eared owl, and, seemingly close at hand, the shrill, mocking "ki-yip-yapping" of coyotes echoed sharply in the stillness of the night. Stray patches of moonlight began to filter upon the party once more as they gradually neared the end of the rough-hewn avenue; the thick growth of pine giving place to scattered cotton-wood clumps.

Arriving at the verge of the timber the party halted. There, some two hundred yards distant, upon a patch of open ground partially encircled by dense, willow-scrub, lay a ghostly-shadowed cluster of ranch buildings. The living habitation itself stood upon a

slightly raised knoll, hard upon the river-bank. To their nostrils the night air brought the strong, not unpleasant scent of cattle, drifting up from the numerous recumbent bovine forms which dotted the ground all around the ranch.

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Awhile the party gazed speculatively at the habitation of him—the undoubted perpetrator of the deadly deeds—for whom they had sought so long. The peaceful aspect of their moonlit surroundings suddenly smote the minds of all with a strange sense of unreality, as full realization of the sinister import of their errand came home to them. In uncanny telepathy with their disturbed feelings sounded the owl's derisive hooting, and the persistent mocking raillery of the coyotes.

It was Slavin who broke the long, tense silence. "Damn that 'Dismal Jimmy' owl!" he ejaculated testily, in a low tone—"an' thim ki-oots! . . . beggars all seem to be givin' us th' ha! ha! as if they knew. P'raps he has beat ut on us afther all? . . . 'Tis harrd tu say—we cannot shpot a glim from this side—winders all face east. Now! luk a-here, all av yez!" He turned to his companions with a grim, determined face, his deep-set eyes glittering ominously in the light of the moon. "Lets get things cut-an'-dhried behfure we shtart in," he whispered. "Whin he knows th' jig's up—that's if he is in—he may act like a man av sinse, an' agree tu come peaceable—but—" and Slavin shook his head slowly—"if he refuses . . . fwhy? . . . 't'wud be straight suicide tu attempt tu rush um. There's on'y wan dhure. Hidin' in th' dark there, wid that Luger gun av his coverin' ut, we'd shtand no show at all. He'd put th' whole bunch av us out av business—in as many shots, behfure a man av us got a chance tu put fut inside. Now, let's see!" he murmured reflectively. "Fwhat is th' lay av th' shack agin? There's—"

"The door and two of the windows face east," interpolated Yorke, softly—"living-room and kitchen—one window to the south—that's his bed-room."

"Eyah! that's ut," whispered the sergeant, "now thin—Lanky—du yu' shtay right here wid th' harses. Kape yu're head—even if ye du hear shootin'. Du not shtir from here onless ye get ordhers from wan av us." Turning to the others he continued in a sibilant hiss, "Yu, Reddy, shlip along th' edge av th' brush here, an' over th' river-bank onto th' shingle. Kape well down an' thread careful ontill ye come forninst th' back winder. Thin pop yu're head up circumshpict an' cover ut wid yu're carbine. Use good judgmint tho'; none av us want tu shtart in shootin' onless we're forced tu ut. Ondher th' circumstances 'tis best we thry an' catch um alive."

For a moment Slavin stared after Redmond's crouching form, as his subordinate disappeared in the gloom, "Thrust no harm comes tu th' lad," he muttered irresolutely, "quick as a flash is th' bhoy wid his head, eyah! but he's inclined tu be over rash at toimes."

"Oh, he's all right," hissed Yorke reassuringly, "don't you get worrying over him making any bad breaks, Burke. He's as fly as they make 'em."

Presently the sergeant faced round with a dreary sigh. "Come on thin, Docthor," he murmured heavily, "wid me an' Yorke."

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Making a wide detour they circled the ranch and wormed their way cautiously through the dense scrub on its eastern side. Suddenly, with a warning gesture to his companions, the sergeant halted. They had reached the verge of the scrub and the front of the ranch-house faced them—barely twenty yards distant. They could discern a faint light glimmering around the lower edge of one of the windows.

“He is in!” whispered Slavin exultantly. “Blinds down though. ’Tis a quare custom av his. Come on thin, Yorkey, me bould second-in-command! In a mighty few short minuts we shall know”—his jaw dropped—“fwhat we shall know! . . . Arrah thin, Docthor!”—he silenced a violent protest from that adventurous gentleman, who made as though to accompany them—“if ye wud help us in best fashion—shtay right here, an’ mark fwhat comes off. If we shud happen tu get ut in th’ neck . . . just yu’ beat ut back tu Lanky! Ye know fwhat tu du—thin. I’ll lave me carbine here awhile.”

He stepped clear of the brush and, revolver in hand, advanced softly upon the low, one-story, log-built dwelling. Yorke followed a few steps in his rear, with his carbine held in readiness at the “port-arms.”

Reaching the door, the sergeant rapped upon it sharply. There was no response from within, but—the light vanished on the instant. Yorke stepped warily to the side and covered the door with his weapon. A few tense moments passed, and then Slavin rapped again. Heavy footfalls now sounded, approaching the door from the inside, halted, and then, through the panels came Gully’s hollow, booming bass: “Who’s there?”

“Shlavin of th’ Mounted Police, Gully. Opin up! we wud shpake wid ye.”

“What do you want? What’s your business at this hour of the night?”

“Fwhat do we want?”—the sergeant uttered mirthless chuckle—“fwhy ’tis yu’ we want, Gully—for murdher! Come off th’ perch, man, th’ jig’s up! There’s a bunch av us here—we’ve got yu’re shack covered properly—wid carbines—north, east, south, an’ west—ye can pull nothin’ off. Come now! will ye pitch up an’ act reasonable? ’Tis no manner av use ye shtartin’ in tu buck th’ Force. Juty’s juty—ye know that.”

“Have you got a warrant, Sergeant?”

“Eyah!” came Slavin’s sinister growl. “We’ve bin fishin’, Gully, up in th’ big pool beyant. *Well* ye must know that pool. Fwhat we caught there is our warrant. Opin up now, will ye? else we bust yu’re dhure in!”

“Slavin—Sergeant! You and Yorke whom I’ve known all this time—good fellows”—the deep, imploring tones faltered slightly—“do not push me to it, man! You and your men go away and leave me in peace this night. Christ knows! I don’t want to do it but—if

you persist in forcing an entrance in here without a warrant—why! I'll pull on your crowd till there's not a man left."

"Gully!" the sergeant's voice shook with passion at the other's threat, "ye bloody murdherin' dog! Ye dhirty back-av-th'-head gun-artist! Thryin' for tu come th' 'good-feller' over us av th' Mounted! There's on'y wan answer tu that, an' ye know ut. Now, will ye opin up this dhure, or I'll bust her down!"

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And, as if to enforce his command, Slavin set his huge shoulder against the door and gave a heave which caused the stout wood to crack ominously.

“Look out, Burke!” cried Yorke suddenly. His right arm shot out and jerked the maddened Irishman violently towards him. His hasty action was only just in time.

Bang! bang! Two muffled shots detonated within, and white splinters flew from a spot in the door covered a moment before by the sergeant’s broad breast. With a startled oath Slavin flung up his gun, as if to fire back; but Yorke clutched his arm and arrested the action.

“No, no, Burke!” he hissed warningly, “no use doing that! You bet he’s not there now. Lying ‘doggo’ behind the logs, most likely. You’d only blow a hole in the door that he could pick us off through after. We’re proper marks in the moonlight here! Let’s back up, and keep the front covered.”

Slavin, balked of his prey, rumbled in his throat awhile, like some huge bear; then, adopting Yorke’s suggestion, he slowly backed up with the latter to the sheltering brush, where they rejoined the expectant, anxious doctor.

“Hit, either of you?” he enquired tersely.

Yorke replied in the negative. “Mighty close shave for Burke here, though” he added, “lucky I heard Gully cocking that blasted Luger of his.” He uttered a suppressed chuckle, “Burke’s always one to go cautioning others, and then lose his temper and expose himself.”

For some few minutes they canvassed the situation in tense whispers, lying prone in the brush with their carbines covering their objective.

“Sh-sh!” hissed the doctor suddenly. “Hark!”

With all their faculties on the stretch, they held their breaths and listened intently. In the stillness they heard the unmistakable noise as of a window being cautiously lifted. The sound came from the southern end of the building.

