

# **The Fur Bringers eBook**

## **The Fur Bringers by Hulbert Footner**

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## THE FUR BRINGERS

### CHAPTER I.

*June fever.*

The firm of Minot & Doane sat on the doorsill of its store on Lake Miwasa smoking its after-supper pipes.

It was seven o'clock of a brilliant day in June. The westering sun shone comfortably on the world, and a soft breeze kept the mosquitoes at bay.

Moreover, the tobacco was of the best the store afforded; yet there was no peace between the two. They bickered like schoolboys kept indoors.

"How many link-skins in the bale you made up today?" asked Peter Minot.

"Three-seventy-two," his young partner answered in a surly tone that was in itself a provocation.

"I made it three-seventy-three," said Peter curtly.

"What's the difference?" demanded Ambrose Doane.

"Seven dollars," said Peter dryly.

"Well, you can claim the extra one, can't you," snarled Ambrose, "and make an allowance if it's found short?"

"That's not the way I like to do business!"

"Too bad about you!"

The older man frowned darkly, clamped his teeth upon his pipe, and held his tongue.

His silence was an additional aggravation to the other. "What do you want me to do," he burst out with an amount of passion absurdly disproportionate to the matter at issue, "cut it open and count it over and bale it up again?"

"To blazes with it!" said Peter. "I want you to keep your temper!"

"I'm sick of this!" cried Ambrose with the wilful abandon of one hopelessly in the wrong. "You're at me from morning till night! Nothing I do is right. Why can't you leave me alone?"

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Peter took his pipe out of his mouth and looked at his young partner in astonishment. His face turned a dull brick color and his blue eyes snapped.

He spoke in a voice of portentous softness: "Who the hell do you think you are? A little gorrarnighty? To make a mistake is natural; to fly into a temper when it is discovered is childish. What's the matter with you these past ten days, anyway? A man can't look at you but you begin to bark and froth. You'd best go off by yourself a while and eat grass to cool your blood!"

Having delivered himself, Peter pulled deeply at his pipe and gazed across the lake with a scowl of honest resentment.

It was a long speech to come from Peter, and it went unexpectedly to the point. Ambrose was silenced. For a long time neither spoke.

Little by little the angry red faded out of Peter's cheeks and neck, and his forehead smoothed itself. Stealing a glance at young Ambrose, the blue eyes began to twinkle.

"Say!" he said suddenly.

Ambrose twisted petulantly and muttered in his throat.

"Stick out your tongue!" commanded Peter.

Ambrose stared at him in angry stupefaction. "What the deuce—"

"No," said Peter, "you're not sick. Your eyeballs is as clean as new milk; your skin is as pink as a spanked baby. No, you're not sick, so to speak!"

There was another silence, Ambrose squirming a little and blushing under Peter's calm, speculative gaze.

"Have you anything against me?" Peter finally inquired. "If you have, out with it!"

The young man shook his head unhappily.

"Forget it then!" cried Peter with a scornful, kindly grin. "You ornery worthless Slavi, you! You Shushwap! You Siwash! Change your face or you'll give the dog distemper!"

Ambrose laughed sheepishly and stole a glance at his partner. There was pain in his bold eyes, and the wish to bare it to his friend as to a surgeon; but he dreaded Peter's laughter.

There was another long silence. The atmosphere was now much clearer.

Peter, having come to a conclusion, removed his pipe and spoke again: "I know what's the matter with you."

"What?" muttered Ambrose.

"You've got the June fever."

Ambrose made no comment.

"I mind it when I was your age," Peter continued; "when the ice goes out of the lake and the poplar-trees hang out their little earrings, that's when a man catches it—when Molly Cottontail puts on her brown jacket and Skinny Weasel a yellow one. The south wind brings the microbe along with it, and it multiplies in the warm earth. Gee! It makes even an old feller like me poetical. After six months of winter it's hell!"

Still Ambrose kept his eyes down and said nothing.

Peter smoked on, and his eyes became reminiscent. "I mind it well," he continued, "the second spring I was in the country. The first year I didn't notice it so much, but the second year—when the warm weather come I was like a wild man. I saw red! I wanted to fight every man I laid eyes on. I felt like I would go clean off my head if I couldn't smash something!"

## Page 3

Ambrose broke in on Peter's reminiscences. He seemed scarcely to have heard.

"I don't know what's the matter with me!" he cried bitterly. "I can't seem to settle down to anything lately. I've got no use for myself at all. I get so cranky, anybody that speaks to me I want to punch them. God knows I need company, too. It is certainly square of you to put up with me the way you do. I appreciate it—"

"Aw, bosh!" muttered Peter.

"I've tried to work it off!" cried Ambrose. "You know I've worked, though I've generally made a mess of things because I can't keep my mind on anything. My head goes round like a top. Half the time I'm in a daze. I feel as if I was going crazy. I don't know what is the matter with me!"

"Twenty-five years old," murmured Peter; "in the pink of condition! I'm telling you what's the matter with you. It's a plain case of June fever. Ask any of the fellows up here."

"What am I going to do?" said Ambrose. "As it is, I work till I'm ready to drop."

"I mind when I had it," said Peter, "I came to a camp of French half-breeds on Musquasepi, and I saw Eva Lajeunesse for the first time. It was like a blow between the eyes. You do not know what she looked like then. I didn't think about it this way or that; I just up and married her. I was glad to get her!"

"Man to man I'll not deny I ain't been sorry sometimes," he went on; "who ain't, sometimes? But, on the whole, after all these years, how could I have done any better? She's good enough for me. A man worries about his children sometimes; but I guess if they go straight there's a place for them, though they are dusky. Eva, she has her bad points, but she's been real good to me. How can I be but grateful!"

This was a rare and unusual confidence for Peter to offer his young partner. Ambrose, flattered and embarrassed, did not know what to say, and said nothing.

He was right, for if he had referred to it, Peter would have been obliged to turn it into a joke. As it was, they smoked on in understanding silence. Finally Peter went on:

"You see, I gave right in. You're different; you want to fight the thing. Blest if I know what to tell you."

"Eva and I don't get on very well," said Ambrose shamefacedly. "She doesn't like me around the house. But I respect her. You know that."

"Sure," said Peter.



"I couldn't do it, Peter," Ambrose went on after a while with seeming irrelevance—howsoever Peter understood. "God knows it's not because I think myself any better than anybody else, or because I think a man does for himself by marrying a—by marrying up here. But I just couldn't do it, that's all."

"No offense," said Peter. "Every man must chop his own trail. I won't say but what you're right. But what are you going to do? A man can't live and die alone."

## Page 4

"I don't know," said Ambrose.

"Tell you what," said Peter; "you take the furs out on the steamboat."

"I won't," said Ambrose quickly. "I went out last year. It's your turn."

"But I'm contented here," said Peter.

Ambrose shook his head. "It wouldn't do me any real good," he said. "It makes it worse after. It did last year. I couldn't bring a white wife up here."

"Well, sir, it's a problem," said Peter with a weighty shake of the head.

This serious, sentimental kind of talk was a strain on both partners. Ambrose made haste to drop the subject.

"I believe I'll start the new warehouse to-morrow," he said. "I like to work with logs. First, I must measure the ground and make a working plan."

Peter was not sorry to be diverted. "Hadn't we better get lumber from the 'Company' mill?" he suggested. "Looks like up to date somehow."

"A board shack looks rotten in the woods?" said Ambrose.

"You're so gol-durn artistic," said Peter quizzically.

Minot & Doane's store was a long log shack with a sod roof sprouting a fine crop of weeds. The original shack had been added to on one side, then on the other. There was a pleasing diversity of outline in the main building and its wings. The whole crouched low on the ground as though for warmth.

Three crooked little windows and three doors so low that a short man had to duck his head under the lintels, faced the lake. The middle door gave ingress to the store proper; the door on the right was the entrance to Peter Minot's household quarters; while that on the left opened to a large room used variously for stores and bunks.

Farther to the left stood the little shack that housed Ambrose Doane in bachelor solitude, and a few steps beyond, the long, low, log stable for the use of the freighters in winter.

Seen from the lake the low, spreading buildings in the rough clearing among gigantic pines were not unpleasing. Rough as they were, they fulfilled the first aim of all architecture; they were suitable to the site.

The traveler by water landed on a stony beach, climbed a low bank and followed a crooked path to the door of the store. On either hand potato and onion patches flourished among the stumps.

From the door-sill where the partners sat, the farther shore of the lake could be seen merely as a delicate line of tree tops poised in the air.

Off to the right their own shore made out in a shallow, sweeping curve, ending half a mile away in a bold hill-point where the Company's post of Fort Moultrie had stood for two hundred years commanding the western end of the lake and its outlet, Great Buffalo River.

To one who should compare the outward aspects of the two establishments, Minot & Doane's offered a ludicrous contrast to the imposing white buildings of Fort Moultrie, arranged military-wise on the grassy promontory; nevertheless, as is not infrequently the case elsewhere, the humbler store did the larger trade.



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The coming of Peter Minot ten years before had worked a kind of revolution in the country. He had brought war into the very stronghold of the arrogant fur monopoly, and had succeeded in establishing himself next door. The results were far-reaching. Formerly the Indian sat humbly on the step with his furs until the trader was pleased to open his door; whereas now when the Indian landed, the trader ran down the hill with outstretched hand.

Far and wide Minot & Doane were known as the “free-traders”; and some of their customers journeyed for three hundred miles to trade in the little log store.

The partners were roused by a shrill hail from up the shore. Grateful for the interruption, they hastened to the edge of the bank.

Summer is the dull season in the fur trade. Most of the firm’s customers were “pitching off” among the hills, and visitors were rare enough to be notable.

“Poly Goussard,” said Ambrose after an instant’s examination of the dug-out nosing alongshore. Ambrose’s keenness of vision was already known in a land of keen-eyed men.

“Taking his woman to see her folks,” added Peter.

Soon the long, slender canoe grounded on the stones below them. It contained in addition to all the worldly goods of the family, a swarthy French half-breed, his Cree wife and three coppery infants in pink calico sunbonnets.

The man climbing over his family indiscriminately, landed and came up the bank with outstretched hand. The woman and children remained sitting like statues in their narrow craft, staring unwinkingly at the white men.

Mrs. Goussard as a full-blooded Cree was considerably below Peter’s half-breed wife in the social scale, and she knew better than to make a call uninvited. Even in the north, woman, the conservator, maintains the distinctions.

“Stay all night,” urged Peter when formal greetings had been exchanged. “Bring your family ashore.”

Poly Goussard shook his head. Poly had a chest like a barrel, a face the color of Baldwin apples and a pair of rolling, gleaming, sloe-black eyes. His head of curly black hair was famous; some one had called him the “Newfoundland dog.”

“I promise my wife I sleep wit’ her folks to-night,” he said. “It is ten miles yet. I jus’ come ashore for a little talk.”

“Fine!” said Peter, “we’re spoiling for news. Come on up to the store and have a cigar.”



Seven hundred miles from the railway a cigar is something of a phenomenon. Poly Goussard displayed twenty dazzling teeth and made haste to follow. The three men entered the store and found seats on boxes and bales.

## CHAPTER II.

*Fort enterprise.*

"Me, I work all winter at Fort Enterprise," said Poly.

"So I heard," said Peter. "You've had quite a trip."

The rosy half-breed shrugged. "It is easy. Jus' floatin' down the Spirit River six days."

## Page 6

"What kind of a job did they give you at Enterprise?" asked Peter.

"I drove a team, me, haulin' logs to the saw-mill," said Poly. "There is plentee work at Fort Enterprise."

"The Company's most profitable post," remarked Peter to Ambrose. "They have everything their own way there." The look which accompanied this suggested to Ambrose it would be a good place for Minot & Doane to start a branch.

"What did you think of the place, Poly?" asked Ambrose.

The half-breed flung up his hands and dramatically rolled his eyes.

"*Wa! Wa! Towasasuak!* It is a gran' place! Jus' lak outside! Trader him live in great big house all make of smooth boards and paint' yellow and red lak the sun! Never I see before such a tall house, and so many rooms inside full of fine chairs and tables so smoot' and shiny.

"He is so reech he put blankets on the floor to walk on, w'at you call carrpitt. Every day he has a white cloth on the table, and a little one to wipe his hands! I have seen it! And silver dishes!"

"There is style for you!" said Peter, with a whimsical roll of his eye in Ambrose's direction.

"There is moch farming by the river at Fort Enterprise," Poly went on; "and plaintee grain grow. There is a mill to grind flour. Steam mak' it go lak the steamboat. They eat eggs and butter at Fort Enterprise, and think not'ing of it. Christmas I have turkey and cranberry sauce. I am going back, me."

"They say the trader John Gaviller is a hard man," suggested Peter.

Poly shrugged elaborately. "Maybe. He owe me not'ing. Me, I would not farm for him nor trade my fur at his store. Those people are his slaves. But he pay a strong man good wages. I will tak' his wages and snap my fingers!

"But wait!" cried Poly with a sparkling eye. "The 'mos' won'erful thing I see at Fort Enterprise—*Wa!*—the laktrek light! Her shine in little bottles lak pop, but not so big. John Gaviller, him clap his hands, so! and *Wa!* she shine!

"Indians, him t'ink it is magic. But I am no fool. I know John Gaviller make the laktrek in an engine in the mill. Me, I have seen that engine. I see blue fire inside lak falling stars.

“Gaviller send the laktrek to the store inside a wire. He send some to his house too. They said it cook the dinner, but I think that is a lie. If a man touch that wire they say he will jomp to the roof! Me? I did not try it.”

Peter chuckled. “Good man!” he said.

The wonders of Fort Enterprise were not new to Ambrose. Other travelers the preceding summer had brought the same tale. With the air that politeness demanded he only half listened, and pursued his own thoughts.

On the other hand Peter, who delighted in his humble friends, drew out Poly fully. The half-breed told about the bringing in of the winter’s catch of fur; of the launching of the great steamboat for the summer season, and many other things.

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"Enterprise is sure a wonderful place!" said Peter encouragingly.

"There is something else," said Poly proudly. "At Fort Enterprise there is a white girl!"

The simple sentence had the effect of the ringing of an alarm going inside the dreamy Ambrose. He drew a careful mask over his face, and leaned farther into the shadow.

"So!" said Peter with a glance in the direction of his young partner. "That is news! Who is she?"

"Colina Gaviller, the trader's daughter," said Poly.

"Is she real white?" asked Peter cautiously.

"White as raspberry flowers!" asseverated Poly with extravagant gestures; "white as clouds in the summer! white as sugar! Her hair is lak golden-rod; her eyes blue lak the lake when the wind blows over it in the morning!"

Peter glanced again at his partner, but Ambrose was farthest from the window, and there was nothing to be read in his face.

"Sure," said Peter; "but was her mother a white woman?"

"They say so," said Poly. "Her long tam dead."

"When did the girl come?" asked Peter.

"Las' fall before the freeze-up," said Poly. "She come down the Spirit River from the Crossing on a raf'. Michel Trudeau and his wife, they bring her. Her fat'er he not know she comin'. Her fat'er want her live outside and be a lady. She say 'no!' She say ladies mak' her sick.' Michel tell me she say that.

"She want always to ride and paddle a canoe and hunt. Michel say she is more brave as a man! John Gaviller say she got go out again this summer. She say 'no!' She is not afraid of him. Me, I t'ink she lak to be the only white girl in the country, lak a queen."

"How old is she?" inquired Peter.

"Twenty years, Michel say," answered Poly. "Ah! she is beautiful!" he went on. "She walk the groun' as sof' and proud and pretty as fine yong horse! She sit her horse like a flower on its stem. Me and her good frens too. She say she lak me for cause I am simple. Often in the winter she ride out wit' my team and hunt in the bush while I am load up."

"What did Eelip say to that?" Peter inquired facetiously. Eelip was Poly's wife.

“Eelip?” queried Poly, surprised. “Colina is the trader’s daughter,” he carefully explained. “She live in the big house. I would cut off my hand to serve her.”

“I suppose Miss Colina has plenty of suitors?” said Peter.

Ambrose hung with suspended breath on the reply.

Poly shook his curly pate. “Who is there for her?” he demanded. “Macfarlane the policeman is too fat; the doctor is too old, his hair is white; the parson is a little, scary man. All are afraid of her; her proud eye mak’ a man feel weak inside. There are no ot’er white men there. She is a woman. She mus’ have a master. There is no man in the country strong enough for that!”

There was a brief silence in the cabin while Poly relighted his cigar. Ambrose had given no sign of being affected by Poly’s tale beyond a slight quivering of the nostrils. But Peter watching him slyly, saw him raise his lids for a moment and saw his dark eyes glowing like coals in a pit. Peter chuckled inwardly, and said:

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"Tell us some more about her."

Ambrose's heart warmed gratefully toward his partner. He thirsted for more like a desert traveler for water, but he dared not speak for fear of what he might betray.

"I will tell you 'ow she save Michel Trudeau's life," said Poly, nothing loath, "I am the first to come down the river this summer or you would hear it before. Many times Michel is tell me this story. Never I heard such a story before. A woman to save a man!"

"Wa! Every Saturday night Michel tell it at the store. And John Gaviller give him two dollars of tobacco, the best. I guess Michel is glad the trader's daughter save him. Old man proud, lak he is save Michel himself!"

Poly Goussard, having smoked the cigar to within half an inch of his lips, regretfully threw the half inch out the door. He paused, and coughed suggestively. A second cigar being forthcoming, he took the time to light it with tenderest care. Meanwhile, Ambrose kicked the bale on which he sat with an impatient heel.

"It was the Tuesday after Easter," Poly finally began. "It was when the men went out to visit their traps again after big time at the fort. There was moch frash snow fall, and heavy going for the dogs. Colina Gaviller she moch friends with Michel Trudeau for because he was bring her in on his raf las' fall.

"Often she go with him lak she go with me. Michel carry her up on his sledge, and she hunt aroun' while he visit his traps. Michel trap up on the bench three mile from the fort. He not get much fur so near, but live home in a warm house, and work for day's wages for John Gaviller."

Poly paragraphed his story with luxurious puffs at the cigar and careful attention to keep it burning evenly.

"So on Tuesday after Easter they go out toget'er. Colina Gaviller ride on the sledge and Michel he break trail ahead. Come to the bench, leave the dogs in a shelter Michel build in a poplar bluff. Michel go to see his traps, and Colina walk away on her snowshoes wit' her little gun.

"Michel not ver' good lok that day. In his first trap find fool-hen catch herself. He is mad. Second trap is little cross-fox; third trap nothin' 'tall!

"Come to fourth trap, wa! see somesing black on the snow! Wa! Wa! Him heart jomp up! Think him got black fox sure! But no! It is too big. Come close and look. What is he catch you think? It is a black bear!

“Everybody know some tam a bear wake up too soon in winter and come out of his hole and roll aroun’ lak he was drunk. He can’t find somesing to eat nowhere, and don’ know what to do!

“This bear him catch his paw in Michel’s little fox trap. It was chain to a little tree. Bear too weak to pull his paw out or break the chain. He lie down lak dead.

“Michel him ver’ mad. Him think got no lok at all after Easter. For ‘cause that bear is poor as a bird out of the egg. Michel mak’ a noise to wake him up. But always he lie still lak dead. Michel think all right.



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“Bam-by he lean over with his knife. Wa! Bear jomp up lak he was burn wit’ fire! Little chain break and before Michel can tak a breath, bear fetch him a crack with the steel trap acrost his head!

“Wa! Wa! Michel’s forehead is bus’ open from here to here lak that! Michel drop his knife in the snow. Him get ver’ sick. Warm blood run all down his eyes, and he can’t see not’ing no more.

“Bear grab Michel round his body and squeeze him pretty near till his eyes jomp out. Michel say a little prayer then. Him say him awful sorry he ain’t confessed this year.

“But always he fight that bear and fight some more. Always he is try get his hands aroun’ that hairy throat. Bear tear Michel’s shoulder with his teeth. Michel feel the hot blood run down inside his shirt and get cold.

“Michel, him always thinkin’ Colina is not far, but he will not call to her. She is only a girl him say; she can’t do not’ing to a crazy bear. Bear hurt her too, maybe, and John Gaviller is mad for that.

“So Michel he jus’ fight. He is ver’ tire’ now. And always they stamping and tumbling and rolling in the snow, and big red spots drop all aroun’.

“Colina, she tell me the end of it. Colina say she is walkin’ sof’ in the poplar bush looking sharp and all tam listen for game. All is ver’ quiet in the bush.

“Bam-by she hear a fonny little noise way off. Twigs crackling, and somesing bumping and tromping in the snow. Colina think it is big game and go quick. Some tam she stop and listen. Bam-by she hear fonny snarling and grunting. She know there is a fight and she is a little scare. But she go more fas’.

“Wa! Wa! What a sight she sec there! Poor Michel he pretty near done. She can’t see his face no more for blood. She think he got no face now. Michel he see her come, and say to her loud as he can: ‘Go way! Go way! You get hurt and John Gaviller give me hell!’

“Colina say not know what to do. Them two turn around so fas’ she ‘fraid to shoot. She run aroun’ and aroun’ them always looking for a chance. Bam-by she see the handle of Michel’s knife in a hole in the snow. She grab it up. She watch her chance. Woof! She stick that bear between the neck and the shoulder!

“That is all!” said Poly. “Bear, him grunt and fall down. Stick his snoot in the snow. Michel crawl away. Colina is fall down too and cry lak a baby. For a little while all three are dead!



“Then Colina wash his wounds with clean snow, and tear up her petticoat for to mak’ bandage. She put him on his snowshoes and drag him back where the dogs is. She bring him quick to the fort. In one week Michel is go to his traps same as ever. That is the story!”

“By God, there’s a woman!” cried Peter. Ambrose said nothing.

When Poly Goussard reembarked in his dug-out a heavy constraint fell upon the two partners.

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Ambrose dreaded to hear Peter call attention to the remarkable coincidence of Poly's story following so close upon their own talk together. He suspected that Peter would want to sit up and thrash the matter to conclusions.

At the bare idea of talking about it Ambrose felt as helpless and sullen as a convicted felon.

In this he underrated Peter's perceptions. Peter had lived in the woods for many years. He intuitively apprehended something of the confusion in the younger man's mind, and he was only anxious to let Ambrose understand that it was not necessary to say anything one way or the other.

But he overdid it a little, and when Ambrose saw that Peter was "on to him," as he would have said, he became still more hang-dog and perverse.

They parted at the door of the store. Peter went off to his family, while Ambrose closed the door of his own little shack behind him, with a long breath of relief.

Feeling as he did, it was torture to be obliged to support the gaze of another's eye, however kindly. So urgent was his need to be alone that he even turned his back on his dog. For a long time the poor beast softly scratched and whined at the closed door unheeded.

Ambrose was busy inside. As it began to grow dark he lit his lamp and carefully pinned a heavy shirt inside his window in lieu of a blind.

Since Peter and his family went to bed with the sun it would be hard to say whom he feared might spy on him. One listening at the door might well have wondered what the activity inside portended.

Later Ambrose opened the door and, putting the dog in, proceeded cautiously to the store. Satisfying himself from the sounds that issued through the connecting door that Peter and his family slept deeply, he lit a candle and quietly robbed the stock of what he required. Then he wrote a note and pinned it beside the store door.

Carrying the bundles back to his cabin, he packed a grub-box and bore it down to the water.

His preparations completed, he went to his shack to bid good-by to his four-footed pal. Job, instantly, comprehending that he was to be left behind, whimpered and nozzled so piteously that Ambrose's heart began to fail.

"I can't take you, old fel'!" he explained. "You're such a common-looking mutt. Of course, I know you're white clear through—but a lady would laugh at you until she knew you!"

Even as he said it his heart accused him of disloyalty. He suddenly changed his mind.

“Come on!” he whispered gruffly. “We’ll chance our luck together. If you open your head I’ll brain you! Wait here a minute.”

Job understood perfectly. He crept down to the lake shore at his master’s feet as quiet as a ghost. Seeing the loaded boat he hopped delightedly into his accustomed place in the bow.

During June it never becomes wholly dark in the latitude of Lake Miwasa. An exquisite dim twilight brooded over the wide water and the pine-walled shore. The stars sparkled faintly in an oxidized silver sea. There was no wind now, but the pines breathed like warm-blooded creatures.

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Ambrose's breast hummed like a violin to the bow of night. The poetic feeling was there, though the expression was prosaic.

"By George, this is fine!" he murmured.

Job's curly tail thumped the gunwale in answer.

"I'm glad I brought you, old fel'," said Ambrose. "I expect I'd go clean off my head if didn't have any one to talk to!"

Job beat a tattoo on the side of the boat and wriggled and whined in his anxiety to reach his master.

"Steady there!" said Ambrose.

Presently he went on: "Three hundred miles! Six days for Poly to come with the current; nine days to go back! Fifteen days at the best! Anything might happen in that time. . . . Poly said no danger from any of the men there. But some one might come down the river! . . . If wishing could bring an aeroplane up north!"

After a silence: "I wish I could get my best suit pressed! . . . It's two years old, anyway. And she's just come in; she knows the styles. . . . Lord, I'll look like a regular roughneck!"

Next morning when Peter Minot threw open the door of the store he found the note pinned to the door-frame. It was brief and to the point:

### DEAR PETE:

You said I ought to go by myself till I felt better. So I'm off. Don't expect me till you see me. Charge me with 50 lbs. flour, 18 lbs. bacon, 20 lbs. rice, 10 lbs. sugar, 5 lbs. prunes, 1/2 lb. tea, 1/2 lb. baking powder, and bag of salt. Please take care of my dog. So long! A. D.

P. S.—I'm taking the dog.

Peter, like all men slow to anger, lost his temper with startling effect. Tearing the note off the door and grinding it under foot, he cursed the runaway from a full heart.

Eva, hearing, hastily called the children indoors, and thrusting them behind her peeped into the store. Peter, purple in the face, was wildly brandishing his arms.

Eva closed the door very softly and gave the children bread and molasses to keep them quiet. Meanwhile the storm continued to rage.

“The young fool! To run off without a word! I’d have let him go gladly if he’d said anything—and given him a good man! But to go alone! He’ll break an arm and die in the bush! And to leave me like this with the year’s outfit due next week!

“I’ll not see him again until cold weather—if I ever see him! Fifty pounds of flour—with his appetite! He’ll starve to death if he doesn’t drown himself first! He’ll never get to Enterprise! Oh, the consummate young ass! Damn Poly Goussard and his romantic stories!”

## **CHAPTER III.**

*Colina.*

John Gaviller and Colina were at breakfast in the big clap-boarded villa at Fort Enterprise.

They were a good-looking pair, and at heart not dissimilar, though it must be taken into account that the same qualities manifest themselves differently in a man of affairs and a romantic, irresponsible young woman.

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They were secretly proud of each other—and quarreled continually. Colina, by virtue of her reckless honesty, frequently got the better of her canny father.

“Well,” he said, now with a gesture of surrender, “if you’re determined to stay here, all right—but you must live differently.”

At the word “must” an ominous gleam shot from under Colina’s lashes.

“What’s the matter with my way of living?” she asked with deceitful mildness.

“This tearing around the country on horseback,” he said. “Going off all day hunting with this man and that—and spending the night in native cabins. As long as I considered you were here on a visit I said nothing—”

“Oh, didn’t you!” murmured Colina sarcastically.

“—But if you are going to make this country your home, you must consider your reputation in the community just the same as anywhere else—more, indeed; we live in a tiny little world here, where our smallest actions are scrutinized and discussed.”

He took a swallow of coffee. Colina played with her food sulkily.

Her silence encouraged him to proceed: “Another thing,” he said with a deprecating smile, “comparatively speaking, I occupy an exalted position now. I am the head of all things, such as they are. Great or small this entails certain obligations on a man. I have to study all my words and acts.

“If you are going to stay here with me I shall expect you to assume your share; to consider my interests, to support me; to play the game as they say. What I object to is your impulsiveness, your outspokenness with the people. Remember, everybody here is your dependent. It is always a mistake to be open and frank with dependents. They don’t understand it, and if they do, they presume upon it.

“Be guided by my experience; no one could justly accuse me of any lack of affability or friendliness in dealing with the people here—but they never know what I am thinking of!”

“Admirable!” murmured Colina, “but I’m not a directors’ meeting!”

“Colina!” said her father indignantly.

“It’s not fair for you to drag that in about my standing by you and supporting you!” she went on warmly. “You know I’ll do that as long as I live! But I must be allowed to do it in my own way. I’m an adult and an individual. I differ from you. I’ve a right to differ from you. It is because these people are my inferiors that I can afford to be perfectly natural

with them. As for their presuming on it, you needn't fear! I know how to take care of that!"

"A little more reserve," murmured her father.

Colina paused and looked at him levelly. "Dad, what a fool you are about me!" she said coolly.

"Colina!" he cried again, and pounded the table.

She met his indignant glance squarely.

"I mean it," she said. "I'm your daughter, am I not?—and mother's? You must know yourself by this time; you must have known mother—you ought to understand me a little but you won't try—you're clever enough in everything else! You've made up an idea for yourself of what a daughter ought to be, and you're always trying to make me fit it!"



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Gaviller scarcely listened to this. "I'll have to bring in a chaperon for you!" he cried.

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Colina. "Anything but that! What do you want me to do?"

"Merely to live like other girls," said Gaviller; "to observe the proprieties."

"That's why I couldn't get along at school," muttered Colina gloomily. "You might as well send me back."

"You're simply headstrong!" said her father severely. "You won't try to be different."

"Dad," said Colina suddenly, "what did you come north for in the first place, thirty years ago?"

The question caught him a little off his guard. "A natural love of adventure, I suppose," he said carelessly.

"Perfectly natural!" said Colina. "Was your father pleased?"

Gaviller began to see her drift. "No!" he said testily.

"And when you went back for her," Colina persisted, "didn't my mother run away north with you, against the wishes of her parents?"

"Your mother was a saint!" cried Gaviller indignantly.

"Certainly," said Colina coolly, "but not the psalm-singing kind. What do you expect of the child of such a couple?"

"Not another word!" cried Gaviller, banging the table—last refuge of outraged fathers.

Colina was unimpressed. "Now you're simply raising a dust to conceal the issue," she said relentlessly.

Gaviller chewed his mustache in offended silence.

Colina did not spare him. "Do you think you can make your child and hers into a prim miss, to sit at home and work embroidery?" she demanded. "Upon my word, if I were a boy I believe you'd suggest putting me in a bank!"

John Gaviller helped himself to another egg with great dignity and removed the top. "Don't be absurd, Colina," he said with a weary air.

It was a transparent assumption. Colina saw that she had reduced him utterly. She smiled winningly. "Dad, if you'd only let me be myself! We could be such pals if you wouldn't try to play the heavy father!"

“Is it being yourself to act like a harum-scarum tomboy?” inquired Gaviller sarcastically.

Colina laughed. “Yes!” she said boldly. “If that’s what you want to call it? There’s something in me,” she went on seriously. “I don’t know what it is—some wild strain; something that drives me headlong; makes me see red when I am balked! Maybe it is just too much physical energy.