Then they heard Redmond’s voice ring out sharply from the bank: “No use, Gully! I’ve got you covered! You can’t make it from there! You’d better give in, man.”

There was an instant’s silence, then—crack! came the crisp report of the Luger. It was answered by the deep, reverberating bang! of a carbine, and the crash of splintered glass and woodwork was followed by a boyish laugh.

“Told you Reddy was there with the goods!” remarked Yorke, triumphantly, to his superior, “don’t suppose he got him though—Gully’s too fly—he’d duck into shelter the

instant he'd fired. I'll bet he's doing some tall thinking just now. Beggar's between the devil and the deep sea—properly. He'll chuck up the sponge just now, you'll see.”

“Eyah!” agreed Slavin, with an oath, “he’s up against it. But Reddy down there—I du not like th’ idea av th’ bhoy bein’ all alone. Yorkey, yu’ shlink thru’ th’ brush an’ down th’ bank an’ kape um company awhile. Th’ Docthor an’ me’ll kape th’ front here covered.”

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A few minutes later, Yorke, after first challenging Redmond cautiously, crept up beside his comrade below the sheltering river-bank.

"Did you get him?" he queried in a tense whisper.

"No, I don't think so," muttered Redmond disconsolately, "but—he d——d near got me—look!"

He exhibited his Stetson hat. A clean bullet perforation showed in the pinched-up top. "I could have got him—easy," he added, "when he first opened the window. Wish I had, now—but you know what Burke said—about getting him alive—I only loosed off after he'd thrown down on me. I was scared for you and Burke, though! I could see you both backing up—after he'd shot through the door."

Bang! A dull, muffled report detonated within the building. The ominous echoes gradually died away, and the stillness of the night settled over all once more.

The crouching policemen stared at each other strangely. "Hear that?" ejaculated Redmond, with a startled oath, "By G——d! he's shot himself! must have—it sounded muffled. . . . All over! I'll bet his brains—"

He broke off short and, shoving the barrel of his carbine over the edge of the bank, he commenced to clamber up. "Wait a second! . . . Good God, Red! don't do that!" snarled Yorke warningly. "He's as cunning as a blasted *lobo*. May be it's only a tr—"

The entreaty died in his throat. Crack! A spurt of flame shot from the opened window, and Redmond, with a gasping exclamation of rage and pain, toppled backwards onto the shingle, his carbine clattering down beside him. Fearful of relaxing his vigilance even at this crisis, the maddened Yorke flung up his weapon and sent shot after shot crashing through the open casement. All could hear the smashing, rending sounds of havoc his bullets were creating within.

"Doctor!" he shouted. "Oh, Doctor! Come on round quick!" In a hoarse aside he spat out feverishly, "Red! Red! my old son! . . . hit bad? Where'd you get it?"

"Shoulder! Oh-h!" gasped poor Redmond, moaning and rolling on the shingle in his agony, "Oh, Christ, it hurts!"

There came a crashing in the undergrowth on their right, and presently a crouching form came creeping rapidly towards them under cover of the sheltering bank. In a terse aside Yorke acquainted the doctor with the details of his comrade's mischance, keeping a wary eye meanwhile on the window. The ex-naval surgeon wasted no time in unnecessary question or comment, but with the grim composure of an old campaigner swiftly proceeded to render first aid to the wounded man.

“Right shoulder—low down!” he presently vouch-safed to the anxious Yorke. “Trust it’s missed the lung! . . . can’t tell yet! . . . I must get him away the best way I can. No! . . . don’t move, Yorke! You keep on your mark! I can pack him I think. I’ll get him to the buckboard somehow. This is going to be a long siege, I’m thinking. You’ll be getting reinforcements later. Slavin told me to send for them.”

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Bang! crash! The crisp sounds of splintering woodwork on the east side of the shack denoted the fact of their quarry apparently attempting a second escape from the front entrance. Unaided, the doctor cleverly executed the professional fire-fighter's trick of raising, balancing on the back, and carrying an unconscious human body. With an overwhelming feeling of relief, not unmixed with admiration, at the other's gameness, Yorke watched him stagger away in the gloom, bearing poor George upon his bowed shoulders.

His momentary lack of vigilance proved well-nigh his own undoing, also. Crack! spat the Luger again from the window. His hat whirled from his head, but he kept his presence of mind. It was not the first time by many that Yorke had been under fire. Ducking down on the instant, he moved swiftly three paces to his right, and then, finger on trigger, he suddenly jerked upright and sent two more shots crashing through the aperture.

"Mark-er!" he called out mockingly. "Signal a miss, mark-er! Ding-dong! You'll get tired of it before we do, Gully! You'd better give up the ghost, man!"

His grim sarcasm failing to draw further fire from his desperate opponent, the senior constable reloaded wearily and settled down to what promised to be a long, danger-fraught vigil.

CHAPTER XIV

He "went out," poor Gus, at the break o' day—
Oh!—his kindly ways, and his cheery face!
But . . . the Lord gave, and hath taken away,
Hark! sounds "The Last Post," Requiescat in Pace!
"THE LAST POST"

Slowly the night dragged through for the two grim, haggard sentinels. Thrice during their vigil had their desperate quarry exercised his marksmanship upon them with his deadly Luger. Seemingly only by a miracle did they escape each time. The sergeant had his hat perforated in similar fashion to his companions. Yorke had a shoulder-strap torn from his stable-jacket. Adroitly shifting their positions each time he fired, they greeted his shots with such withering blasts of carbine fire that they finally silenced their enemy's battery. Throughout he had remained as mute as a trapped wolf. Only an occasional cough indicated that so far, apparently, he was unharmed and, like them, still grimly on the alert.

Relief came to the two besiegers with the first streaks of dawn. Dr. Cox, with almost superhuman efforts, had somehow managed to reach Lanky Jones and the buckboard with the wounded Redmond. Swiftly conveying the latter back to the detachment, the

physician had immediately got in touch with the night-operator at the station, and also MacDavid.

And now, guided by that old pioneer, Inspector Kilbride arrived upon the scene with an armed party from the Post. They had been rushed up by a special train, which had been flagged by MacDavid at the nearest objective point to Gully's ranch.

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Swiftly and warily they skirmished towards their objective. Half of the party, under a sergeant, crept along below the sheltering river bank where they soon joined the wearied, but still vigilant, Yorke. The rest, under the inspector, making a wide detour of the ranch, gained the brush on its eastern side. Among this last party were Hardy, McSporran and McCullough. In extended order they glided through the thick scrub and, reaching its fringe, flung themselves prone with their carbines held in readiness.

The inspector gradually wormed himself up beside Slavin who, in a few tense whispers, acquainted his superior with all details of the situation. Full well, both men realized what a perilous spot it was, for all concerned, on the eastern front of the shack. Straining their eyes in the gray, ghostly gloom they could just discern an open casement. Apparently it was from this well-sheltered embrasure that Gully had previously attempted to pick off Slavin. With the coming of daylight their position would be absolutely untenable in the face of further fire from the enemy. On the other hand, if they retreated further into the scrub they would lose sight of their objective altogether.

So much Kilbride intimated to the sergeant as they held whispered consultation. Also, he imparted reassuring news anent Redmond. The latter's injury, though serious, was not a mortal hurt, according to a report from MacDavid, who had left the doctor watching his patient closely at the detachment.

Suddenly, a few paces to the right of where they lay, came the sound of one of the party stealthily clearing his throat. Poor fellow! his momentary lack of caution proved to be his death warrant.

Crack! A spurt of flame leapt from the velvety-black square of casement. The horrid, unforgettable cry of a man wounded unto death echoed the shot, and the startled besiegers could hear their comrade threshing around amongst the dead leaves in his agony.

"Steady, men! steady now! don't expose yourselves!" yelled the inspector. "Fire at that window, while I get to this man!—keep me covered!"

His commands were eagerly obeyed. Sheltered by the roaring burst of carbine fire he wriggled sideways in feverish haste and eventually gained the stricken man. The latter's convulsive threshing of limbs had ceased and an instant's examination convinced the inspector that Gully's random shot had been fatal.