“Well, if you let me work it off it does no harm. If I can ride all day, or paddle or swim, or go hunting with Michel or one of the others; and be interested in what I’m doing, and come home tired and sleep without dreaming—why everything is all right. But if you insist on cooping me up!—well, I’m likely to turn out something worse than harum-scarum, that’s all!”

Gaviller flung up his arms.

“Really, you’ll have to go back to your aunt,” he said grimly. “The responsibility of looking after you is too great!”

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Colina laughed out of sheer vexation. "The silly ideas fathers have!" she cried. "Nobody can look after *me*, not you, not my aunt, nobody but myself! Why won't you understand that! I don't know exactly what dangers you fancy are threatening me. If it is from men, be at ease! I can put the fear of God into them! It is the sweet and gentle girl you would like to have that is in danger there!"

"I'm afraid you'll have to go back," said Gaviller.

Colina drew her beautiful straight brows together. "You make me think you simply want to get me off your hands," she said sullenly.

Gaviller shook his head. "You know I love to have you with me," he said simply.

"Then consider me a fixture!" said Colina serenely. "This is my country!" she went on enthusiastically. "It suits me. I like its uglinesses and its hardships, too! I hated it in the city. Do you know what they called me?—the wild Highlander!"

"Up here everybody understands my wildness, and thinks none the worse of me. It was different in the city—you've always lived in the north, you old innocent—you don't know! Men, for instance, in society they have a curious logic. They seem to think if a girl is natural she must be bad! Sometimes they acted on that assumption—"

"What did I tell you!" cried her father. "Men are the same everywhere!"

"Well," said Colina, smiling to herself, "they didn't get very far. And no man ever tried it twice. Up here—how different. I don't have to think of such things."

"I have to think of settling you in life," said Gaviller gloomily. "There is no one for you up here."

"I'm not bothering my head about that," said Colina. She went on with a kind of splendid insolence: "Every man wants me. I'll choose one when I'm ready. I can't see anything in men except as comrades. The decent ones are timid with women, and the bold ones are—well—rather beastly. I'm looking for a man who's brave and decent, too. If there's no such thing—"

She rose from the table. Colina's was a body designed to fill a riding-habit, and she wore one from morning till night. She was as tall as a man of middle height, and her tawny hair piled on top of her head made her seem taller.

"Well?" said Gaviller.

"Oh, I'll choose the handsomest beast I can find," she said, laughing over her shoulder and escaping from the room before he could answer.



John Gaviller finished his egg with a frown. Colina had this trick of breaking things off in the middle, and it irritated him. He had an orderly mind.

## CHAPTER IV.

*The meeting.*

Colina groomed her own horse, whistling like a boy. Saddling him, she rode east along the trail by the river, with the fenced grain fields on her right hand.

Beyond the fields she could gallop at will over the rolling, grassy bottoms, among the patches of scrub and willow.

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It was not an impressively beautiful scene—the river was half a mile wide, broken by flat wooded islands overflowed at high water; the banks were low, and at this season muddy. But the sky was as blue as Colina's eyes, and the prairie, quilted with wild flowers, basked in the delicate radiance that only the northern sun can bestow.

On a horse Colina could not be actively unhappy, nevertheless she was conscious of a certain dissatisfaction with life. Not as a result of the discussion with her father—she felt she had come off rather well from that.

But it was warm, and she felt a touch of languor. Fort Enterprise was a little dull in early summer. The fur season was over, and the flour mill was closed; the Indians had gone to their summer camps; and the steamboat had lately departed on her first trip up river, taking most of the company employees in her crew.

There was nothing afoot just now but farming, and Colina was not much interested in that. In short, she was lonesome. She rode idly with long detours inland in search of nothing at all.

Loping over the grass and threading her way among the poplar saplings, Colina proceeded farther than she had ever been in this direction since summer set in.

She saw the painter's brush for the first time—that exquisite rose of the prairies—and instantly dismounted to gather a bunch to thrust in her belt. The delicate, ashy pink of the flower matched the color in her cheeks.

On her rides Colina was accustomed to dismount when she chose, and Ginger, her sorrel gelding, would crop the grass contentedly until she was ready to mount again. To-day the spring must have been in his blood, too.

When Colina went to him he tossed his head coquettishly, and trotting away a few steps, turned and looked at her with a droll air. Colina called him in dulcet tones, and held out an inviting hand.

Ginger waywardly wagged his head and danced with his forefeet.

This was repeated several times—Colina's voice ever growing more honeyed as the rose in her cheeks deepened. The inevitable happened—she lost her temper and stamped her foot; whereupon Ginger, with lifted tail, ran around her like a circus horse.

Colina, alternately cajoling and commanding, pursued him bootlessly. Fond as she was of exercise, she preferred having the horse use his legs. She sat down in the grass and cried a little out of sheer impotence.

Ginger resumed his interrupted meal on the grass with insulting unconcern. Colina was twelve miles from home—and hungry.

Desperately casting her eyes around the horizon to discover some way out of her dilemma, Colina perceived a thin spiral of smoke rising above the edge of the river bank about a quarter of a mile away.

She had no idea who could be camping on the river at this place, but she instantly set off with her own confident assurance of finding aid. Ginger displayed no inclination to leave the particular patch of prairie grass he had chosen for his luncheon.

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As Colina approached the edge of the bank she heard a voice. She herself made no sound in the grass.

Looking over the edge she saw a man and a dog on the stony beach below, both with their backs to her and oblivious of her approach. Of the man, she had a glimpse only of a broad blue flannel back and a mop of black hair.

She heard him say to the dog: "Our last meal alone, old fel'! To-night, if we're lucky, we'll dine with her!"

This conveyed nothing to Colina—she was to remember it later.

In speaking he turned his profile, and she received an agreeable shock; he was young; he was not common; he had a fair, pink skin that contrasted oddly with his swarthy locks; his bold profile accorded with her fancy.

What caught her off her guard was his affectionate, quizzical glance at the dog.

It was a seductive glimpse of a stern face softened.

The dog scented her and barked; the man turning sprang to his feet. Colina experienced a sudden and extraordinary confusion of her faculties.

He was taller than she expected—that was not it; in the glance of his eager dark eyes there was a quality that took her completely by surprise—that took her breath away. This in one of the sex she condescended to!

The young man was completely dumfounded by the sight of her. He hung in suspended motion; his wide eyes leaped to hers—and clung there. They silently gazed at each other—each with much the same pained and breathless look.

Colina struggled hard against the spell. She was badly flustered. "Please catch my horse for me," she said with, under the circumstances, intolerable hauteur.

He did not move. She saw a dull, red tide creep up from his neck, over his face and into his hair. She had never seen such a painful blush. He kept his head up, and though his eyes became agonized with embarrassment, they clung doggedly to hers.

She knew intuitively that he blushed because he fancied that she, from his rough clothes, had judged him to be a common tramp.

She was glad of it—his blush gave her a little security.

But she could not support his glance. She all but stamped her foot as she said: "Didn't you hear me?"

With a visible effort the young man collected his wits, and with unsmiling face started to climb toward Colina. The dog, making to follow him, he spoke a word of command and it returned to the boat. Face to face with him Colina felt as if his glowing dark eyes were burning holes in her.

"Where is he?" he asked soberly.

Colina merely pointed across the bottoms where Ginger could be seen still busy with the grass.

"I'll bring him to you," he said coolly, and started off.

His assurance exasperated Colina. "It isn't as easy as you think," she said haughtily, "or I shouldn't have asked for help!"

He turned his head, his face suddenly breaking into a beaming smile. "I know horses," he said.



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Colina was furious. He made her feel like a little girl. She bit her lips to keep in the undignified answer that sprang to them. Inside her she said it: "Smarty! I shall laugh when he leads you a chase!" She sat down in the grass under a poplar-tree, prepared to enjoy the circus from afar.

There was none. Ginger having tired of his waywardness, perhaps, or having eaten his fill, quietly allowed himself to be taken. The young man came riding back on him. Colina could almost have wept with mortification.

He slipped out of the saddle beside her and stood waiting for her to mount. There was no consciousness of triumph in his manner.

His eyes flew back to hers with the same extraordinarily naive glance. When Colina frowned under it he literally dragged them away, but in spite of him they soon returned.

Many a man's eyes had been offered to Colina, but never a pair that glowed with a fire like this. They were at the same time bold and humble. They contained an imploring appeal without any sacrifice of self-respect. They disturbed Colina to such a degree she scarcely knew what she was doing.

He offered her a hand to mount, and she drew back with an offended air. He instantly yielded, and she mounted unaided—mounted awkwardly, and bit her lip again.

He did not immediately loose her rein. Out of the corner of her eye Colina saw that he was breathing fast.

"It will be late before you get home," he said. His voice was very low—she could feel the effort he was making not to let it shake. "Will you—will you eat with me?"

The modest tendering of this bold invitation disarmed Colina. She hesitated. He went on with a touch of boyish eagerness: "There's only a traveler's grub, of course. I got a fish on a night-line this morning. Also there's a prairie chicken roasted yesterday."

A self-deceiving argument ran through Colina's brain like quick-silver: "If I go, I shall be tormented by the feeling that he got the best of me; if I stay a while I can put him in his place!"

She dismounted. The young man turned abruptly to tie Ginger to the poplar-tree, but even in the boundary of his cheek Colina read his beaming happiness.

With scarcely another glance at her he plunged down the bank and set to work over his fire. Colina sedately followed and seated herself on a boulder to wait until she should be served.



Now that he no longer looked at her, Colina could not help watching him. A dangerous softness began to work in her breast; he was so boyish, so clumsy, so anxious to entertain her fittingly—his unconsciousness of her nearness was such a transparent assumption.

Colina was alarmed by her own weakness. She looked resolutely at the dog.

He was a mongrel black and tan, bigger than a terrier, and he had a ridiculous curly tail. He had received her with an insulting air of indifference.

## Page 18

"What an ugly dog!" Colina said coolly.

The young man swung around and affectionately rubbed the dog's ear.

"The best sporting dog in Athabasca," he said promptly, but without any resentment.

Colina bit her lip again. It seemed as if everything she did was mean. "Of course his looks haven't anything to do with his good qualities," she said. Here she was apologizing.

"He's almost human," said the young man. "I talk to him like a person."

"Come here, dog," said Colina.

The animal was suddenly stricken with deafness.

"What's his name?" she asked.

"Job."

"Come here, Job!" said Colina coaxingly.

Job looked out across the river.

"Job!" said his master sternly.

The dog sprang to him as if they had been parted for years, and frantically licked his hand. This display of boundless affection was suspiciously self-conscious.

The young man led him to Colina's feet. "Mind your manners!" he commanded.

Job in utter abasement offered her a limp paw. She touched it, and he scampered back to his former place with an air of relief, and turning his back to her lay down again. It cannot be said that his enforced obedience made her feel any better.

## CHAPTER V.

*An invitation to dine.*

Lunch was not long in preparing, for the rice had been on the fire when Colina first appeared. The young man set forth the meal as temptingly as he could on a flat rock, and at the risk of breaking his sinews carried another rock for Colina to sit upon. His apologies for the discrepancies in the service disarmed Colina again.

"I am no fine lady," she said. "I know what it is to live out."



Colina was hungry and the food good. A good understanding rapidly established itself between them. But the young man made no move to serve himself. Indeed he sat at the other side of the rock-table and produced his pipe.

"Why don't you eat?" demanded Colina.

"There is plenty of time," he said, blushing.

"But why wait?"

"Well—there's only one knife and fork."

"Is that all?" said Colina coolly. "We can pass them back and forth—can't we?"

Starting up and dropping the pipe in his pocket he flashed a look of extraordinary rapture on her that brought Colina's eyelids fluttering down like winged birds. He was a disconcerting young man. Resentment moved her, but she couldn't think of anything to say.

They ate amicably, passing the utensils back and forth.

After a while Colina asked: "Do you know who I am?"

"Of course," he said. "Miss Colina Gaviller."

"I don't know you," she said.

"I am Ambrose Doane, of Moultrie."

"Where is Moultrie?"

## Page 19

"On Lake Miwasa—three hundred miles down the river."

"Three hundred miles!" exclaimed Colina. "Have you come so far alone?"

"I have Job," Ambrose said with a smile.

"How much farther are you going?" she asked.

"Only to Fort Enterprise."

"Oh!" she said. The question in the air was: "What did you come for?" Both felt it.

"Do you know my father?" Colina asked.

"No," said Ambrose.

"I suppose you have business with him?"

"No," he said again.

Colina glanced at him with a shade of annoyance. "We don't have many visitors in the summer," she said carelessly.

"I suppose not," said Ambrose simply.

Colina was a woman—and an impulsive one; it was bound to come sooner or later: "What did you come for?"

His eyes pounced on hers with the same look of mixed boldness and apprehension that she had marked before; she saw that he caught his breath before answering.

"To see you!" he said.

Colina saw it coming, and would have given worlds to have recalled the question. She blushed all over—a horrible, unequivocal, burning blush. She hated herself for blushing—and hated him for making her.

"Upon my word!" she stammered. It was all she could get out.

He did not triumph over her discomfiture; his eyes were cast down, and his hand trembled. Colina could not tell whether he were more bold or simple. She had a sinking fear that here was a young man capable of setting all her maxims on men at naught. She didn't know what to do with him.

"What do you know about me?" she demanded.

It sounded feeble in her own ears. She felt that whatever she might say he was marching steadily over her defenses. Somehow, everything that he said made them more intimate.

"There was a fellow from here came by our place," said Ambrose simply. "Poly Goussard. He told us about you—"

"Talked about me!" cried Colina stormily.

"You should have heard what he said," said Ambrose with his venturesome, diffident smile. "He thinks you are the most beautiful woman in the world!" Ambrose's eyes added that he agreed with Poly.

It was impossible for Colina to be angry at this, though she wished to be. She maintained a haughty silence.

Ambrose faltered a little.

"I—I haven't talked to a white girl in a year," he said. "This is our slack season—so I—I came to see you."

If Colina had been a man this was very like what she might have said—to meet with candor equal to her own in the other sex, however, took all the wind out of her sails.

"How dare you!" she murmured, conscious of sounding ridiculous.

Ambrose cast down his eyes. "I have not said anything insulting," he said doggedly. "After what Poly said it was natural for me to want to come and see you."

## Page 20

"In the slack season," she murmured sarcastically.

"I couldn't have come in the winter," he said naively.

Colina despised herself for disputing with him. She knew she ought to have left at once—but she was unable to think of a sufficiently telling remark to cover a dignified retreat.

"You are presumptuous!" she said haughtily.

"Presumptuous?" he repeated with a puzzled air.

She decided that he was more simple than bold. "I mean that men do not say such things to women," she began as one might rebuke a little boy—but the conclusion was lamentable, "to women to whom they have not even been introduced!"

"Oh," he said, "I'm sorry! I can only stay a few days. I wanted to get acquainted as quickly as possible."

A still small voice whispered to Colina that this was a young man after her own heart. Aloud she remarked languidly: "How about me? Perhaps I am not so anxious."

He looked at her doubtfully, not quite knowing how to take this. "Really he is too simple!" thought Colina.

"Of course I knew I would have to take my chance," he said. "I didn't expect you to be waiting on the bank with a brass band and a wreath of flowers!"

He smiled so boyishly that Colina, in spite of herself, was obliged to smile back. Suddenly the absurd image caused them to burst out laughing simultaneously—and Colina felt herself lost.

Laughter was as dangerous as a train of gunpowder. Even while he laughed Colina saw that look spring out of his eyes—the mysterious look that made her feel faint and helpless.

He leaned toward her and a still more candid avowal trembled on his lips. Colina saw it coming. Her look of panic-terror restrained him. He closed his mouth firmly and turned away his head.