For awhile the besiegers poured in brisk volleys upon the door and windows, until the inspector gave the command to "Cease Fire!" Suddenly—mockingly—hard upon the last shot, the echoes of which had barely died away, came again the vicious, whip-like crack of the Luger; this time from the southern end of the shack. The long-drawn, nerve-shattering scream of the first casualty was duplicated, and a carbine volley crashed from the river bank.



Then up from the attacking party swelled an exceeding bitter, angry cry; the grim, deadly exasperation of men goaded to the point of recklessly attempting ruthless reprisal upon their hidden enemy. With a total disregard of personal safety many of them sprang up out of cover, as if to charge upon their hated objective.

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"As you were! Back, men! back!" rang out the deep, imperious voice of Kilbride. The stern command checked the onrush of maddened men. "D'you hear me?" he thundered, "Take cover again immediately—everyone. . . . I'll give the word when to rush him, and that's not yet."

It said much for the discipline of the Force that his commands were obeyed, albeit in somewhat mutinous fashion. The inspector turned to Slavin with fell eyes. "Christ!" he said, "there's two men gone! I won't chance any more lives in this fashion! I'll give him ten minutes to surrender and if he don't give up the ghost then I'll do what an emergency like this calls for—what I came prepared to do, if necessary. Sergeant! take charge of this side until further orders; I'm going down the bank to the other party awhile."

He stole away through the brush and presently they all heard his stentorian tones ring out from the river bank. "Gully! oh, Gully! It's Inspector Kilbride speaking. I'll give you ten minutes to come out and give yourself up. If you don't—well! . . . I've got a charge of dynamite here . . . and a fuse, and I'll blow you and your shack to hell, my man. It's up to you—now!"

There was no response to the inspector's ultimatum. Amidst dead silence the prescribed time slowly passed. Fifteen minutes—then, a gasping murmur of excitement arose from those on the eastern front, as in the rapidly whitening dawn they saw Kilbride suddenly reappear around the northern and blank end of the building. For some few moments they watched his actions in awe-struck, breathless silence as, with bent back, he busied himself with his dangerous task.

Presently he straightened up. "Now! Look out, everybody!" he bawled. He struck a match and applied it to something that immediately began to splutter, and then he retreated a safe distance northward. All eyes were glued, as if fascinated, to the deadly, sputtering fuse. Soon came the dull, muffled roar of an explosion. The walls of the building sagged outwards, the roof caved in, and the whole structure seemed to collapse like a pack of cards, amid a cloud of dust.

For some few seconds the party gazed fearfully at the work of destruction; then a loud cheer went up, and with one accord all dashed forward, filled with eager, morbid curiosity as to what they might find buried beneath the ruins.

Suddenly, midway between the brush and their objective they checked their onrush and halted, staring in speechless amazement. Pushing his way up, apparently from some hole beneath a pile of debris, appeared the figure of a huge man.

In their excitement the attackers had overlooked the possibility of a cellar existing below the stone foundation of the dwelling. At this juncture the party from the river bank was

rapidly approaching the ruins from its western side. The posse was in a dilemma. Neither party dare fire at its quarry between them for fear of hitting each other.

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Gully apparently either did not realize the situation or did not care. With face convulsed with passion, beyond all semblance to a human being, he crouched and rushed the party on the eastern side of his wrecked home, firing as he came. Badly hit, several of his assailants were speedily *hor de combat*, among them, Hardy and McCullough. The whole incident happened in quicker time than it takes to relate.

Then, from out the startled crowd there sprang a man. It was Slavin. His hour had come. There was something appalling in the spectacle of the two gigantic men rushing thus upon each other. Suddenly, Gully tripped over a log and fell headlong, his deadly gun flying from his grasp. With a sort of uncanny, cat-like agility he scrambled to his feet and strove to recover his weapon. He was a fraction of a second too late. A kick from Slavin sent it whirling several yards away, and the next moment the opponents were upon each other.

At the first onslaught the issue of the combat seemed doubtful. The ex-sheriff was no wrestler like Slavin, but he speedily demonstrated that he was a boxer, as well as a gunman. Cleverly eluding the grasp of his powerful assailant for the moment, twice he rocked Slavin's head back with fearful left and right swings to the jaw. With a bestial rumbling in his throat, the sergeant countered with a pile-driving punch to the other's heart; then, ducking his head to avoid further punishment, he grappled with the murderer. Roaring inarticulately in their Berserker rage, the pair bore a closer resemblance to a bear and a gorilla than men.

Once in that terrible grip, however, Gully, big and powerful man though he was, had not the slightest chance with a wrestler of Slavin's ability. Shifting rapidly from one cruel hold to another the huge Irishman presently whirled his antagonist up over his hip and sent him crashing to the ground, face downwards. Then, kneeling upon the neck of his struggling and blaspheming victim, he held him down until handcuffs finally imprisoned the enormous wrists, and leg-irons the ankles.

The grim, long-protracted duel was over at last. But at lamentable cost. Two men killed outright, and five badly wounded had been the deadly toll exacted by Gully in his last, desperate stand.

The rays of the early morning shone upon a strange and solemn scene. Gully, guarded by two constables, was seated upon the stone foundation that marked the site of his wrecked dwelling. Head in hands, sunk in a sort of stupor, his attitude portrayed that of a man from whom all earthly hope had fled. Some distance away lay the wounded men, being roughly, but sympathetically attended to by their comrades. All were awaiting now the arrival of the coroner, and also the means of transportation which the inspector had ordered MacDavid to requisition for them.

Presently came those who reverently bore the dead upon hastily-constructed stretchers. Silently Inspector Kilbride indicated a spot near the fringe of brush; and

there, side by side, they laid them down, covering the bodies with a blanket dragged from the debris of the shattered dwelling.

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Bare-headed, the rest of the party gathered around their officer. Long and sadly Kilbride gazed down upon the still forms outlined under their covering. Twice he essayed to speak, but each time his voice failed him.

“Men!” he said at last huskily, as if to himself. “Men! is this what I have brought you into? . . . Is this—”

He choked, and was silent awhile; then; “Oh!” cried he suddenly, “God knows! . . . under the circumstances I used the best judgment I—”

But Slavin broke in and laid a tremulous hand on his superior’s shoulder. “No! no! Sorr! . . . hush! for th’ love av Christ! . . . Ye must not—” the soft Hibernian brogue sank to a gentle hush—“niver fear . . . for thim that’s died doin’ their juty! . . . ‘Tis th’ Peace, Sorr—th’ Peace everlastin’ . . . for Hornsby an’ Wade. They were good men. . . .”

Yorke bent down and, drawing back a fold of the blanket, exposed two still white faces. In the centre of Hornsby’s forehead all beheld Gully’s terrible sign-manual. Wade had been shot through the throat.

“Hornsby!” gasped Yorke brokenly, “poor old Gus Hornsby!” . . . He turned a tired, drawn face up to Slavin’s. “He was with us in the Yukon, Burke. Remember how we used to rag him when he first came to us as a cheechaco buck? But the poor beggar never used to get sore over it . . . always seemed sort of . . . patient . . . and happy . . . no matter how we joshed him. . . .”

Gently he replaced the blanket, stared stupidly a moment at the grim, haggard face of his sergeant, then he burst out crying and wandered away from the sad scene.

CHAPTER XV

That very night, while gentle sleep
The people’s eyelids kiss’d,
Two stern-faced men set out from Lynn,
Through the cold and heavy mist;
And Eugene Aram walk’d between,
With gyves upon his wrist.
“THE DREAM OF EUGENE ARAM”

Slowly the memorable June day had drawn to a close, and now darkness had set in and the moon shone brightly down upon the old detachment of Davidsburg. It had been a strenuous day for Inspector Kilbride and his subordinates, as many details of the eventful case had to be arranged ere they could leave with their prisoner on the night’s train for the Post.



The inspector's first care, naturally, had been the slow and careful conveyance of the wounded men (Redmond included)—and the dead—down to the special train which still awaited them on the Davidsburg siding. The bulk of the party departed with them, the officer retaining Slavin, Yorke, and McSporran. A coroner's inquest, held that afternoon upon the remains of the unfortunate hobo, Drinkwater, had resulted in a verdict of "wilful murder" being returned against Ruthven Gully. Two days later, at the Post, similar verdicts were rendered in the cases of poor Hornsby and Wade.