Presently he offered her a breast of prairie chicken with a matter-of-fact air. She shook her head, and a silence fell between them—a terrible silence.

"Oh, why don't I go!" thought Colina despairingly.

It was Ambrose who eased the tension by saying comfortably: “It’s a great experience to travel alone. Your senses seem to be more alert—you take in more.”

He went on to tell her about his trip, and Colina lulled to security almost before she knew it was recounting her own journey in the preceding autumn. It was astonishing when they stuck to ordinary matters—how like old friends they felt. Things did not need to be explained.

It provided Colina with a good opportunity to retire. She rose.

Ambrose’s face fell absurdly. “Must you go?” he said.

“I suppose I will meet you officially—later,” she said.

He raised a pair of perplexed eyes to her face. “I never thought about an introduction,” he said quite humbly. “You see we never had any ladies up here.”

In the light of his uncertainty Colina felt more assured. “Oh, we’re sufficiently introduced by this time,” she said offhand.



## Page 21

"But—what should I do at the fort?" he asked. "How can I see you again?"

She smiled with a touch of scorn at his simplicity. "That is for you to contrive. You will naturally call on my father; if he likes you, he will bring you home to dinner."

Ambrose smiled with obscure meaning. "He will never do that," he said.

"Why not?" demanded Colina.

"My partner and I are free-traders," he explained; "the only free-traders of any account in the Company's territory. Naturally they are bitter against us."

"But business is one thing and hospitality another," said Colina.

"You do not know what hard feeling there is in the fur trade," he suggested.

"You do not know my father," she retorted.

"Only by reputation," said Ambrose.

The shade of meaning in his voice was not lost on her. Her cheeks became warm. "All white men who come to the post dine with us as a matter of course," she said. "We owe you the hospitality. I invite you now in his name and my own."

"I would rather you asked him about me first," said Ambrose.

This made Colina really angry. "I do not consult him about household matters," she said stiffly.

"Of course not," said Ambrose; "but in this case I would be more comfortable if you spoke to him first."

"Are you afraid of him?" she inquired with raised eyebrows.

"No," said Ambrose coolly; "but I don't want to get you into trouble."

Colina's eyes snapped. "Thank you," she said; "you needn't be anxious. You had better come—we dine at seven."

"I will be there," he said.

By this time she was mounted. As she gave Ginger his head Ambrose deftly caught her hand and kissed it. Colina was not displeased. If it had been self-consciously done she would have fumed.



She rode home with an uncomfortable little thought nagging at her breast. Was he really so simple as she had decided? Had he not baited her into losing her temper—and insisting on his coming to dinner? Surely he could not know her so well as that!

“Anyway, he *is* coming!” she thought with a little gush of satisfaction she did not stop to examine. “I’ll wear evening dress, the black taffeta, and my string of pearls. At my own table it will be easier—and with father there to support me! We will see!”

## CHAPTER VI.

### *The dinner.*

Colina did not see her father until he came home from the store for dinner. She was already dressed and engaged in arranging the table.

John Gaviller’s eyes gleamed approvingly at the sight of her in her finery. Black silk became Colina’s blond beauty admirably. Manlike, he arrogated the extra preparations to himself. He thought it was a kind of peace offering from Colina.

“Well!” he began jocularly, only to check himself at the sight of three places set at the table. “Who’s coming?” he demanded with natural surprise.

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Colina, busying herself attentively with the centerpiece of painter's brush, wondered if her father had met Ambrose Doane. She gave him a brief, offhand account of her adventure without mentioning their guest's name.

"But who is it?" he asked.

She answered a little breathlessly; "Ambrose Doane of Moultrie."

Gaviller's face changed slightly. "H-m!" he said non-committally.

"Doesn't the table look nice?" said Colina quickly.

"Very nice," he said.

"We must prove to ourselves once in a while that we are not savages!"

"Naturally! Do you want me to dress?"

Colina, who had not looked at her father, nevertheless felt the inimical atmosphere. She stooped to a touch of flattery. "You are always well dressed," she said, smiling at him.

"Hm!" said Gaviller again. "Call me when you're ready." He marched off to his library.

Colina breathed freely. So far so good! Ambrose Doane had not been to call on her father. He was hardly the simple youth she had decided. But she couldn't think the less of him for that.

When she heard the door-bell ring—Gaviller's house boasted the only door-bell north of Caribou Lake—her heart astonished her with its thumping. She ran up to her own room. Ambrose according to instructions previously given was to be shown into the drawing-room.

Another wonder of Gaviller's house was the full-length mirror imported for Colina. She ran to it now. It treated her kindly. The crisp, thin, dead-black draperies showed up her white skin in dazzling contrast.

On second thought she left off the string of pearls. The effect was better without any ornament. Her face was her despair; her eyes were misty and unsure; the color came and went in her cheeks; she could not keep her lips closed.

"You fool! You fool!" she stormed at herself. "A man you have seen once! He will despise you!"

She could not keep the dinner waiting. Bracing herself, she started for the hall. A final glance in the mirror gave her better heart. After all she was beautiful and beautifully

dressed. She descended the stairs slowly, whispering to herself at every step: "Be game!"

Though the sun was still shining out-of-doors, according to Colina's fancy, every night at this hour the shutters were closed and the lamps lighted. The drawing-room was lighted by a single, tall lamp with a yellow shade.

Ambrose was standing in the middle of the room. He had changed his clothes. His suit was somewhat wrinkled, and his boots unpolished, but he looked less badly than he thought. At sight of Colina he caught his breath and turned very pale. His eyes widened with something akin to awe. Colina was suddenly relieved.

"So you dared to come!" she said with a careless smile.

He did not answer. Plainly he could not. He stood as if rooted to the floor. Colina had meant to offer him her hand, but suddenly changed her mind.

## Page 23

Instead, with reckless bravado considering her late state of mind, she went to the lamp and turned it up. She felt his honest, stricken glance following her, and thrilled under it.

"You have not met my father?"

Ambrose "took a brace" as he would have said. "No," he answered.

"I thought very likely you would see him this afternoon," she said with a touch of smiling malice.

His directness foiled it.

"I waited down the river," he said. "I didn't want to have a row with him that might spoil to-night."

"What a terrible opinion you have of poor father!" said Colina.

"Does he know I'm coming?" asked Ambrose.

"Certainly!"

"What did he say?"

"Nothing! What should he say?"

"He has boasted that no free-trader ever dared set foot in his territory."

"I don't believe it! It's not like him. Come along and you'll see."

"Wait!" said Ambrose quickly. "Half a minute!"

Colina looked at him curiously.

"You don't know what this means to me!" he went on, his glowing, unsmiling eyes fixed on her. "A lady's drawing-room! A lamp with a soft, pretty shade!—and you—like that! I—I wasn't prepared for it!"

Colina laughed softly. She was filled with a great tenderness for him, therefore she could jeer a little.

Ambrose had not moved from the spot where she found him.

"It's not fair," he went on. "You don't need that! It bowls a man over."

This was the ordinary language of gallantry—yet it was different. Colina liked it. "Come on," she said lightly, "father is like a bear when he is kept waiting for dinner!"

The two men shook hands in a natural, friendly way. With another man Ambrose was quite at ease. Colina approved the way her youth stood up to the famous old trader without flinching. They took places at the table, and the meal went swimmingly.

Ambrose, whether he felt his affable host's secret animosity and was stimulated by it, or for another reason, suddenly blossomed into an entertainer. When her father was present he addressed Colina's ear, her chin or her golden top-knot, never her eyes.

John Gaviller apparently never looked at her either, but Colina knew he was watching her closely. She was not alarmed. She had herself well in hand, and there was nothing in her politely smiling, slightly scornful air to give the most anxious parent concern.

Under the jokes, the laughter, and the friendly talk throughout dinner, there were electric intimations that caused Colina's nostrils to quiver. She loved the smell of danger.

It was no easy matter to keep the conversational bark on an even keel; the rocks were thick on every hand. Business, politics, and local affairs were all for obvious reasons tabooed. More than once they were near an upset, as when they began to talk of Indians.

## Page 24

Ambrose had related the anecdote of Tom Beavertail who, upon seeing a steamboat for the first time, had made a paddle-wheel for his canoe, and forced his sons to turn him about the lake.

"Exactly like them!" said John Gaviller with his air of amused scorn. "Ingenious in perfectly useless ways! Featherheaded as schoolboys!"

"But I like schoolboys!" Ambrose protested. "It isn't so long since I was one myself."

"Schoolboys is too good a word," said Gaviller. "Say, apes."

"I have a kind of fellow-feeling for them," said Ambrose smiling.

"How long have you been in the north?"

"Two years."

"I've been dealing with them thirty years," said Gaviller with an air of finality.

Ambrose refused to be silenced. Looking around the luxurious room he felt inclined to remark, that Gaviller had made a pretty good thing out of the despised race, but he checked himself.

"Sometimes I think we never give them a show," he said with a deprecating air, "We're always trying to cut them to our own pattern instead of taking them as they are. They are like schoolboys, as you say.

"Most of the trouble with them comes from the fact that anybody can lead them into mischief, just like boys. If we think of what we were like ourselves before we put on long trousers it helps to understand them."

Gaviller raised his eyebrows a little at hearing the law laid down by twenty-five years old.

"Ah!" he said quizzically. "In my day the use of the rod was thought necessary to make boys into men!"

Ambrose grew a little warm. "Certainly!" he said. "But it depends on the spirit with which it is applied. How can we do anything with them if we treat them like dirt?"

"You are quite successful in handling them?" queried Gaviller dryly.

"Peter Minot says so," said Ambrose simply. "That is why he took me into partnership."

"He married a Cree, didn't he?" inquired Gaviller casually.

Colina glanced at her father in surprise. This was hardly playing fair according to her notions.

"A half-breed," corrected Ambrose.

"Of course, Eva Lajeunesse, I remember now," said Gaviller. "She was quite famous around Caribou Lake some years ago."

Ambrose with an effort kept his temper. "She has made him a good wife," he said loyally.

"Ah, no doubt!" said Gaviller affably. "Do you live with them?"

"I have my own house," said Ambrose stiffly.

Here Colina made haste to create a diversion.

"Aren't the Indian kids comical little souls?" she remarked. "I go to the mission school sometimes to sing and play for them. They don't think much of it. One of the girls asked me for a hair. One hair was all she wanted."

The subject of Indian children proved to be innocuous. They took coffee in John Gaviller's library.



## Page 25

"Colina brought these new-fangled notions in with her," said her father.

"They're all right!" said Ambrose soberly.

Colina saw the hand that held his spoon tremble slightly, and wondered why. The fact was the thought could not but occur to him: "How foolish for me to think she could ever bring her lovely, ladylike ways to my little shack!"

He thrust the unnerving thought away. "I can build a bigger house, can't I?" he demanded of himself. "Anyway, I'll make the best play to get her that I can!"

In the library they talked about furniture. It transpired that the trader had a passion for cabinet making, and most of the objects that surrounded them were examples of his skill. Ambrose admired them with due politeness, meanwhile his heart was sinking. He could not see the slightest chance of getting a word alone with Colina.

In the middle of the evening a breed came to the door, hat in hand, to say that John Gaviller's Hereford bull was lying down in his stall and groaning. The trader bit his lip and glanced at Colina.

"Would you like to come and see my beasts?" he asked affably.

"Thanks," said Ambrose just as politely. "I'm no hand with cattle." He kept his eyes discreetly down.

Gaviller could not very well turn him out of the house. There was no help for it. He went.

## CHAPTER VII.

*Two interviews.*

The instant the door closed behind Gaviller, Ambrose's eyes flamed up. "What a stroke of luck!" he cried.

It had something the effect of an explosion there in the quiet room where they had been talking so prosily. Colina became panicky. "I don't understand you!" she said haughtily.

"You do!" he cried. "You know I didn't paddle three hundred miles up-stream to talk to him! Never in my life had I anything so hard to go through with as the last two hours. I didn't dare look at you for fear of giving myself away."

There was an extraordinary quality of passion in the simple words. Colina felt faint and terrified. What was one to do with a man like this! She mounted her queenliest manner. "Don't make me sorry I asked you here," she said.

"Sorry?" he said. "Why should you be? You can do what you like! I can't pretend. I must say my say the best way I can. I may not get another chance!"

Colina had to fight both herself and him. She made a gallant stand. "You are ridiculous!" she said. "I will leave the room until my father comes back if you can't contain yourself."

He was plainly terrified by the threat, nevertheless he had the assurance to put himself between her and the door.

"You have no cause to be angry with me," he said. "You know I do not disrespect you!" He was silent for a moment. His voice broke huskily. "You are wonderful to me! I have to keep telling myself you are only a woman—of flesh and blood like myself—else I would be groveling on the floor at your feet, and you would despise me!"

## Page 26

Colina stared at him in haughty silence.

"I love you!" he whispered with odd abruptness. "No woman need be insulted by hearing that. You came upon me to-day like a bolt of lightning. You have put your mark on me for life! I will never be myself again."

His voice changed; he faltered, and searched for words. "I know I'm rough! I know women like to be courted regularly. It's right, too! But I have no time! I may never see you alone again. Your father will take care of that! I must tell you while I can. You can take your time to answer."

Colina contrived to laugh.

The sound maddened him. He took a step forward, and a vein in his forehead stood out. She held her ground disdainfully.

"Don't do that!" he whispered. "It's not fair! I—I can't stand it!"

"Why must you tell me?" asked Colina. "What do you expect?"

"You!" he whispered hoarsely. "If God is good to me! For life."

"You are mad!" she murmured.

"Maybe," he said, eying her with the resentment which is so closely akin to love; "but I think you understand my madness. Talking gets us nowhere. A dozen times to-day your eyes answered mine. Either you feel it too or you are a coquette!"

This brought a genuine anger to Colina's aid. Her weakness fled. "How dare you!" she cried with blazing eyes.

"Coquette!" he repeated doggedly. "To dress yourself up like that to drive me mad!"

Colina forgot the social amenities. "You fool!" she cried. "This is my ordinary way of dressing at night! It is not for you!"

"It was for me!" he said sullenly. "You were happy when you saw its effect on me! If it's only a game I can't play it with you. It means too much to me!"

"Coquette!" still made a clangor in Colina's brain that deafened her to everything else. "You are a savage!" she cried. "I'm sorry I asked you here. You needn't wait for my father to come back. Go!"

"Not without a plain answer!" he said.

Colina tried to laugh; she was too angry. “My answer is no!” she cried with outrageous scorn. “Now go!”

He stood studying her from under lowering brows. The sight of her like that—head thrown back, eyes glittering, cheeks scarlet, and lips curled—was like a lash upon his manhood. The answer was plain enough, but an instinct from the great mother herself bade him disregard it. Suddenly his eyes flamed up.

“You beauty!” he cried.

Before she could move he had seized her in her finery. Colina was no weakling, but within those steely arms she was helpless. She strained away her head. He could only reach her neck, under the ear. She yielded shudderingly.

“I hate you! I hate you!” she murmured.

Their lips met.

Colina swayed ominously on his arm. She sank down on the sofa, still straining away from him, but weakly. Suddenly she burst into passionate weeping.

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"What have you done to me!" she murmured.

At sight of the tears he collapsed. "Ah, don't!" he whispered brokenly. "You break my heart! My darling love! What is the matter?"

"I am a fool—a fool!—a fool!" she sobbed tempestuously. "To have given in to you! You will despise me!"

He slipped to the floor at her feet. He strove desperately to comfort her. Tenderness lent eloquence to his clumsy, unaccustomed tongue.

"Ah, don't say that! It's like sticking a knife in me! My lovely one! As if I could! You are everything to me! I have nothing in the world but you! Forgive me for being so rough! I couldn't help it! I couldn't go by anything you said. I had to find out for sure! It had to happen! What does it matter whether it was in a day or a year? The minute I saw you I knew how it was. I knew I had to have you or live like a priest till I died."

Colina was not to be comforted. "You think so now!" she said. "Later, when you have tired of me a little, or if we quarreled, you would remember that I—I was too easily won!"

"Ah, don't!" he cried exasperated. "If you say it again I'll have to swear. What more can I say? I love you like my life! I could not despise you without despising myself! I don't know how to put it. I sound like a fool! But—but this is what I mean. You make me seem worth while to myself."

Colina's hands stole to her breast. "Ah! If I could believe you!" she breathed.

"Give me time!" he begged. "What good does talking do! What I do will show you!"

Little by little she allowed him to console her. Her arm stole around his shoulders, her head was lowered until her cheek lay in his hair.

They came down to earth. Ambrose seated himself beside her, and looking in her shamed face laughed softly and deep. "You fraud," he said.

Colina hid her face. "Don't!" she begged.

He laughed more.

"What are you laughing at?" she demanded.

"To think how you scared me," he said. "With your grand clothes and high and mighty airs. I had to dig my toes into the floor to keep from cutting and running. And it was all bluff!"

“Scared you!” said Colina. “I never in my life knew a man so utterly regardless and brutal!”

“You like it,” he said. Colina blushed.

“I had no line to go on,” said Ambrose with his engaging simplicity. “I never made love to any girls. I haven’t read many books either. I guess that’s all guff, anyway. I didn’t know how the thing ought to be carried through. But something told me if I knuckled under to you the least bit it would be all day with Ambrose.”

They laughed together.

John Gaviller’s step sounded on the porch outside. They sprang up aghast. They had completely forgotten his existence.

“Oh, Heavens!” whispered Colina. “He has eyes like a lynx!”

## Page 28

Ambrose's eyes, darting around the room, fell upon an album of snapshots lying on the table. He flung it open.

When Gaviller came in he found them standing at the table, their backs to him. He heard Ambrose ask:

"Who is that comical little guy?"

Colina replied: "Ahcunazie, one of the Kakisa Indians in his winter clothes."

Colina turned, presenting a sufficiently composed face to her father. "Oh," she said. "You were gone a long while. What was the matter with the bull?"

She strolled to the sofa and sat down. Ambrose idly closed the book and sat down across the room from her. Gaviller glanced from one to another—perhaps it was a little too well done. But his face instantly resumed its customary affability.

"Nothing serious," he said. "He is quite all right again."

Ambrose was tormented by the desire to laugh. He dared not meet Colina's eye. "It is terrible to lose a valuable animal up here," he said demurely.

After a few desultory polite exchanges Ambrose got up to go. "I was waiting to say good night to you," he explained.

"You are camping down the river, I believe."

"Half a mile below the English mission. I paddled up."

"I'll walk to the edge of the bank with you," said Gaviller politely.

As in nearly all company posts there was a flag-pole in the most conspicuous spot on the river-bank. It was halfway between Gaviller's house and the store. At the foot of the pole was a lookout-bench worn smooth by generations of sitters.

Leaving the house after a formal good night to Colina, Ambrose was escorted as far as the bench by John Gaviller. The trader held forth amiably upon the weather and crops. They paused.

"Sit down for a moment," said Gaviller. "I have something particular to say to you."

Ambrose suspected what was coming. But humming with happiness like a top as he was, he could not feel greatly concerned.

Still in the same calm, polite voice Gaviller said:

"I confess I was astonished at your assurance in coming to my house."

This was a frank declaration of war. Ambrose, steeling himself, replied warily: "I did not come on business."

"What did you come for?"

Ambrose did not feel obliged to be as frank with father as with daughter. "I am merely looking at the country."

"Well, now that you have seen Fort Enterprise," said Gaviller dryly, "you may go on or go back. I do not care so long as you do not linger."

Ambrose frowned. "If you were a younger man—" he began.

"You need not consider my age," said Gaviller.

Ambrose measured his man. He had to confess he had good pluck. The idea of a set-to with Colina's father was unthinkable. There was nothing for him to do but swallow the affront. He bethought himself of using a little guile.



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"Why shouldn't I come here?" he demanded.

"I don't like the way you and your partner do business," said Gaviller.

There was nothing to be gained by a wordy dispute, but Ambrose was only human. "You are sore because we smashed the company's monopoly at Moultrie," he said.

"Not at all," said Gaviller calmly. "The trade is free to all. What little you have taken from us is not noticeable in the whole volume. But you have deliberately set to work to destroy what it has taken two centuries to build up—the white man's supremacy. You breed trouble among the Indians. You make them insolent and dangerous."

"Company talk," said Ambrose scornfully. "A man can make himself believe what he likes. We treat the Indians like human beings. Around us they're doing well for the first time. Here, where you have your monopoly, they're sick and starving!"

"That is not true," said Gaviller coolly. "And, in any case, I do not mean to discuss my business with you. I deal openly. You had the opportunity to do my daughter a slight service. I have repaid it with my hospitality. We are quits. I now warn you not to show your face here again."

"I shall do as I see fit," said Ambrose doggedly.

"You compel me to speak still more plainly," said Gaviller. "If you are found on the Company's property again, you will be thrown off."

"You cannot frighten me with threats," said Ambrose.

"You are warned!" said Gaviller. He strode off to his house.

## CHAPTER VIII.

*In Ambrose's camp.*

Ambrose was awakened in his mosquito-tent by an alarm from Job. The sun was just up, and it was therefore no more than three o'clock. A visitor was approaching in a canoe.

In the North a caller is a caller. Ambrose crept out of his blankets and, swallowing his yawns, stuck his head in the river to clear his brain.

The visitor was a handsome young breed of Ambrose's own age. Ambrose surveyed his broad shoulders, his thin, graceful waist and thighs approvingly. He rejoiced in an

animal built for speed and endurance. Moreover, the young man's glance was direct and calm. This was a native who respected himself.

"Tole Grampierre, me," he said, offering his hand.

Ambrose grasped it. "I'm Ambrose Doane," he said.

"I know," said the young breed. "Las' night I go to the store. The boys say Ambrose Doane, the free-trader, is camp' down the river. So I talk wit' my fat'er. I say I go and shake Ambrose Doane by the hand."

"Will you eat?" said Ambrose. "It is early."

"When you are ready," answered Tole politely. "I come early. I go back before they get up at the fort. If old man Gaviller know I come to you it mak' trouble. My fat'er he got trouble enough wit' Gaviller."

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Tole squatted on the beach. There is an established ritual of politeness in the North, and he was punctilious.

"You are well?" he asked gravely. Ambrose set about making his fire. "I am well," he said.

"Your partner, he is well?"

"Peter Minot is well."

"You do good trade at Lake Miwasa?"

"Yes. Marten is plentiful."

"Good fur here, too. Not much marten; plenty link."

"Your father is well?" asked Ambrose in turn.

"My fat'er is well," said Tole. "My four brot'ers well, too."

"I am glad," said Ambrose.

More polite conversation was exchanged while Ambrose waited for his guest to declare the object of his visit. It came at last.

"Often I talk wit' my fat'er," said Tole. "I say there is not'ing for me here. Old man Gaviller all tam mad at us. We don't get along. I say I fink I go east to Lake Miwasa. There is free trade there. Maybe I get work in the summer. When they tell me Ambrose Doane is come, I say this is lucky. I will talk wit' him."

"Good," said Ambrose.

"Wat you t'ink?" asked Tole, masking anxiety under a careless air. "Is there work at Moultrie in the summer?"

Ambrose instinctively liked and trusted his man. "Sure," he said. "There is room for good men."

"Good," said Tole calmly. "I go back wit' you."

Ambrose had a strong curiosity to learn of the situation at Fort Enterprise. "What do you mean by saying old man Gaviller is mad at you?" he asked.

"I tell you," said Tole. He filled his pipe and got it going well before he launched on his tale.

"My fat'er, Simon Grampierre, he is educate'," he began. "He read in books, he write, he spik Angleys, he spik French, he spik the Cree. We are Cree half-breed. My fat'er's fat'er, my mot'er's fat'er, they white men. We are proud people. We own plenty land. We live in a good house. We are workers.

"All the people on ot'er side the river call my fat'er head man. When there is trouble all come to our house to talk to my fat'er because he is educate'. He got good sense.

"Before, I tell you there is good fur here. It is the truth. But the people are poor. Every year they are more poor as last year. The people say: 'Bam-by old man Gaviller tak' our shirts! He got everyt'ing else.' They ask my fat'er w'at to do."

Tole went on: "Always my fat'er say: 'Wait,' he say. 'We got get white man on our side. We got get white man who knows all outside ways. He bring an outfit in and trade wit' us.' The people don't want to wait. 'We starve!' they say.

"My fat'er say: 'Non! Gaviller not let you starve. For why, because you not bring him any fur if you dead. He will keep you goin' poor. Be patient,' my fat'er say. 'This is rich country. It is known outside. Bam-by some white man come wit' outfit and pay good prices.'

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"Always my fat'er try to have no trouble," continued Tole. "But old man Gaviller hear about the meetings at our house. He hear everyt'ing. He write a letter to my fat'er that the men mus' come no more.

"My fat'er write back. My fat'er say: 'This my house. This people my relations, my friends. My door is open to all.' Then old man Gaviller is mad. He call my fat'er mal-content. He tak' away his discount."

"Discount?" interrupted Ambrose.

Tole frowned at the difficulty of explaining this in English. "All goods in the store marked by prices," he said slowly. "Too moch prices. Gaviller say for good men and good hunters he tak' part of price away. He tak' a quarter part of price away. He call that discount. If a man mak' him mad he put it back again."

The working out of such a scheme was clear to Ambrose. "Hm!" he commented grimly. "This is how a monopoly gets in its innings."

"Always my fat'er not want any trouble," Tole went on. "Pretty soon, I t'ink, the people not listen to him no more. They are mad. This year there will be trouble about the grain. Gaviller put the price down to dollar-fifty bushel. But he sell flour the same."

"Do you mean to say he buys your grain at his own price, and sells you back the flour at his own price?" demanded Ambrose.

Tole nodded. "My fat'er the first farmer here," he explained. "Long tam ago when I was little boy, Gaviller come to my fat'er. He say: 'You have plenty good land. You grow wheat and I grind it, and both mak' money.'

"My fat'er say: 'I got no plow, no binder, no thresher.' Gaviller say: 'I bring them in for you.' Gaviller say: 'I pay you two-fifty bushel for wheat. I can do it up here. You pay me for the machines a little each year.'

"My fat'er t'ink about it. He is not moch for farm. But he t'ink, well, some day there is no more fur. But always there is mouths for bread. If I be farmer and teach my boys, they not starve when fur is no more.

"My fat'er say to Gaviller: 'All right.' Writings are made and signed. The ot'er men with good land on the river, they say they raise wheat, too.

"After that the machines is brought in. Good crops is raised. Ev'rything is fine. Bam-by Gaviller put the price down to two-twenty-five. Bam-by he only pay two dollar. Tams is hard, he say. Las' year he pay one-seventy-five. Now he say one-fifty all he pay.

“The farmers say they so poor now, might as well have nothing. They say they not cut the grain this year. Gaviller say it is his grain. He will go on their land and cut it. There will be trouble.”

“This is a kind of slavery!” cried Ambrose.

“There is more to mak’ trouble,” Tole went on with his calm air. “Three years ago Gaviller build a fine big steamboat. He say: ‘Now, boys, you can go outside when you want.’ He says: ‘This big boat will bring us ev’rything good and cheap from outside.’

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"But when she start it is thirty dollars for a man to go to the Crossing. And fifty cents for every meal. Nobody got so much money as that.

"It is the same to bring t'ings in. Not'ing is cheaper. Jean Bateese Gagnon, he get a big book from outside. In that book there is all things to buy and pictures to show them. The people outside will send you the t'ings. You send money in a letter."

"Mail order catalogue," suggested Ambrose.

"That is the name of the book," said Tole. In describing its wonders he lost, for the first time, some of his imperturbable air. "Wa! Wa! All is so cheap inside that book. It is wonderful. Three suits of clothes cost no more as one at the Company store.

"Everyt'ing is in that book. A man can get shirts of silk. A man can get a machine to milk a cow. All the people want to send money for t'ings. Gaviller say no. Gaviller say steamboat only carry Company freight. Gaviller say: 'Come to me for what you want and I get it—at regular prices.'"

"And this is supposed to be a free country," said Ambrose.

"The men are mad," continued Tole. "They do not'ing. Only Jean Bateese Gagnon. He is the mos' mad. He say he don' care. He send the money for a plow las' summer. All wait to see w'at Gaviller will do.

"Gaviller let the steamboat bring it down. He say the freight is fifteen dollars. Jean Bateese say: 'Tak' it back again. I won't pay.' Gaviller say: 'You got to pay.' He put it on the book against Gagnon."

Tole related other incidents of a like character, Ambrose listened with ever mounting indignation. There could be no mistaking the truthful ring of the simple details.

Not only was Ambrose's sense of humanity up in arms, but the trader in him was angered that a competitor should profit by such unfair means. With a list of grievances on one side and unqualified sympathy on the other, the two progressed in friendship.

They breakfasted together, Job making a third. Ambrose found himself more and more strongly drawn to the young fellow. He was reminded that he had no friend of his own age in the country. Tole, he said to himself, was whiter than many a white man he had known.

Job, who as a rule drew the colorline sharply, was polite to Tole. Job was pleased because Tole ignored him. Uninvited overtures from strangers made Job self-conscious.

Tole and Ambrose, being young, drifted away from serious business after a while. They discussed sport. Tole lost some of his gravity in talking about hunting the moose.

Not until Tole was on the point of embarking did the real object of his visit transpire. "My father say he want you come to his house," he said diffidently.

"Sure I will," said Ambrose.

Tole lingered by his dugout, affecting to test the elasticity of his paddle on the stones. He glanced at Ambrose with a speculative eye.



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"Maybe you and Peter Minot open a store across the river and trade with us," he suggested with a casual air.

Ambrose was staggered by the possibilities it opened up. He knew the idea was already in Peter's mind. What if he, Ambrose, should be chosen to carry it out? He sparred for wind.

"I don't know," he said warily. "There is much to be considered. I will talk with your father."

Tole nodded and pushed off.

## CHAPTER IX.

*Lovers.*

Ambrose and Colina had had no opportunity the night before to arrange for another meeting. Ambrose stuck close to his camp, feeling somehow that the next move should come from her.

It was not that he had been unduly alarmed by her father's threat, though he had a young man's healthy horror of being humiliated in the beloved one's presence.

But the real reason that kept him inactive was an instinctive compunction against embroiling Colina with her father. She had only known him, Ambrose, a day; she should have a chance to make sure of her own mind, he felt.

As to what he would do if Colina made no move, Ambrose could not make up his mind. He considered a night expedition to the fort; he considered sending a message by Tole. Either plan had serious disadvantages. It was a hard nut to crack.

Then he heard hoofs on the prairie overhead. His heart leaped up and his problems were forgotten. He sprang to the bank. Job heard the hoofs, too, and recognized the horse. Job hopped into the empty dugout, and lay down in the bow out of sight, like a child in disgrace.

At the sight of her racing toward him a dizzying joy swept over Ambrose; but something was wrong. She stopped short of him, and his heart seemed to stop, too.

She was pale; her eyes had a dark look. An inward voice whispered to him that it was no more than to be expected; his happiness had been too swift, too bright to be real.

He went toward her. "Colina!" he cried apprehensively.



"Don't touch me!" she said sharply.

He stopped. "What is the matter?" he faltered.