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Throughout the day Gully had remained in a sort of sullen, brooding stupor. But now, with the coming of night, he seemed to grow restless—pacing within the narrow confines of his cell like unto a trapped wolf, his leg-shackles clanking at every turn. Seated outside the barred door, McSporran maintained a close and vigilant guard. It wanted four hours yet until train time and inside the living-room the inspector, Slavin, and Yorke were beguiling the interval in low-voiced conversation.

“Strange thing, Sergeant,” remarked Kilbride musingly, “I can’t place him now, but I’ll swear I’ve seen this man, Gully, before; somewhere back of beyond, I guess. I’ve been in some queer holes and corners on this globe in my time—long before I ever took on the Force. Seems he has, too, from what you and Yorke have told me. D——d strange! . . . I’ve got a fairly good memory for faces but—”

He broke off and looked enquiringly at McSporran, who had silently entered just then. “What is it, McSporran?”

“Gully, Sirr!” responded the constable, saluting. “He wad wish tu speak wi’ ye, Sirr.”

The inspector’s face hardened, and his steely eyes glittered strangely as he heard the news. For a brief space he remained, chin in hand, in deep thought; then rising, he sauntered slowly over to the prisoner’s cell.

“What is it you want, Gully?” he said quietly.

“Kilbride—Inspector!” came the great rumbling bass through the bars. “If you keep me cooped up in this pen much longer . . . I tell you! . . . you’ll have me slinging loose in the head—altogether!” He uttered a mirthless, wolf-like bark of a laugh. “My ears are keener than your memory—I heard you speaking just now. Listen!” a curiously wistful note crept into his deep tones, for the inspector had made an angry, impatient gesture—“Listen, Kilbride! . . . I’m gone up—I know it—therefore, if I sing my ‘swan song’ now or later, it can matter little one way or the other; and I would rather sing it to you and Slavin and Yorke there than to anyone else. Before I am through, you all may—shall we say—p’raps judge me a trifle less harshly than you do now. Regard this as . . . practically the last request of a man who is as good as dying . . . that—I be allowed to sit amongst you once more . . . and talk, and talk, and ta—”

His voice broke, and he left the sentence unfinished. For some few seconds the inspector remained motionless, with bent head, just looking—and looking—in deep, reflective silence at the doomed man who importuned him.

“Am I to understand that you wish to make a statement, Gully?” he said, in even, passionless tones. “Remember!—you’ve been charged and warned, man—whatever you say’ll be used in evidence against you at your trial.”

The other, hesitating a moment, swallowed nervously in his agitation.

“Yes,” he said huskily, “I know—but that’s all right! . . . As I said before—it can make little or no difference . . . in my case. . . .”

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Turning, Kilbride silently motioned to McSporran to unlock the cell-door.

The huge manacled prisoner emerged, and shuffled awkwardly towards the inner room, closely attended by his armed escort.

Slavin and Yorke, seated together at one end of the table, arose as Gully entered. Standing curiously still, as if carved in stone, their bitter eyes alone betraying their emotions, silently they gazed at the huge, gaunt, unkempt figure that came shambling towards them.

Gully halted and stared long and fixedly at the relentless faces of the two men whose grim, dogged vigilance had led to his undoing. Over his blood-streaked, haggard face there swept the peculiar ruthless smile which they knew so well; and he raised his manacled hands in a semblance of a salute.

"Morituri te salufant!" he muttered in his harsh, growling bass—the speech nevertheless of an educated man.

"Eh, fwhat?" queried Slavin vaguely. The classical allusion was lost on him, but Kilbride and Yorke exchanged a grim, meaning smile as they recalled the ancient formula of the Roman arena. McSporran pushed forward a chair, into which Gully dropped heavily. Chin cupped in hands, and elbows resting on knees he remained for a space in an attitude of profound thought. The inspector, resuming his chair at the table, motioned his subordinates to be seated, and reached forward for some writing materials.

"All right, now, Gully!" he began, in a hard, metallic tone. "What is it you wish to say?" All waited expectantly.

Apparently with an effort Gully roused himself out of the deep reverie into which he had sunk, and for a space he gazed with blood-shot eyes into the calm, stern face of his questioner. Then, with a sort of dreamy sighing ejaculation, he roused himself and, leaning back in his chair, began the following remarkable story. He spoke in a recklessly earnest manner and with a sort of deadly composure that startled and impressed his hearers in no little degree.

"Listen, Inspector," he said. "A good deal of the story I'm going to tell you has no bearing on the—the—the—case in hand. There's no use in your taking all this down. I understand procedure"—he smiled wanly—"therefore, with your permission I'll go ahead, and you can construct a brief statement on your own lines afterwards, which I will sign."

Kilbride bowed his head in assent to the other's request.

"The name I bear now," began the prisoner,—"'Ruthven Gully'—is my real name, though knocking around the world like I've been since I was a kid of sixteen, and the many

queer propositions I've been up against in my time, why—I've found it expedient to use various aliases.

"For instance"—he eyed the inspector keenly—"I wasn't known as 'Gully' that time Cronje nailed us all at Doornkop, Kilbride, in 'ninety-six. . . ."

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Kilbride uttered a startled oath. Shaken out of his habitual stern composure he stared at the man before him in sheer amazement. "Good God!" he cried, "The 'Jameson Raid!' . . . Now I know you, man!—you're—you're—wait a bit! I've got it on the tip of my tongue—Mor—Mor—Mordaunt, by gad! . . . that's what you called yourself then. Ever since I sat with you on that case I've been turning it over in my head where in ever I'd fore-gathered with you before. It was your moustache which fooled me—you were clean-shaven then. . . Well, Well! . . ."

He was silent awhile, overcome by the discovery. "Aye!" he resumed in an altered voice, "I've got good cause to remember you, Mor—Gully, I mean. You certainly saved my life that day . . . when we were lying in that *donga* together. I was hit pretty bad, and you stood 'em off. You were a wonderful shot, I recollect. I saw you flop out six Doppers—one after the other."

He turned to Slavin. "Sergeant!" he said quietly, "You'd better leave the leg-irons on, but remove his handcuffs—for the time-being, anyway. . . ." He addressed himself to the prisoner with a sort of sad sternness. "It's little I can do for you now, Gully . . . but I can do that, at least. . . ."

Slavin complied with his officer's request. Gully's huge chest heaved once, and he bowed his head in silent acknowledgment of Kilbride's act of leniency.

"All right! go ahead, Gully!" said the latter.

The prisoner took up his tale anew. "As I was saying—I left the Old Country when I was sixteen. No need to drag in family troubles, but . . . that's why. . . . Well! I hit for the States. Montana for a start off, and it sure was a tough state in 'seventy-four, I can tell you. That's where I first learned to handle a gun. I knocked around between there and Wyoming and Arizona for about nine years, and during that time I guess I tackled nearly every kind of job under the sun, but I punched and rode for range outfits mostly.

"Then I was struck with a fancy to see the South, and I drifted to Virginia. I'd been there about two years, working as an overseer on a tobacco plantation, when I got a letter from our family's solicitor recalling me home. My eldest brother had died, and the estate had passed on to me. Where, Inspector?—why, it was at Castle Brompton, a quiet little country town in Worcestershire.

"Well! I'd had a pretty rough training—living the life of a roustabout for so many years, and I guess I kind of ran amuck when I struck home. I played ducks and drakes with the estate, and the end of it was . . . I got heavily involved in debt. There seemed nothing for it but to up-anchor, and to sea again in my shirt. So, my fancy next took me to Shanghai, where I obtained a poorly-paid Civil Service job—in the Customs. I stuck that for about a year, and then I pulled out—disgusted. The next place I landed

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up in was, if anything, worse—the Gold Coast. From there I drifted to the Belgian Congo. I was there for nearly two years doing—well! perhaps it's best for me not to enter into details—we'll call it 'rubber.' It's a cruel country that—one that a man doesn't exactly stay in for his health, anyway; for a bad dose of fever nearly fixed me. It made me fed up with the climate and—the life. So I pulled out of it and went down country to the Transvaal. That's how I came to get mixed up in 'The Raid,' Inspector. I was in Jo'burg at the time it was framed up, so I threw in my lot with the rest of you.