She made no move to dismount. She did not look at him. "I—I have had a bad night," she murmured. "I came to throw myself on your generosity."

"Generosity?" he echoed.

"To—to ask you to forget what happened last night. I was mad!"

Ambrose had become as pale as she. He had nothing to say.

She stole a glance at his face. At the sight of his blank, sick dismay she quickly turned her head. A little color came back to her cheeks.

There was a silence.

At last he said huskily: "What has happened to change you?"

"Nothing," she murmured. "I have come to my senses." His stony face and his silence terrified her. "Aren't you a little relieved?" she faltered. "It must have been a kind of madness in you, too."



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He raised a sudden, penetrating glance to her face. She could not meet it. It came to him that he was being put to a test. The revulsion of feeling made him brutal. Striding forward, he seized her horse by the rein.

"Get off!" he harshly commanded.

Colina had no thought but to obey.

He tied the rein to a limb and, turning back, seized her roughly by the wrists.

"What kind of a game is this?" he demanded.

Colina, breathless, terrified, delighted, laughed shakily.

He dropped her as suddenly as he had seized her, and walked away to the edge of the bank and sat down, staring sightlessly across the river and striving to still the tumult of his blood. He was frightened by his own passion. He had wished to hurt her.

Colina went to him and humbly touched his arm.

"I'm sorry," she whispered.

He looked at her grimly.

"You should not try such tricks," he said. "A man's endurance has its limits."

There was something delicious to Colina in abasing herself before him. She caught up his hand and pressed it to her cheek.

"How was I to know?" she murmured. "Other men are not like you."

"I might have surprised you," he said grimly.

"You did!" whispered Colina. The suspicion of a dimple showed in either cheek.

He rose. "Let me alone for a minute," he said. "I'll be all right."  
He went to the horse and loosened the saddle girths.

Colina could have crawled through the grass to his feet. She lay where he had left her until he came back. He sat down again, but not touching her. He was still pale, but he had got a grip on himself.

"Tell me," he said quietly, "did you do it just for fun, or had you a reason?"

"I had a reason."



"What was it?" he asked in cold surprise.

"I—I can't tell you while you are angry with me," she faltered.

"I can't get over it right away," he said simply. "Give me time."

Colina hid her face in her arm and her shoulders shook a little. It is doubtful if any real tears flowed, but the move was just as successful. He leaned over and laid a tender hand on her shoulder.

"Ah, don't!" he said. "What need you care if I am angry. You know I love you. You know I—I am mad with loving you! Why—it would have been more merciful for you to shoot me down than come at me the way you did!"

"I'm sorry," she whispered. "I never dreamed it would hurt so much! I had to do it—Ambrose!"

It was the first time she had spoken his name. He paused for a moment to consider the wonder of it.

"Why?" he asked dreamily.

Colina sat up.

"I worried all night about whether you would be sorry to-day," she said, averting her head from him. "I thought that nothing so swift could possibly be lasting. And then this morning father and I had a frightful row.

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"I was starting out to come to you, and he caught me. He all but disowned me. I came right on—I told him I was coming. And on the way here I thought—I knew I would have to tell you what had happened.

"And I thought if you were secretly sorry—for last night—when you heard about father and I—you would feel that you had to stand by me anyway! And then I would never know if you really— So I had to find out, first."

This confused explanation was perfectly clear to Ambrose.

"Will you always be doubting me?" he asked wistfully. "Can't you believe what you see?"

She crept under his arm. "It was so sudden!" she murmured. "When I am not with you my heart fails me. How can I be sure?"

He undertook to assure her with what eloquence his heart lent his tongue. The feeling was rarer than the words.

"How wonderful," said Ambrose dreamily, "for two to feel the same toward each other! I always thought that women, well, just allowed men to love them."

"You dear innocent!" she whispered. "If you knew! Women are not supposed to give anything away! It makes men draw back. It makes them insufferable."

"It makes me humble," said Ambrose.

"You boy!" she breathed.

"I'm years older than you," he said.

"Women's hearts are born old," said Colina; "men's never grow out of babyhood."

Her head was lying back on the thick of his arm.

"Your throat is as lovely—as lovely as pearl!" he whispered, brooding over her.

The exquisite throat trembled with laughter.

"You're coming out!" she said.

"I don't care!" said Ambrose. "You're as beautiful as—what is the most beautiful thing I know?—as beautiful as a morning in June up North."

"I don't know which I like better," she murmured.



"Of what?" he asked.

"To have you praise me or abuse me. Both are so sweet!"

"Do you know," he said, "I am wondering this minute if I am dreaming! I'm afraid to breathe hard for fear of waking up."

She smiled enchantingly.

"Kiss me!" she whispered. "These are real lips."

"Sit up," he said presently, with a sigh, "We must talk hard sense to each other. What the devil are we going to do?"

She leaned against his shoulder.

"Whatever you decide," she said mistily.

"What did your father say to you?" asked Ambrose.

She shuddered. "Hideous quarrelling!" she said. "I have the temper of a devil, Ambrose!"

"I don't care," he said.

"When I told him where I was going he took me back in the library and started in," she went on. "He was so angry he could scarcely speak. If he had let it go it wouldn't have been so bad. But to try to make believe he wasn't angry! His hypocrisy disgusted me.

"To go on about my own good and all that, and all the time he was just plain mad! I taunted him until he was almost in a state of ungovernable fury. He would not mention you until I forced him to.

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"He said I must give him my word never to see you or speak to you again. I refused, of course. He threatened to lock me up. He said things about you that put me beside myself. We said ghastly things to each other. We are very much alike. You'd better think twice before you marry into such a family, Ambrose."

"I take my chance," he said.

"I'm sorry now," Colina went on. "I know he is, too. Poor old fellow! I have you."

"You mustn't break with him yet," said Ambrose anxiously.

"I know. But how can I go back and humble myself?"

"He'll meet you half-way."

"If—if we could only get in the dugout and go now!" she breathed.

He did not answer. She saw him turn pale.

"Wouldn't it be the best way," she murmured, "since it's got to be anyway?"

He drew a long breath and shook his head.

"I wouldn't take you now," he said doggedly.

"Of course not!" she said quickly. "I was only joking. But why?" she added weakly. Her hand crept into his.

"It wouldn't be fair," he said, frowning. "It would be taking too much from you."

"Too much!" she murmured, with an obscure smile.

Ambrose struggled with the difficulty of explaining what he meant. "I never do anything prudent myself. I hate it. But I can't let you chuck everything—without thinking what you are doing. You ought to stay home a while—and be sure."

"It isn't going to be so easy," she said, "quarreling continually."

"I sha'n't see you again until I come for you," said Ambrose. "And it's useless to write letters from Moultrie to Enterprise. I'm out of the way. Why can't the question of me be dropped between you and your father?"

"Think of living on from month to month without a word! It will be ghastly!" she cried.

"You've only known me two days," he said sagely. "I could not leave such a gap as that."

“How coldly you can talk about it!” she cried rebelliously.

Ambrose frowned again. “When you call me cold you shut me up,” he said quietly.

“But if you do not make a fuss about me every minute,” she said naively, “it shames me because I am so foolish about you.”

Ambrose laughed suddenly.

There followed another interlude of celestial silliness.

This time it was Colina who withdrew herself from him.

“Ah,” she said with a catch of the breath, “every minute of this is making it harder. I shall want to die when you leave me.”

Ambrose attempted to take her in his arms again.

“No,” she insisted. “Let us try to be sensible. We haven’t decided yet what we’re going to do.”

“I’m going home,” said Ambrose, “to work like a galley-slave.”

“It is so far,” she murmured.

“I’ll find some way of letting you hear from me. Twice before the winter sets in I’ll send a messenger. And you, you keep a little book and write in it whenever you think of me, and send it back by my messenger.”



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"A little book won't hold it all," she said naively.

"Meanwhile I'll be making a place for you. I couldn't take you to Moultrie."

She asked why.

"Eva, Peter's wife," he explained. "In a way Peter is my boss, you see. It would be a horrible situation."

"I see," said Colina. "But if there was no help for it I could."

"Ah, you're too good to me!" he cried. "But it won't be necessary. Peter and I have always intended to open other posts. I'll take the first one, and you and I will start on our own. Think of it! It makes me silly with happiness!"

Upon this foundation they raised a shining castle in the air.

"I must go," said Colina finally, "or father will be equipping an armed force to take me."

"You must go," he agreed, but weakly.

They repeated it at intervals without any move being made. At last she got up.

"Is this—good-by?" she faltered.

He nodded.

They both turned pale. They were silent. They gazed at each other deeply and wistfully.

"Ah! I can't! I can't!" murmured Colina brokenly. "Such a little time to be happy!"

They flew to each other's arms.

"No—not quite good-by!" said Ambrose shakily. "I'll write to you to-morrow morning—everything I think of to-night. I'll send it by Toile Grampierre. You can send an answer by him."

"Ah, my dear love, if you forget me I shall die!"

"You doubt me still! I tell you, you have changed everything for me. I cannot forget you unless I lose my mind!"

## CHAPTER X.

*Another visitor.*

Ambrose, having filled the day as best he could with small tasks, was smoking beside his fire and enviously watching his dog. Job had no cares to keep him wakeful. It was about eight o'clock, and still full day.

It was Ambrose's promise to visit Simon Grampierre that had kept him inactive all day. He did not wish to complicate the already delicate situation between Grampierre and Gaviller by an open visit to the former. He meant to go with Tole at dawn.

Suddenly Job raised his head and growled. In a moment Ambrose heard the sound of a horse approaching at a walk above. Thinking of Colina, his heart leaped—but she would never come at a walk! An instinct of wariness bade him sit where he was.

A mounted man appeared on the bank above. It was a breed forty-five years old perhaps, but vigorous and youthful still; good looking, well kept, with an agreeable manner; thus Ambrose's first impressions. The stranger rode a good horse.

"Well?" he said, looking down on Ambrose in surprise.

"Tie your horse and come down," said Ambrose politely. He welcomed the diversion. This man must have come from the fort. Perhaps he had news.

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Face to face with the stranger, Ambrose was sensible that he had to deal with an uncommon character. There was something about him, he could not decide what, that distinguished him from every other man of Indian blood that Ambrose had ever met.

He wore a well-fitting suit of blue serge and a show of starched linen, in itself a distinguishing mark up north. "Quite a swell!" was Ambrose's inward comment.

"You are Ambrose Doane, I suppose?" he said in English as good as Ambrose's own. Ambrose nodded.

"I knew you had dinner with Mr. Gaviller last night," the man went on, "but as you didn't drop in on us at the store to-day I supposed you had gone back. I didn't expect to find you here."

He was fluent for one of his color—too fluent the other man felt. Ambrose was sizing him up with interest.

It finally came to him what the man's distinguishing quality was. It was his open look, an expression almost of benignity, absolutely foreign to the Indian character. Indians may give their eyes freely to one another, but a white man never sees beneath the glassy surface.

This Indian in look and manner resembled an English country gentleman, much sunburnt; or one of those university-bred East Indian potentates who affect motor-cars and polo ponies. Oddly enough his candid look affronted Ambrose. "It isn't natural," he told himself.

"I am Gordon Strange, bookkeeper at Fort Enterprise," the stranger volunteered.

The bookkeeper of a big trading-post is always second in command. Ambrose understood that he was in the presence of a person of consideration in the country.

"Sit down," he said. "Fill up your pipe."

Strange obeyed. "We're supposed to be red-hot rivals in business," he said with an agreeable laugh. "But that needn't prevent, eh? Funny I should stumble on you like this! I ride every night after supper—a man needs a bit of exercise after working all day in the store. I saw the light of your fire."

He was too anxious to have it understood that the meeting was accidental. Ambrose began to suspect that he had ridden out on purpose to see him.

The better men among the natives, such as Tole Grampierre, have a pride of their own; but they never presume to the same footing as the white men. Strange, however, talked as one gentleman to another.

There was nothing blatant in it; he had a well-bred man's care for the prejudices of another. Nevertheless, as they talked on Ambrose began to feel a curious repugnance to his visitor, that made him wary of his own speech.

"Too damn gentlemanly!" he said to himself.

"Why didn't you come in to see us to-day?" inquired Strange. "We don't expect a traveler to give us the go-by."

"Well," said Ambrose dryly, "I had an idea that my room would be preferred to my company."

"Nonsense!" said Strange, laughing. "We don't carry our business war as far as that. Why, we want to show you free-traders what a fine place we have, so we can crow over you a little. Anyway, you dined with Mr. Gaviller, didn't you?"

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"John Gaviller would never let himself off any of the duties of hospitality," said Ambrose cautiously.

He was wondering how far Strange might be admitted to Gaviller's confidence. That he was being drawn out, Ambrose had no doubt at all, but he did not know just to what end.

Strange launched into extensive praises of John Gaviller. "I ought to know," he said in conclusion. "I've worked for him twenty-nine years. He taught me all I know. He's been a second father to me."

Ambrose felt as an honest man hearing an unnecessary and fulsome panegyric must feel, slightly nauseated. He said nothing.

Strange was quick to perceive the absence of enthusiasm. He laughed agreeably. "I suppose I can hardly expect you to chime in with me," he said. "The old man is death on free-traders!"

"I have nothing against him," said Ambrose quickly.

"Of course I don't always agree with him on matters of policy," Strange went on. "Curious, isn't it, how a man's ruling characteristic begins to get the better of him as he grows old.

"Mr. Gaviller is always just—but, well, a leetle hard. He's pushing the people a little too far lately. I tell him so to his face—I oppose him all I can. But of course he's the boss."

Ambrose began to feel an obscure and discomfiting indignation at his visitor. He wished he would go.

"You really must see our plant before you go back," said Strange; "the model farm, the dairy herd, the flourmill, the sawmill. Will you come up to-morrow and let me take you about?"

His glibness had the effect of rendering Ambrose monosyllabic. "No," he said.

"Oh, I say," said Strange, laughing, "what did you come to Fort Enterprise for if you feel that way about us?"

Under his careless air Ambrose thought he distinguished a certain eagerness to hear the answer. So he said nothing.

"I'm afraid you and the old gentleman must have had words," Strange went on, still smiling. "Take it from me, his bark is worse than his bite. If he broke out at you, he's sorry for it now. It takes half my time to fix up his little differences with the people here."

He paused to give the other an opportunity to speak. Ambrose remained mum.

"The old man certainly has a rough side to his tongue," murmured Strange insinuatingly.

"You're jumping to conclusions," said Ambrose coolly. "John Gaviller gave me no cause for offense. I was well entertained at his house."

"U-m!" said Strange. He seemed rather at a loss. Presently he went on to tell in a careless voice of the coyote hunts they had. Afterward he casually inquired how long Ambrose meant to stay in the neighborhood.

"I don't know," was the blunt answer.

"Well, really!" said Strange with his laugh—the sound of it was becoming highly exasperating to Ambrose. "I don't want to pry into your affairs, but you must admit it looks queer for you to be camping here on the edge of the company reservation without ever coming in."

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Ambrose was wroth with himself for not playing a better part, but the man affected him with such repugnance he could not bring himself to dissimulate, "Sorry," he said stiffly. "You'll have to make what you can of it."

Strange got up. His candid air now had a touch of manly pride. "Oh, I can take a hint!" he said. "Hanged if I know what you've got against me!"

"Nothing whatever," said Ambrose.

"I come to you in all friendliness—"

"Thought you said you stumbled on me," interrupted Ambrose.

"I mean of course when I saw you here I came in friendliness," Strange explained with dignity.

"Well, go in friendliness, and no harm done on either side," said Ambrose coolly.

For a brief instant Strange lost his benignant air. "I've lived north all my life," he said. "And I never met with the like. We have different ideas about hospitality."