“Suddenly I had an overwhelming desire to go back to the States and the range life again. I was properly fed up with Africa. So—back I went there—to Montana again. I punched for one or two cow-outfits awhile, and then came a time when a deputation of citizens came and put it up to me if I'd take on the office of Deputy-Sheriff for —— County, where I happened to be working. I suppose the fact of my being a little more handy with a gun than most had impressed some of them. Things were running wild there just then, and for awhile I tell you, I was up against a rather dirty proposition. I and my guns certainly worked overtime for a stretch, till I got matters more or less ship-shape. I had the backing of the best people in the community luckily, and eventually I won out.

“Then—when the inevitable reaction set in with the peaceable times that followed, somehow I managed to get in bad with some of them. They had no more use for me or my guns. I was like a fish out of water. I decided to pull out, for a strange hankering to see England and my old home again came over me. So I resigned my office and headed back to the Old Country. . . .”

At this point in his narrative, Gully dropped his head in his hands and rocked wearily awhile ere continuing haltingly: “It was the mistake of my life—ever going back—to a civilized country. For a time I strove to conduct myself as a law-abiding British citizen—to conform to the new order of things, but—I had been amongst the rough stuff too long. I was out of my sphere entirely.

“One day, in a hotel at Leeds, I got into a violent quarrel with a man—fellow of the name of Hammond. It was over a woman. He insulted me—in front of a crowd of men at that—and finally he struck me. Hitherto I'd taken no back-down from any man living, and I guess I forgot myself then and kind of ran amuck—fancied I was back in Montana again. Consequence was—I threw down on him in front of this crowd and shot him dead.

“Of course I was arrested and charged with murder in the first degree; but as it was adduced at my trial that I'd received a certain amount of provocation, I was sent down for fifteen years. I'd done little over six months of my time in Barmsworth Prison when I and two of my fellow convicts framed up a scheme to escape. It takes too long to go

into details how we worked it. I made my get-away, though I had to abolish a poor devil of a warder in doing so. The other two lost out. One got shot and the other was caught some days later—as I read in the papers.

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“Well! I managed to reach the States again, and eventually came over this side of the line. As I had been convicted and sentenced under the alias which I had adopted while in England—my real name never coming out—I resumed my name of Gully again when I settled down here. My relatives, what few I possess, have never known of my conviction and imprisonment. All the time I was in England on my second trip I was clean-shaven, but on returning to the States I let my moustache grow once more. As you said, Kilbride—it is a very effectual disguise. Will one of you give me a drink, please? My mouth’s pretty dry with all this talking.”

Yorke got up and brought him a glass of water, and he drank it down with a murmur of thanks.

“Now!” he said, continuing his narrative: “I’m coming to the worst part of all. You’ll all wonder I’ve not gone mad—brooding; but I’ve got to go through with it. When I settled down here I honestly did struggle hard to live down my past and start afresh with a clean sheet. I borrowed some money from an old ex-sheriff friend of mine in Montana—which loan, by the way, I have paid all back—every cent—and bought”—he gazed gloomily at Kilbride—“what was my home. But somehow . . . Fate seems to have dogged me and tripped me up in the end. Until last January everything was going well with me. As Slavin and Yorke here can testify . . . I was conducting myself fairly and squarely with all men.

“Then—one day Yorke brought that Blake and Moran case up in front of me. Both of these men I’d met before, but they didn’t recognize me again—not absolutely. I usually contrived to keep pretty clear of them for reasons which will appear obvious later. I’m coming to that. Moran I recognised as a former Montana tough who used to hang around Havre—bronco-buster, cow-puncher, and tin-horn by turns. Many a time I’ve caught him sizing me up, in Cow Run and elsewhere—mighty hard, too, but he never seemed to be sure of me. Once he did chance a feeler, but I just twirled my moustache, a la Lord Tomnoddy, and bluffed him to a finish.

“Larry Blake”—a ruthless gleam flickered momentarily in Gully’s deep-set, shadowy eyes—“Larry Blake, I recognized as the son of the Governor of Barmsworth Prison—old Gavin Blake. Sometimes this young fellow used to come around with his father, when the old gentleman was making his daily tour of inspection. I well remember the first time I saw him—young Larry. I was chipping stone in the quarry, amongst a gang, with a ball and chain on. I’d been in about two months then. The Governor was showing some visitors around, and his son was with him. They were staring at us like people do at wild animals in a show. I was pointed out to them, and my recent crime mentioned. I remember young Blake eying me with especial interest. He came out to Canada and hit these parts about two years after I’d located here.

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“Well! now and again when we’d run across each other I’d find him looking at me in a queer, vague fashion, too; but I felt safe enough with him; like I did with Moran—until this case came up. After it was over, he and I happened to be alone, and, in a round-about way, he began asking me questions. He did it so clumsily, though, that my suspicions were aroused at once. Of course I bluffed him—or thought I had—easily for the moment, but one day I happened to be in the Post Office getting my mail when, amongst a bunch of letters on the counter I saw one addressed to ‘Gavin Blake, Esq., Governor of Barmsworth Prison, England.’ Old Kelly, the postmaster, having his back to me at the time, fumbling around the pigeon-holes, I promptly annexed this letter and slipped it into my pocket.

“When I opened it up my suspicions were verified. Young Blake wrote to his father that he’d come across a man whom he could almost swear to as being one of the three convicts who’d broken out of Barmsworth some years back. He asked what steps he’d better take in the case—if the original warrant issued for me could be forwarded to the Mounted Police, and so on. He said his intentions were to try and gain further evidence, and in the meantime to confide in no one about his suspicions until he received definite instructions what steps to take.

“I guess the devil must have got a good grip on me again after I’d read that letter. It seemed no use trying to redeem the past with outsiders like young Blake making it their business to butt in and lay one by the heels. Anyway, like Satan at prayers, I didn’t feel like being coolly sacrificed when my years of honest effort were drawing near their reward in the shape of a fairly prosperous ranch—just at the whim of a lazy, profligate young busy-body.

“From that hour Larry Blake was practically—‘gone up.’ I’d deliberately made up my mind to put him out of business on the first convenient opportunity that presented itself. That opportunity came on the night he was fighting with Moran in the hotel. I thought I could kill two birds with one stone. I’ll admit it was a devilish idea, but I was desperate. Of course things didn’t shape out as I’d planned—Moran’s alibi for instance, or that hobo, Drinkwater.

“I know to you it will only appear sheer nonsense on my part ever to start in attempting to justify my—my abolishment of him. But this—what I am going to tell you—is the absolute truth of what happened. In the first place—when he spotted me bringing Moran’s horse into the stable that night—although I was mad and man-handled the poor devil at the time—I felt fairly easy in my mind later, thinking he would drift out of town next day, after the manner of his kind. But when he was brought up in front of me afterwards, I realized the serious predicament I was in.”

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He turned to Slavin. "Sergeant!" he went on: "I'll admit I was feeling pretty queer when you were examining that man—especially about the smelling of drink business. I'd slipped him a snort of whiskey after you'd gone down to Doctor Cox's to get those papers signed. I told him to keep his mouth shut if he was questioned about any horse or man—and that I'd get him off if he obeyed my instructions. Of course he didn't know what all this was for. He had no opportunity of knowing—never did know, though I fancy he thought it was a case of horse-stealing. Anyway, my promises and the drink made him my ally at once. Only human nature for him to side with me against the Police. As you know, Sergeant, you can get more definite results from that class of man by a drink bribe than by all the threats and promises in the world.

"My original intention in taking him out to my place was to slip him twenty dollars or so, and head him adrift westward, and so out of things. But after we got home and I put the proposition up to him, the beggar began to assert himself and get bold and saucy—tried to blackmail me for an unheard of amount—threatening he'd go and tell you everything if I didn't come across, and all that. Finally I lost my temper with him and gave him a good slap across the face. He happened to be outside the house bucking wood at the time, and, when I hit him, he came for me with the axe. I only jumped back just in time, as he struck. I threw down on him and put him out of business right-away then, realizing I was up against it."

Gully halted for a space and leaned his head in his hands. "God!" he muttered presently, "what nights I've had! I've killed many men in my time, but those two—I hated framing up all that business on you fellows next day—those tracks and the bill-folder, and all that useless chasing for a week, but it seemed to me to be the only plausible bluff I could run on you, under the circumstances. Now, are there any more things you don't understand? Any questions you'd like to ask me?"

"Yes!" queried Slavin. "How did you get to Calgary that night—after you'd missed the nine-thirty eastbound. Jump a freight, or what? You were seen to get on the train. . . ."

"I know that," said Gully slowly, "I did it for a blind. I walked through the coaches and slipped out again at the far end of the platform—in the dark. No! I didn't jump a freight, Sergeant. I was tempted to; but on second thoughts the idea made me feel kind of uneasy. Perhaps you'll be dubious of this, but, as a fact, I took a 'tie-pass'—walked it all the way to Calgary on the track. I was about done when I made Shagnappi Point, beating my passage through all that snow. I bought a new pair of cow-puncher's boots while I was in town. You remember I was wearing them when I returned. I had the overshoes wrapped up as a parcel and packed them back to the ranch and burnt them—and Drinkwater's boots."

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"How about that Savage automatic?" said Yorke, "the one you shot those dogs with yesterday? We've got your Luger, but where's the Savage gun?"

"Oh, yes!" replied Gully wearily, "of course I had two guns. I never used to pack the Luger around—afterwards, well! . . . for obvious reasons. You'll probably find the Savage in the cellar at my place—that's if it isn't buried, like I nearly was."

There was a long silence, broken only by the scratch, scratch, of the inspector's pen, as he rapidly indited a formal statement for the prisoner to sign. Once during its composition he halted for a brief space and, leaning back in his chair, gazed long with a sort of dreary sternness at the huge, unkempt figure before him.

"Gully," he said slowly, "whatever in God's name put it into your head to stand off the Police in the way you did? Shooting those two poor chaps and nearly putting the kibosh on five others! Whatever did you hope to gain by it? You must have known it was absolutely impossible for you to make your get-away from us. Why, man! we had you cornered like a wolf in a trap. It was worse than silly and useless and cruel for you to act in the way you did!"

"Oh, my God! I don't know!" moaned Gully, rocking despondently with his head in his hands. "I must have gone clean mad for the time being. . . ." He gazed gloomily at Slavin and Yorke, muttering half to himself: "What little things do trip a man up in the end! The best laid schemes o' mice and men! But for my shooting those cursed dogs yesterday you'd never, never have suspected me. The whole thing would just have been filed and forgotten in time—would just have remained one of those unfathomable mysteries. Directly after I'd thrown down on those curs I realized what a d——d bad break I'd made—what my momentary loss of temper was going to cost me. I could tell by the way you all looked at me what was in your minds. . . ."

"Yes, but how about that fishing expedition of ours, Gully?" said Yorke. "You seem to have forgotten that." And he related the story of Redmond's dive.

"Ah!" retorted Gully, bitterly. "And yet you might have got snagged a hundred times there and only just cursed and snapped your line and reeled in, thinking it was a log or something. . . . Well, as I was saying, I realized the jig was up after that dog business, and directly I got home I began making preparations for my get-away last night. If you'd all only have come half an hour later than you did—That's what made me so mad—just another half hour later, mind you, and I would have been away—en route for the Coast by the night train."

Presently Kilbride threw aside his pen and straightened up. "Now, listen, Gully!" he said. And he read out the confession that he had composed from the main facts of the prisoner's remarkable statement.

“Yes!” muttered Gully thoughtfully, as the inspector finished. “Yes, that will do, Kilbride. Give me the pen, please, and I will sign it. . . .”

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He proceeded to affix his signature, continuing with a sort of deadly composure: "I have endorsed and executed many death-warrants in my time—in my capacity of Deputy-Sheriff—I little thought that some day I might be called upon to sign my own . . . which this document virtually is. . . ."

He reared himself up to his huge, gaunt height, and with a sweeping glance at his captors added: "Nothing remains for me now I imagine, but to shake hands with—Radcliffe.[1] . . ."

And his dreadful voice died away like a single grim note of a great, deep-toned bell, tolled perchance in some prison-yard.

"*Eshcorrt!* Get ready!" boomed out Sergeant Slavin's harsh command. The party was on the station platform. Yorke and McSporran fell in briskly on either side of their heavily-manacled prisoner, and stood watching the distant lights of the oncoming east-bound train as it rounded the Davidsburg bend.

One last despairing glance Gully cast about him at the all familiar surroundings, then he raised his fettered hands on high and lifted up his great voice:

"I have striven! I have striven!—and now!—Oh! there is no God! Bear witness there is no God! No God! . . ." he cried to the heavens.

The wild, harsh, dreadful blasphemy rang far and wide out into the night, floating over the nearby river and finally dying away a ghastly murmur up among the timber-lined spurs of Crag Canon.

And a huge, gaunt lobo wolf, lying at the crest of the draw, flung up his gray head and howled back his awful note—seemingly in echo: "There is no God! no God!"

[1] Note by Author—Canada's official executioner at this period.

CHAPTER XVI

"Feel my pulse, sir, if you want to,
but it ain't much use to try—"

"Never say that," said the Surgeon,
as he smothered down a sigh:

"Chuck a brace, for it won't do, man,
for a soldier to say die!"

"What you say don't make no diffrence, Doctor,
an'—you wouldn't lie. . . ."

"THE OLD SERGEANT"

“Git there! Come a-Haw-r-r, then! Whoa!” With a flourish, Constable Miles Sloan, the Regimental Teamster, swung the leaders of his splendid four-in-hand and pulled up at the front entrance of the Holy Cross Hospital. Slewng around on his high box-seat he addressed himself to the drag’s occupants, Slavin and Yorke.

“I don’t know whether they will let you see him, or not,” he remarked doubtfully, “he’s a pretty sick man.”

“We will chance ut, anyway,” mumbled Slavin, as he and Yorke climbed out of the rig. “Ye’d best wait awhile, Miles! We shan’t be long.”

Quietly—very quietly, Sister Marthe opened the door of room Number Fifty-six, and with list-slippered noiselessness stepped out into the corridor.

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"Oh, Mon Dieu!" she ejaculated, startled at the sudden apparition of two scarlet-coated figures standing motionless outside the door, "Oh, m'sieurs, 'ow you fright me!" and the expressive eyes under the white coif and the shoulders and supple hands of the French-Canadian Nursing-Sister made great play.

Yorke saluted her with grave courtesy. "Sister," he said anxiously, "how is Constable Redmond doing? Can we see him?"

She glanced irresolutely a moment at the handsome, imploring countenance of the speaker, and then her gaze flickered to his huge companion. The silent, wistful appeal she read in the latter's grim, cadaverous face decided her.

"*Eheu!*" she said softly, "'e is a ver' seeck man . . . but come then, m'sieurs, if you wish it!"

Cautiously they tip-toed into the room behind her.

Yes! They decided, he was a "seeck" man all right! So sick that he could not raise his flushed, hollow-cheeked young face from the pillow to salute his comrades with his customary impious bonhomie. Now, gabbling away to himself in the throes of delirium, ever his feverish eyes stared beyond the hospital-walls westwards to Davidsburg.

With his brow contracted with an expression of vague worry, he was living over and over again the memorable night in which he had gotten his wound.

"Slavin!—Yorkey!" he kept repeating, in tones of such yearning entreaty that moved those individuals more than they cared to show. Yes, they were both of them there, standing by the side of his cot; but the poor sufferer's unseeing eyes betrayed no recognition.

The deep sorrow that oppressed Slavin and Yorke just then those worthies rarely—if ever—alluded to afterwards. Passing the love of women is the unspoken, indefinable spirit of true comradeship that exists between some men.

For one brief, soul-baring moment the comrades stared at each other, their self-conscious faces reflecting mutually their inmost feelings; then Yorke turned to Sister Marthe.

"What does the Doctor say?" he whispered anxiously.

The nurse was about to make answer when the door was softly opened and that gentleman entered the room, accompanied by Captain Bargrave and Inspector Kilbride.

Involuntarily, from long habit of discipline, Slavin and Yorke, stiffened to "attention" in the presence of their superiors, until, with a kindly, yet withal slightly imperious gesture, the

O.C. mutely signified them to relax their formal attitude. The Regimental Surgeon, Dr. Sampson, a tall, gray-moustached, pleasant-faced man, nodded to them familiarly and proceeded to make minute examination of his patient's wound. From time to time he questioned and issued low-voiced instructions to Sister Marthe. Perfectly motionless, the grave-eyed quartette of policemen stood grouped around the cot, silently awaiting the physician's verdict.