"Very likely," said Ambrose coolly. "Good night!"

When his visitor rode away Ambrose turned with relief to his dog. The sight of Job's honest ugliness was good to him.

"He's a cur, Job!" he said strongly. "A snake in the grass! An oily scoundrel! I don't know how I know it, but I know it! A square man would have punched me the way I talked to him."

Job wagged his tail in entire approval of his master's judgment. Ambrose turned in, feeling better for having spoken his mind.

Nevertheless, as he lay waiting for sleep it occurred to him that he had been somewhat hasty. After all, he had nothing to go on. And, supposing Strange were what he thought him, how foolish he, Ambrose, had been to show his band.

If he had been craftier he might have learned things of value for him to know. Following this unsatisfactory train of thought, he fell asleep.

## CHAPTER XI.

*Alexander Selkirk and family.*

Again Ambrose was awakened by a furious barking from Job. It was even earlier than on the preceding morning. The sun was not up; the river was like a gray ghost.

Ambrose, expecting Tole, looked for a dugout. There was none in sight. Job's agitated barks were addressed in the other direction.

Issuing from his tent, Ambrose beheld a quaint little man squatting on top of the bank like an image. He had an air of strange patience, as if he had been waiting for hours, and expected to wait.

His brown mask of a face changed not a line at the sight of Ambrose.

"What do you want?" demanded the white man.

"Please, I want spik wit' you," the little man softly replied.

"Come down here then," said Ambrose.

The early caller looked at Job apprehensively. Ambrose silenced the dog with a command, and the man came slowly down the bank, cringing a little.

The quaintness of aspect was largely due to the fact that he wore a coat and trousers originally designed for a tall, stout man. Ambrose suspected he had a child to deal with until he saw the wrinkles and the sophisticated eyes.



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"Who are you?" he asked.

"I Alexander Selkirk, me," was the answer.

Ambrose could not but smile at the misapplication of the sonorous Scotch name to such a manikin.

"You Ambrose Doane?" the other said solemnly.

"Everybody seems to know me," said Ambrose.

Alexander stared at him with a sullen, walled, speculative regard, exactly, Ambrose thought, like a schoolboy facing an irate master, and wondering where the blow will fall.

To carry out this effect he was holding something inside his voluminous jacket, something that suggested contraband.

"What have you got there?" demanded Ambrose.

Without changing a muscle of his face, Alexander undid a button and produced a gleaming black pelt.

Ambrose gasped. It was a beautiful black fox. Such a prize does not come a trader's way once in three seasons. The last black fox Minot & Doane had secured brought twelve hundred dollars in London—and it was not so fine a specimen as this.

Lustrous, silky, black as anthracite; every hair in place, and not a white hair showing except the tuft at the end of the brush.

"Where did you get it?" Ambrose asked, amazed.

"I trap him, me, myself," said Alexander.

"When?"

"Las' Februar'."

"Are you offering it to me?" asked Ambrose, eyeing it desirously.

"Ow much?" demanded Alexander, affecting a wall-eyed indifference.

Ambrose made a more careful examination. There was no doubt of it; the skin was perfect. He thrilled at the idea of returning with such a prize to his partner. He made a rapid calculation.

"Five hundred and fifty cash," he said. "Seven hundred fifty in trade."

A spark showed in Alexander's eyes.

"It is yours," he said.

"How can we make a trade?" asked Ambrose, perplexed. "John Gaviller would never honor any order of mine. I have no goods here to give you in trade."

"All right," said Alexander imperturbably. "I go to Moultrie to get goods."

"You, too," said Ambrose. "I can't import you all."

"I got go Moultrie, me," said Alexander. "I got trouble wit' Gaviller. He starve me and my children. They sick."

"Starve you!"

"Gaviller say give no more debt till I bring him my black fox," Alexander went on apathetically. "Give no flour, no sugar, no meat, no tea. My brot'er feed us some. Gaviller say to him better not. So now we have nothing. We ongary."

This promised difficulties. Ambrose frowned. "Tell me the whole story," he said.

The little man was eying the grub-box wolfishly. Throwing back the cover, Ambrose offered him a cold bannock.

"Here," he said. "Eat and tell me."

Alexander without a word turned and scrambled up the bank and disappeared, clutching the loaf to his breast. The white man shouted after him without effect. He left the precious pelt behind him.

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Ambrose shrugged philosophically. "You never can tell."

Presently Alexander came back, his seamy brown face as blank as ever. He vouchsafed no explanation. Ambrose affected not to notice him. He had long since found it to be the best way of getting what he wanted. The breed squatted on the stones, prepared to wait for the judgment-day, it seemed.

After a while he said with the wary, defiant look of a child beggar who expects to be refused, perhaps cuffed: "Give me 'not'er piece of bread."

Ambrose without a word broke his remaining bannock in two and gave him half. Alexander bolted it with incredible rapidity and sat as before, waiting.

Ambrose, wearying of this, dropped the pelt on his knees, saying: "Take your black fox. I cannot trade with you."

It had the desired effect. Alexander arose and put the skin inside the tent. "It is yours," he said. "Give me tobacco."

Ambrose tossed him his pouch.

When the little man got his pipe going, squatting on his heels as before, he told his tale. "Me spik Angleys no good," he said, fingering his Adam's apple, as if the defect was there. "Las' winter I ver' poor. All tam moch sick in my stummick. I catch him fine black fox. Wa! I say. I rich now.

"I tak' him John Gaviller. Gaviller say: 'Three hunder twenty dollar in trade.' Wa! That is not'in'. I am sick to hear it. Already I owe that debt on the book. Then I am mad. Gaviller t'ink for because I poor and sick I tak' little price. I t'ink no!

"So I tak' her home. The men they look at her. Wa! they say, she is *miwasan*—what you say, beauty? They say, don' give Gaviller that black fox, Sandy. He got pay more. So I keep her. Gaviller laugh. He say: 'You got give me that black fox soon. I not pay so moch in summer.'"

The apathetic way in which this was told affected Ambrose strongly. His face reddened with indignation. The story bore the hall-marks of truth.

Certainly the man's hunger was not feigned; likewise his eagerness to accept the moderate price Ambrose had offered him was significant. Ambrose scowled in his perplexity.

"Hanged if I know what to do for you!" he said. "I'll give you a receipt for the skin. I'll give you a little grub. Then you go home and stay until I can arrange something."

Alexander received this as if he had not heard it.

"You hear," said Ambrose. "Is that all right?"

"I got go Moultrie," the little man said stolidly.

"You can't!" cried Ambrose.

Alexander merely sat like an image.

This was highly exasperating to the white man. "You've got to go home, I tell you," he cried.

"I not go home," the native said with strange apathy. "Gaviller kill me now."

"Nonsense!" cried Ambrose. "He has got to respect the law."

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Alexander was unmoved. "He not give me no grub," he said. "I starve here."

This was unanswerable. Ambrose, divided between annoyance and compassion, fumed in silence. He himself had only enough food for a few days. The breed wore him out with his stolidity.

"Well, what do you want me to do?" he asked at last.

"Give me little flour," said Alexander. "I go to Moultrie."

"What will you do with your family?"

"I tak' them."

"How many?"

"My woman, my boy, my two girl, my baby."

"Good Lord!" cried Ambrose. "Have you a boat?"

"*Non!* There is timber down the river. I mak' a raf, me."

"It would take you two weeks to float down," cried Ambrose. "I have only thirty pounds of flour."

Alexander shrugged. "We ongr, anyway," he said. "We lak be ongr on the way."

Ambrose swore savagely under his breath. This was nearly hopeless. He strode up and down, thrashing his brains for a solution.

Alexander, squatting on his heels, waited apathetically for the verdict. He had shifted his burden to the white man.

"Where is your family?" demanded Ambrose.

Alexander looked over his shoulder and spoke a word in Cree. Instantly four heads appeared over the edge of the bank. Job barked once in startled and indignant protest, and went to Ambrose's heels.

Ambrose could not forbear a start of laughter at the suddenness of the apparition. It was like the genii in a pantomime bobbing up through the trapdoors.

"Come down," he said.



A distressful little procession faced him; they were gaunt, ragged, appallingly dirty, and terrified almost into a state of idiocy. First came the mother, a travesty of womanhood, dehumanized except for her tragic, terrified eyes.

A boy of sixteen followed her, ugly and misshapen as a gargoyle; he carried the baby in a sling on his back. Two timorous little girls came last.

They lugged their pitiful belongings with them—a few rags of bedding and clothes, some traps and snowshoes, and cooking utensils. The smaller girl bore a holy picture in a gaudy frame.

Ambrose's heart was wrung by the sight of so much misery. He stormed at Alexander. "Good God! What a state to get into. What's the matter with you that you can't keep them better than that? You've no right to marry and have children!"

Somehow they apprehended the compassion that animated his anger, and were not afraid of him. They lined up before him, mutely bespeaking his assistance.

Their faith in his power to rescue them was implicit. That was what made it impossible for him to refuse.

"Here," he said roughly. "You'll have to take my dugout. I'll get another from Grampierre. You can make Moultrie in six days in that if you work. That'll give you five pounds of flour a day—enough to keep you alive."

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The word “dugout” galvanized Alexander into action. Without a glance in Ambrose’s direction, he ran to the craft, and running it a little way into the water rocked it from side to side to satisfy himself there were no leaks.

Turning to his family he spoke a command in Cree, and forthwith they began to pitch their bundles in.

Ambrose was accustomed to the thanklessness of the humbler natives. They are like children, who look to the white man for everything, and take what they can get as a matter of course. Still he was a little nonplused by the excessive precipitation of this family.

It occurred to him there was something more in their desperate eagerness to get away than Alexander’s tale explained. But having given his word, he could not take it back.

From father down to babe their faces expressed such relief and hope he had not the heart to rebuke them. Alexander came to him for the food, and he handed over all he had.

“Wait!” he said. “I will give you a letter for Peter Minot. Lord!” he inwardly added. “Peter won’t thank me for dumping this on him!”

On a leaf of his note-book he scribbled a few lines to his partner explaining the situation.

“You understand,” he said to Alexander, “out of your credit for the black fox, John Gaviller must be paid what you owe him.”

Alexander nodded indifferently, mad to get away.

As Alexander’s squaw was about to get in the dugout she paused on the stones and looked at Ambrose, her ugly, dark face working with emotion. Her eyes were as piteous as a wounded animal’s. She flung up her hands in a gesture expressing her powerlessness to speak.

It seemed there was some gratitude in the family. Moved by a sudden impulse she caught up Ambrose’s hand and pressed it passionately to her lips. The white man fell back astonished and abashed. Alexander paid no attention at all.

In less than ten minutes after Ambrose had given them the dugout the distressed family pushed off for a new land. Father and son paddled as if the devil were behind them.

“I wonder if I done the right thing?” mused Ambrose.

The Selkirks had not long disappeared down the river when Ambrose received another visitor. This was a surly native youth who, without greeting, handed him a note, and rode back to the fort. Ambrose's heart beat high as he examined the superscription.

He did not need to be told who had written it. But he was not prepared for the contents:

**DEAR:**

Come to me at once. Come directly to the house. I am in great trouble.

*Colina.*

## **CHAPTER XII.**

*Gathering shadows.*

Ambrose, hastening back to Gaviller's house with a heart full of anxiety, came upon Gordon Strange as he rounded the corner of the company store. The breed was at the door. Evidently he harbored no resentment, for his face lighted up at the sight of an old friend.



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"Well!" he said. "So you came to see us."

Ambrose felt the same unregenerate impulse to punch the smooth face. However, with more circumspection than upon the previous occasion, he returned a civil answer.

"Have you heard?" asked Strange, with an expression of serious concern.

Ambrose reflected that Strange probably knew a message had been sent.

"Heard what?" he asked non-committally.

"Mr. Gaviller was taken sick last night."

"What's the matter with him?" asked Ambrose quickly.

Strange shrugged. "I do not know exactly. The doctor has not come out of the house since he was sent for. A stroke, I fancy."

"I will go to the house and inquire," said Ambrose.

He proceeded, telling himself that Strange had not got any change out of him this time. He was relieved by the breed's news; he had feared worse.

To be sure, it was terribly hard on Colina, but on his own account he could not feel much pain of mind over a sickness of Gaviller's.

The half-breed girl who admitted him showed a scared yellow face. Evidently the case was a serious one. She ushered him into the library. The aspect, the very smell of the little room, brought back the scene of two days before and set Ambrose's heart to beating.

Presently Colina came swiftly in, closing the door behind her. She was very pale, and there were dark circles under her eyes. She showed the unnatural self-possession that a brave woman forces on herself in the presence of a great emergency. Her eyes were tragic.

She came straight to his arms. She lowered her head and partly broke down and wept a little.

"Ah, it's so good to have some one to lean on!" she murmured.

"Your father—what is the matter with him?" asked Ambrose.

The look in her eyes and her piteous shaking warned him to expect something worse than the tale of an illness.

She lifted her white face.

“Father was shot last night,” she said.

“Good God!” said Ambrose. “By whom?”

“We do not know.”

“He’s not—he’s not—” Ambrose’s tongue balked at the dreadful word.

She shook her head. “A dangerous wound, not necessarily fatal. We can’t tell yet.”

“You have no idea who did it?”

Colina schooled herself to give him a coherent account. The sight of her forced calmness, with those eyes, was inexpressibly painful to Ambrose.

“No. He went out after dinner. He said he had to see a man. He did not mention his name. He came back at dusk. I was on the veranda. He was walking as usual—perfectly straight. But one hand was pressed to his side.

“He passed me without speaking. I followed him in. In the passage he said: ‘I am shot. Tell no one but Giddings. Then he collapsed in my arms. He has not spoken since.’”

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Ambrose heard this with mixed feelings. His heart bled for Colina. Yet the grim thought would not down that the tyrannous old trader had received no more than his deserts. He soothed her with clumsy tenderness.

"Why do you want to keep it a secret?" he asked, after a while.

"Father wished it," said Colina. "We think he must have had a good reason. The doctor thinks it is best. There has been a good deal of trouble with the natives; many of them are ugly and rebellious. And we whites are so few!

"Father could keep them in hand. They are in such awe of him; they regard him as something almost more than mortal. If they learn that he is vulnerable—who knows what might happen!"

"I understand," said Ambrose grimly.

"So no one knows, not even the servants. I have hidden all the—things. Of course, the man who did it will never tell." The calm voice suddenly broke in a cry of agony. "Oh, Ambrose!"

He comforted her mutely.

"It is so dreadful to think that any one should hate him so!" said poor Colina. "So unjust! They are like his children. He is severe with them only for their good!"

Ambrose concealed a grim smile at this partial view of John Gaviller.

"He lies there so white and still," she went on. "It nearly breaks my heart to think how I have quarreled with him and gone against his wishes. If waiting on him day and night will ever make it up to him, I'll do it!"

Ambrose's breast stirred a little with resentment, but he kept his mouth shut. He understood that it was good for Colina to unburden her breast.

"Ah, thank God I have you!" she murmured.

They heard the doctor coming, and Colina drew away. She introduced the two men.

"Mr. Doane is my friend," she said. "He is one of us."

The doctor favored Ambrose with a glance of astonishment before making his professional announcement. Ambrose saw the typical hanger-on of a trading-post, a white man of Gaviller's age, careless in dress, with a humorous, intelligent face, showing the ravages of a weak will. At present, with the sole responsibility of an important case on his shoulders, he looked something like the man he was meant to be.

It was no time for commonplaces.

“John is conscious,” he said directly. “He is showing remarkable resistance. There is no need for any immediate alarm. He wants to make a statement. I made the excuse of getting pencil and paper to come down. In a matter of such importance I think there should be another witness.”

“I will go,” said Colina.