Throughout, poor Redmond had continued to toss and rave incessantly. Much of his babbling was incoherent and fragmentary—breaking off short in the middle of a sentence or dying away in a mumbling, indistinct murmur. At intervals though, his voice rang out with startling clearness.

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"Ah-a-a! Here he is!" he cried out suddenly, "Gully!"—all eyes were centred on the flushed, unquiet face and restless hands. There seemed a curious, morbid fascination in watching the workings of that sub-conscious mind. "No use, Gully! You can't make it from there!"—the twitching hands made a motion as of levelling a carbine—"No use, man! I've got you covered. . . . You' better give in! . . ."

He paused for a space, panting feverishly, then his eyes became wilder and his speech more rapid.

"No! no! Gully!" he gasped out imploringly, "it's Yorkey, I tell you—oh, don't pick off Yorkey! . . . Drink? . . ."—the unnaturally bright eyes stared unseeingly at the motionless figure of the O.C., standing at the foot of the cot—"Not so much—now—since—looking after him. . . . Not a bad chap. . . . We fought once. . . . Yes, Sir! . . . had—hell of a fight! . . . Pax? . . . sure!—bless you!—buried ruddy hatchet—auld lang syne—Slavin. . . . St. Agnes' Eve! . . . How he sings—! Oh, shut up, Yorkey!—Sings, I tell you—! Hark! . . . that's him singin' now—Listen! . . . What? . . . it's Stevenson's 'Requiem'. . . . Burke! Burke! . . . the —'s always singin' that . . . goes—"

And the weak, fretful voice shrilled up in a quavering falsetto—

"Under the wide—and—starry sky Dig—the grave, and—let me—lie; Glad did I—live, and—gladly die, And I laid—me down with—a w——"

The shaky, pitiful tones died away in vague, incoherent mumblings.

Yorke uttered a queer choking sound in his throat, and turned his face away from the little group. Slavin, in silent comprehending sympathy, laid a huge hand on the other's shoulder to steady him. In customary British fashion, the O.C. and the Inspector strove to mask their emotions under an exaggerated grimness of mien, only their eyes betraying their feelings. The former, toying with his sweeping, fair moustache in agitated fashion, gazed drearily around the sick-room till his stern, yet kindly old eyes finally came to rest upon a framed scriptural quotation which was hanging on the wall above the head of the cot.

In corpulent, garish, black, red and gold German text the inscription ran:

At even, when the sun was set, The sick, O Lord, around Thee lay; Oh in what divers pains they met! Oh in what joy they went away!

Abstractedly, the old soldier read and re-read the verse till his eyes ached, and he was forced to lower them and meet the tell-tale ones of Kilbride.

The Doctor, with a final satisfied scrutiny of his patient's wound, which he had laid bare, bade the nurse dress it afresh, then, beckoning to the others, he withdrew from the

room, followed by the O.C. and his subordinates. The Doctor's first words reassured them in no little degree.

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"Oh, I've good hopes of him," he said. "He seems to be doing all right. He'll pull around—that is, unless any unforeseen complications set in. It's that journey down here yesterday that's upset him. Absolutely necessary under the circumstances, of course, but—terribly hard on a man in his condition. I think it'll be best for nobody to visit him—for awhile anyway . . . must be kept as quiet as possible. Well! let's have a look at the others!"

The remaining wounded men occupied a large, semi-private ward lower down the corridor. Of these last Hardy's case was by far the most serious. He had been shot through the body; the high-pressure Luger bullet luckily missing any vital organ. McCullough had been drilled through the calf of his left leg, Davis through the arm, and Belt had had the knuckles stripped from his right hand. All of them were resting quietly, though weak from loss of blood and the train journey,

The O.C. and Kilbride remained for a short time in the ward, manifesting much kindly sympathy for the injured men, then, deeming that perhaps the party was retarding the nurses' ministrations, the O.C. withdrew, beckoning his subordinates to follow him.

Slavin and Yorke walked slowly down the hospital steps and climbed into the Police drag again. Sloan gathered up his lines and swung around on his high seat.

"Hullo!" he remarked sleepily. "Here you are again, eh? Begun to think you were both in there for keeps! Well, did you see him?"

"Yes!" answered Yorke tonelessly, avoiding the teamster's eyes, "We've seen him. Home, James!"

Firm, measured footsteps sounded in the hospital corridor and halted with a jingle of spurs outside the door of room Number Fifty-six.

"Come aboard!" came the clear, boyish voice of its occupant, in response to a knuckle-tattoo on the panel, and the visitors, Slavin and Yorke, entered.

Redmond, sitting up in bed, comfortably propped with pillows, threw aside the magazine he had been reading and greeted the new-comers jovially and with a light in his eyes which did the hearts of those worthies good to see.

A month's careful nursing and absolute quiet had transformed their wounded comrade into a somewhat different being from the delirious patient they had beheld when last they stood in that room. Allowing for a slight emaciation and the inevitable hospital pallor, he appeared to be well on the road to convalescence.

"Sit at ease!" he said, with a fair semblance of his old grin. "Smoke up if you want to, they don't kick about it here. I've tried it but it tastes rotten as yet. Well! What's doin' in L?" (He referred to the Division.)

“Hell, yu’ mane,” corrected Slavin grimly, as he and Yorke proceeded to divest themselves of their side-arms and unbutton their tunics. “Not much doin’ now, but—later, p’raps. . . .”

“Just got back from Supreme Court,” explained Yorke. “Gully! . . . He’s to be ‘bumped off’ this day-month. . . .”

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There came a long, tense silence.

“G—d!” broke out Yorke suddenly, arousing Redmond out of the deep reverie into which he had sunk on receipt of the news—“the look on that Eugene Aram face of his when the jury filed in and threw the book at him! I can’t forget it somehow.”

“Well! yeh want tu thin!” remarked Slavin bluntly. “Quit ut! . . . d’ju hear? . . . ’Tis no sort av talk, that, for a sick room. . . .”

And hereafter they all avoided the sinister subject.

Presently McCullough came limping in on his crutches, and ere long that wily individual succeeded with his customary ingenuity in inveigling the company into a facetious barrack-room argument. Later they commenced relating racy stories.

Slavin’s deep-set eyes began to twinkle and glow, as he unburdened himself of a lengthy narrative concerning a furlough he had spent in his native land many years back, in which Ballymeen Races, a disreputable “welshing” bookmaker, himself, a jug of whiskey and a blackthorn stick were all hopelessly mixed in one grand Hibernian tangle.

“Beat ut, he did, over hedge an’ bog an’ ditch, wid all our money, th’ dhirrty dog. But I cud run tu, in thim days, an’ whin I caught up I shure did play a tchune on th’ nob av um!” concluded the sergeant thoughtfully. In pursuance of his daily round of the wards, Dr. Sampson presently came swinging in amongst them and saluted the party with his usual breezy bonhomie. A universal favourite with the members of the Force his entry was acclaimed with delight. They promptly bade him sit down and contribute—a la Boccaccio—to their impromptu Decameron, which request he (sad to relate) complied with.

Amid the roar of laughter that greeted the Doctor’s last bon mot, that gentleman looked ruefully at his watch and prepared to depart.

“Twenty past twelve!” he ejaculated, “and I’ve got four more patients to see yet. . . ! Behold the retarding influences of bad company!”

“Say, Doctor,” enquired Yorke, “how’s Hardy doing? Is he bucking up at all? He was pretty down in the mouth last time I saw him.”

The Doctor’s genial countenance clouded slightly. “Well, no!” he said, gravely, “he’s not doing well at all. I’ve been rather worried over him lately. The man’s relapsed into a curious state of inertia—seems incapable of being roused. Organically he’s nothing to fear now; I’ll stake my professional reputation on that. But when a man gets down like he is now, why, the mind often reacts on the body with serious results. If he was in a tropical climate he’d snuff out like a candle. That’s all that’s retarding his otherwise certain recovery now—if we could only——”

Here, McCullough, who had been an interested listener broke in. “Rouse him, Doctor?” he queried, “you say he wants rousing? . . . Is that all? . . . All right then! . . . I know him better than you do—I’ll bet you I’ll rouse him!” he concluded a trifle brutally.

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And he swung off on his crutches and presently levered himself into the ward where Hardy lay.

In actual bodily recovery the latter's physical condition fully equalled Redmond's, but the brooding, listless demeanor of the patient confirmed only too well the Doctor's diagnosis. Now, sunk in the coma of utter dejection, Hardy was lying back on his pillows like a man weary of life.

Sometime earlier, in response to his earnest solicitations, he had been allowed to have his beloved parrot in hospital with him. All day long the disreputable-looking bird gabbled away contentedly as it climbed around in its cage, which had been placed on a small table alongside the cot.

McCullough's first move was to resort to the never-failing expedient of arousing the parrot's ire by puffing tobacco-smoke into its cage. Mechanically the outraged bird responded with a shocking blast of invective, winking rapidly its white parchment-lidded eyes and swinging excitedly to and fro on its perch.

Hardy admonished the joker—lethargically, but with a certain degree of malevolence in his weary tones.

"Aw, chack it, Mac!" he drawled. "W'y can't yer let th' bleedin' bird alone? Yer know 'e don't like that bein' done t'im. Jes' 'awk t'im tellin' yer as much!"

McCullough turned on his crutches and leered awhile upon the speaker with a sort of mournful triumph, than he lifted up his voice in a very fair imitation of Hardy's own unmusical wail——

"Old soldiers never die, never die, never die,
Old soldiers never die—they simply fade aw-ay."

"I don't think!" he concluded *sotto voce* to Davis, as that individual, sitting down on the next cot began preparing his wounded arm for the ministrations of Sister Marthe who had just entered the ward.

"No use!" McCullough rambled on. "I tell yu' th' man's as good as 'gone up.' Harry. . . . Well! I'll have old Kissiwasti when he pegs out anyway. I won't half smoke-dry th' old beggar then! I'll teach him to swear. . . .!"

"Eh! . . . 'Ere, wot abaht it?"

The cockney's voice held no trace of lethargy now. The sharply-uttered, vindictive query was matched by the blazing eyes which were regarding the farrier-corporal with undisguised hostility.

“Wot abaht wot?” mimicked McCullough, though his heart smote him for the cold-blooded evasion.

“Wot abaht wot you sed abaht me. . . ?”

“Well, wot abaht it. . . ?”

Speechless with rage, for a moment Hardy gazed into the other’s nonchalant mask-like visage, then, with a gesture of maniacal impotence, he raised his clenched fists high above his head.

Sister Marthe now judged it high time to intervene. During the enactment of this little tableau she had stood looking on in mute bewilderment. Despite her imperfect knowledge of English, and especially the vernacular, she had a shrewd intuition of what had passed between the two men.

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Seizing McCullough by the arm, despite his protestations of injured innocence, she gently, but firmly, escorted him out of the ward.

“Vas! vas!—Now you go, M’sieu McCullough! . . . out of ze ward right-away! . . . Vat you say—vat you do—I do not know, but you ’ave excite ’im ’orrible! . . . Oh, *pardonnez-moi*, Docteur!” she ejaculated, as she bumped into that gentleman in the corridor.

“Hullo!” said the latter inquiringly, as he remarked the little nurse’s flushed, angry face. “What’s up, Sister Marthe?”

For answer, that irate lady pointed accusingly to McCullough. That worthy, his questionable experiment accomplished, was retreating up the corridor as fast as his crutches could carry him.

“First, Docteur,” began the nurse indignantly, “’e blow smoke in ze eye of ze parrot, then ’e turn roun’ to *pauvre* M’sieu ’Ardy an’ ’e sing—oh, I ’ave not ze English, but ’e *blague* ’im so—

*“Vieux soldats ne meurent! jamais! jamais! jamais!
Vieux soldats ne meurent jamais!—ils simplement passent!”*

“An’ M’sieu ’Ardy ’e say: ‘Vat about?’ an’ then ’e raise ’is two ’ands e Ciel—so! an’ ’e tell Le Bon Dieu all about it. Oh, ’ow ’e pray! Ecoutez! Docteur! you can ’ear ’im now! . . .”

And awhile Doctor Sampson listened, a grim smile lurking around the corners of his firm mouth, as he leaned against the open door of the ward.

“Praying, Sister?” he ejaculated. “It’s the queerest kind of praying I’ve ever heard. But is it him—or is it the parrot?”

Two days later he remarked to the O.C. and Kilbride: “I’m glad to be able to report a decided improvement in that man Hardy’s condition. His pulse is stronger, his appetite is increasing and—he’s beginning to grouse. That old ruffian of a farrier-corporal, McCullough, was right, begad!—he knew the man better than I did. As a general rule I’m inclined to be rather sceptical of such drastic experiments, but in certain cases, er—”

“Something of the sort might be beneficial if applied to young Redmond, too,” remarked the O.C., testily. “He’s down in the dumps now; though to give him his due . . . he tries hard not to show it whenever I happen to be in the hospital. Dudley, my Orderly-room sergeant, is leaving next month—time-expired—so I thought I was conferring a great favour on the boy by promising him the step-up—good staff appointment—give him a chance to recuperate thoroughly. But no!—my young gentleman courteously declines my munificent offer. Nothing must serve him but he must go back to me Irish ’ginthleman’ and that d——d dissipated scamp of a Yorke.”

“It’s the spirit of comradeship,” remarked Kilbride quietly. “If I might suggest, Sir, . . . I think it would be better if you do decide to let him go back there. They pull well together and do good work, those three.”

“Ullo, Reddy!” called out Constable Hardy, as he directed his wobbly steps towards the bench on the hospital balcony where George was seated, “ow long ‘ave you bin up ‘ere? Th’ O.C. an’ Kilbride was round jes’ now. You didn’t see ‘em, eh?”

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"No," answered Redmond listlessly. And thereupon he relapsed into moody silence.

"Wy, wot's up?" enquired Hardy presently, scanning the other's downcast countenance. "Wot's th' matter wiv you, son? . . . you don't look 'appy! . . ."

"You bet I'm not, either!" burst out George suddenly. "The Old Man's offered me Dudley's job, but I don't want a staff job. I want to go back to Davidsburg. Who cares to be stuck around the Post?"

"Me for one!" retorted the old soldier grinning, "Jes' now, anyway. Listen, son! Th' Old Man 'e sez to me: 'Ardy!' 'e sez, 'you've bin 'it pretty bad and I find you deserve a softer class of dewty than goin' back t' prisoner's escort. I think I'll recommend you for Provo'-Sorjint, in charge o' th' Guard-room, w'en you're able t' return t' dewty,' 'e sez."

With an effort Redmond roused himself to the point of congratulating the Cockney upon his prospective promotion. He had no desire to act as a wet blanket on such an auspicious occasion as this, his own troubles notwithstanding.

"That ain't all," continued Hardy, with a gloating chuckle. "Th' Old Man, 'e sez 'Belt's bein' invalided, McCullough's gettin' 'is third stripe, an' Dyvis is goin' dahn t' th' Corp'ril's Class at Regina, but that there young Redmond worries me! I don't know wot t' do abaht 'im,' 'e sez—jes' like that—sorter kind-like—not a bit like th' O.C. o' a Division torkin' t' a buck private.

"'Beg yer pardon, Sir!' I sez, 'but if you let 'im go back t' Dyvidsburg I fink 'e'll be quite contented. Seems like 'e wants t' be wiv Sorjint Slavin an' Constable Yorke agin.'

"'Fink so?' sez 'e, pullin' 'is oweld moustache, 'I sure do, Sir,' I sez. 'So be it, then!' 'e sez, turnin' t' Kilbride, but th' Inspector 'e sez nothin':—'e on'y larfs. An' then they went away."

Redmond, giving vent to a delighted oath, came out of his sulks on the instant.

"Hardy!" he cried, "you're a gentleman! . . ."

"Nay!" was the other's disclaimer. "A dranken oweld soweljer, son . . . that's all."

But Redmond heard him not. With elbows resting upon the balcony-rail he was looking beyond the Elbow Bridge, beyond Shagnappi Point—westwards to Davidsburg, his face registering the supreme content of a man who had just attained his heart's desire.