Giddings shook his head. “Your father expressly forbade it,” he said. “He wishes to spare you.”

Colina made an impatient gesture, but seemed to acquiesce.

“You go,” she said to Ambrose.

Giddings looked doubtful, but said nothing.

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"I'm afraid the sight of me—" Ambrose began.

"I don't mean that you should go in," said Colina. "If you stand in the doorway he cannot see you the way he lies."

Ambrose nodded and followed Giddings out.

"What is the wound?" he asked.

"Through the left lung. He will not die of the shot. I can't tell yet what may develop."

Ambrose halted at the open door of Gaviller's room. The windows looked out over the river, and the cooling northwest wind was wafted through. The hospital-like bareness of the room evinced a simple taste in the owner. The gimcracks he loved to make were all for the public rooms below.

The head of the bed was toward the door. On the pillow Ambrose could see the gray head, a little bald on the crown.

Giddings, after feeling his patient's pulse, sat down beside the bed with pad and pencil.

"I'm ready to take down what you say," he said.

The wounded man said in a weak but surprisingly clear voice:

"You understand this is not to be used unless the worst happens to me."

Giddings nodded.

"You must give me your word that no proceedings will be taken against the man I name—unless I die. I will not die. When I get up I will attend to him."

"I promise," said Giddings.

After a brief pause Gaviller said:

"I was shot by the breed known as Sandy Selkirk."

Ambrose sharply caught his breath. A great light broke upon him.

Gaviller went on:

"He caught a black fox last winter that he has persistently refused to give up to me. Out of sheer obstinacy he preferred to starve his family. Yesterday Strange told me he thought it likely Selkirk would try to dispose of the skin to Ambrose Doane, the free-trader who is hanging around the fort."

Giddings sent a startled glance toward the door.

“Strange said perhaps news of it had been carried down the river, and that was what Doane had come for. So I went to Selkirk’s shack last night to get it. I consider it mine, because Selkirk already owes the company its value. Any attempt to dispose of it elsewhere would be the same as robbing me.

“Selkirk refused to give it up, and I took it. He shot me from behind. There were no witnesses but his family. That is all I want to say.”

“I have it,” murmured Giddings.

The gray head rolled impatiently on the pillow. “Giddings, don’t let that skin get away. I rely on you. Be firm. Be secret.”

“I’ll do my best,” said the doctor.

He came to the door, ostensibly to close it, showing a scared face. “I didn’t know what was coming,” his lips shaped.

Ambrose nodded to him reassuringly, meaning to convey that nothing he had heard would influence his actions.

Giddings closed the door, and Ambrose returned down-stairs with a heart that sunk lower at each step. What he had at first regarded calmly enough as Gaviller’s tragedy he now clearly saw was likely to prove tragic for himself.

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It was useless to try to put Colina off.

"I must know!" she cried passionately. "I'm the head here now. I must know where we all stand."

Ambrose told her. To save her feelings he instinctively softened the harsher features. It did not do his own cause any good later.

"Oh, the wretch!" breathed Colina between set teeth. "I know him! A sneaking little scoundrel! Just the one to shoot from behind! To think we must let him go! That is the hardest."

Ambrose was silent.

"We must get the skin," she went on eagerly. "Giddings can't handle the natives. You do that for me."

"It is too late," said Ambrose grimly. "He is gone with it."

"Gone?" she exclaimed, with raised eyebrows. "How do you know?"

"He came to my camp at dawn," said Ambrose. Honesty compelling him, he added with a touch of defiance; "I gave him my dugout."

Colina shrank from him.

"You helped him get away!" she cried.

"I didn't know what had happened," he said indignantly.

"Of course not!" said Colina, with quick penitence.

But she did not return to him. Presently the frown came back; she began to breathe quickly. "You saw the skin; you must have talked with him. You took his part against father!"

Ambrose had nothing to say. He could have groaned aloud in his helplessness to avert the catastrophe that he saw coming.

It was as if a horrible, black-shrouded shape had stepped between him and Colina.

She, too, was aware of it. For an age-long moment they stared at each other with a kind of chilled terror.

Neither dared speak of what both were thinking.

At last Colina tried to wave the hideous fantom away.

"Ah, we mustn't quarrel now!" she said tremulously. "Couldn't the man be overtaken and the skin recovered?"

"Possibly," admitted Ambrose. "I wouldn't advise it."

Colina, freshly affronted, struggled with her anger.

"Let me explain," said Ambrose. "I agreed to take the skin from him, but on the understanding that out of the price Mr. Gaviller must be paid every cent of what was owing him." His reasonable air suddenly failed him. "Colina," he burst out imploringly, "it was worth more than double what your father offered! That was the trouble! What is a skin to us? I pledge myself to transmit whatever price it brings to your father. Won't that do?"

"Don't say anything more about it," said Colina painfully. "You're right; we mustn't quarrel about a thing like that."

A wretched constraint fell upon them. For the moment the catastrophe had been averted, but both felt it was only for the moment.

They had nothing to say to each other.

Finally Colina moved toward the door.

"I must see if anything is wanted up-stairs," she murmured. "Wait here for me."



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### CHAPTER XIII.

*The quarrel.*

When Colina returned she said immediately: "Ambrose, can you stay at Fort Enterprise a little while longer?"

His heart leaped up. "As long as I can help you!" he cried.

They looked at each other wistfully. They wanted so much to be friends—but the black shape was still there in the room.

"I'd be glad to have you stay here in the house," said Colina.

Ambrose shook his head. "I'd much better stay in camp."

She acquiesced. "There are three white men here," she went on, "Giddings, Macfarlane the policeman, and Mr. Pringle the missionary. Each is all right in his way, but—"

"They're all in love with you," suggested Ambrose.

She smiled faintly. "How did you know?"

Ambrose shrugged. "Deduced it."

"You see I cannot take any of them into my confidence."

"Colina!" he said. "If you would only let me—"

"Ah, I want to!" she returned. "If only, only you will not abuse him—wounded and helpless as he is!"

Here was the black shape again.

"I suppose Gordon Strange will run the business," said Ambrose.

"Naturally," said Colina. "He knows everything about it."

"If you want my advice," Ambrose said diffidently, "do not trust him too far."

She looked at him in astonishment. "Mr. Strange is almost like one of the family. He's been father's right-hand man for years and years. Father says he's the best servant the company possesses."

"That may be," said Ambrose doggedly, "but a good servant makes a bad master. After all, he is not one of us. If you value my advice at all you will never let him know he is running things."

"How can I help it? I haven't told him yet what has happened; but Dr. Giddings and I agreed that he must be told. He never mixes with the natives."

"Of course he must know your father was wounded, but he needn't be told how seriously. If I were you I would make him inform me of every detail of the business on the pretext of repeating it to your father. And I would issue orders to him as if they came from your father's bed."

"How can I?" said Colina. "I know nothing of the business."

"I can help you," said Ambrose—"if you want me to. I know it."

"But, Ambrose," she objected, "what reason have you to feel so strongly against Mr. Strange?"

"No reason," he said; "only an instinct. I believe he's a crook."

"Father relies on him absolutely."

"Maybe his influence with your father was sometimes unfortunate."

Colina's eyebrows went up. "Influence! Father would hardly allow his judgment to be swayed by a breed."

"You're a woman," said Ambrose earnestly. "You should not despise these feelings that we have sometimes and cannot give a reason for. I saw Strange on my way here. I exchanged only half a dozen words with him, yet I am as sure as I can be that he was glad of the accident to your father and hopes to profit by it somehow."

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Colina was still incredulous.

“Look what he wrote me this morning!” she cried. “It sounds so genuine.”

She handed him a note from the desk. He read:

### **DEAR MISS COLINA:**

They are saying that your father has been taken ill; that the doctor has been with him all night. I am more distressed than I can tell you. You know what he is to me! Do send me some word. He was so cheerful and well yesterday that I cannot believe it can be serious. Native gossip always magnifies everything.

If it is all right to speak to him about business, will you remind him that a deputation from the farmers is due at the store this morning to receive his final answer as to the price of wheat this year. As far as I know his intention is to offer one-fifty a bushel, but something may have come up to cause him to change his mind. Unless he is very ill, I would rather not take this responsibility upon myself.

Do let me have word from you.

G.S.

“Anybody can write letters,” said Ambrose. “It sounds to me as if he was just trying to find out how bad your father is. He could easily put the farmers off.”

“I can’t believe he’s as bad as you say,” said Colina gravely. “Why, he was here long before I was born. But I will be prudent. With your help I’ll try to run things myself.”

Ambrose sent her a grateful glance—shot with apprehension. He dreaded what was still to come.

“This question of the price of the wheat,” Colina went on; “we have to give him an answer or confess father is very ill.”

Ambrose nodded gloomily.

“Fortunately that is easy,” she continued; “for he spoke about it at dinner last night. He means to pay one-fifty.” She moved toward the desk. “I’ll send a note over at once.”

The critical moment had arrived—even more swiftly than he feared. He could not think clearly, for the pain he felt.

“Ah, Colina, I love you!” he cried involuntarily.



She paused and smiled over her shoulder.

"I know," she said, surprised and gentle. "That's why you're here."

"I've got to advise you honestly," he cried, "no matter what trouble it makes."

"Of course," she said. "What's the matter, Ambrose?"

"You should offer them one-seventy-five for their wheat."

The eyebrows went up again. "Why?"

"It's only fair. Two dollars would be fairer."

"But father said one-fifty."

"Your father is wrong in this instance."

Colina frowned ominously.

"How do you know?" she demanded.

"I know the price of flour at the different posts," he said deprecatingly. "I know the risks that must be allowed for and the fair profit one expects."

"Do you mean to say that father is unfair?" she cried.

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He was silent. An unlucky word had betrayed him. He could have bitten his tongue. Still, he reflected sullenly, it was bound to come. You can't make black white, however tenderly you describe it.

Colina sprang to her feet.

"Unfair!" she cried. "That is to say a cheat! You can say it while he is lying up-stairs desperately wounded!"

"Colina, be reasonable," he implored. "The fact that he is suffering can't make a wrong right."

"There is no wrong!" she cried. "What do you know about conditions here?"

"They come to my camp," he said simply, "one after another to beg me to help them."

"And you were not above it," she flashed back, "murderers and others!"

An honest anger fired Ambrose's eyes. "You're talking wildly," he said sternly. "I'm trying to help you."

Colina laughed.

With a great effort he commanded his temper, "What do you see yourself in your rides about the settlement?" he asked. "Poverty and wretchedness! How do you explain it when times are good—when this is known as the richest post in the north?"

Colina would have none of his reasoning. "These are just the dangerous ideas my father warned me against!" she cried passionately. "This is how you make the natives discontented and unruly!"

"You will not listen to me!" he cried in despair.

"Listen to you! I see him lying there—helpless. I am sick with compassion for him and with hatred against the creatures who did it. And you dare to attack him, to excuse them! I will not endure it!"

"I am not attacking him. Right or wrong, he has brought about a disastrous situation. He's the first to suffer. We're all standing on the edge of a volcano. We are five whites here, and three hundred miles from the nearest of our kind. If we want to save him and save ourselves we've got to face the facts."

Of this Colina heard one sentence. "Do you mean, to say that father brought this on himself?" she demanded, breathlessly angry.

Ambrose made a helpless gesture.

"I am to understand that you justify the breed?" she persisted.

"You have no right to put words into my mouth!"

Colina repeated like an automaton. "Do you think the breed was justified in shooting my father?"

"I will not answer."

"You've got to answer—before you and I go any farther!"

"Colina, think what you're doing!" he cried. "We must not quarrel."

"I'm not quarreling," she said with an odd, flinty quietness. "I'm trying to find out something necessary for me to know. You might as well answer. Do you think the breed was justified in shooting my father?"

Ambrose, baited beyond endurance, cried: "I do! He went into the man's house and laid hands on his property. Even a breed has rights."

Colina bowed her head as if in polite acceptance. "You had better go," she said in soft tones more terrible than a cry. "I am sorry I ever saw you!"

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The bitterness of lovers' quarrels is in ratio with their passion for each other. These two loved with complete abandon, consequently each could wound the other maddeningly.

But the plant of their love, vigorous as it was, was not rooted in old acquaintance. When the top withered under the blasts of anger there was no store of life below. Now each was secretly terrified by the strangeness of the being to whom he had yielded his soul.

Ambrose, wild with pain, no longer recked what he said. "You make a man mad!" he cried. "You will not listen to reason. A thing must be so just because you want it that way. I rack my brains for words to save your feelings, and this is what I get! Very well, you shall have the bald truth."

"Leave the house!" cried Colina.

"Not until I have spoken out!"

She clapped her hands over her ears.

"That is childish!" he said scornfully. "You can hear me! Throughout the whole north your father is called the slave-driver!"

Colina faced him still and white. This was the very incandescence of anger. "Go!" she said. "I'm done with you!"

"One thing more," he said doggedly. "The price of wheat. I shouldn't have said anything about justice. Putting that aside, it will be good business for you to pay the farmers their price. Otherwise you'll have red rebellion on your hands!"

As Ambrose made for the door he met Gordon Strange coming in.

"Wait!" Colina commanded. "I want you to hear this."

It was impossible to tell from her set face what she meant to do, Ambrose waited, hoping against hope.

"You want to know about the wheat?" said Colina.

"First, your father," said Strange, anxious and compassionate.

"He is not dangerously ill," said Colina.

"Ah!" said Strange. "Yes, the farmers are waiting."

Colina said clearly: "The price is to be one-fifty per bushel."



"That's what I thought," said Strange. "I will tell them." He went.

"Ah, Colina!" cried Ambrose brokenly.

She left the room slowly, as if he had not been there.

Ambrose could not have told how he got out of the house.

## CHAPTER XIV.

*Simon Grampierre.*

Ambrose lay in his tent with his head hidden in his arms, trying not to think. Job licked his hand unheeded. A hail from the river forced him to rouse himself. As he crawled out he instinctively cast a glance at the sun. It was mid-afternoon.

Tole Grampierre landed on the stones. "You are seeck!" he exclaimed, seeing Ambrose's face.

Though life loses all its savor, it must be carried on with a good air. "*Mal de tete!*" said Ambrose, making light of it. "It will soon pass."

Tole accepted the explanation. He told Ambrose that he had come that morning and found him gone. He had come back to tell him what the white man already knew—that, though Gaviller had been laid low by a mysterious stroke, he had sent word from his sick-bed that he would pay no more than one-fifty for wheat.



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"The men are moch mad," Tole went on in his matter-of-fact way. "They not listen to my fat'er no more. Say he too old. All come to meet to our house to-night. There will be trouble. My fat'er send me for you. He say maybe you can stop the trouble."

"I stop it?" said Ambrose, laughing harshly. "What the devil can I do?"

Tole shrugged. "My fat'er say nobody but you can stop it."

It was clear to Ambrose that "trouble" signified danger to Colina. "I'll come," he said apathetically.

"Where is your dugout?" asked Tole.

Ambrose explained.

"Bring all your things," said Tole. "You stay at our house now till you go back. My mot'er got good medicine. She cure *mal de tete*."

Ambrose reflected bitterly that Mrs. Grampierre's simples could hardly reach his complaint. Nevertheless, he was not anxious to be left alone—he was not one to nourish a sorrow. He packed up what remained of his outfit, and Tole stowed it in the dugout.

The Grampierre house was a mile and a half above the Company's establishment on the other side of the river. The two young men had, therefore, a three-mile paddle against the current.

Landing, Ambrose saw before him a low, wide-spreading house built of squared logs and whitewashed. Ample barns and outhouses spread around a rough square. The whole picture brought to mind a manor-house of earlier and simpler times.

The patriarch himself waited at the door. He was a fine figure of manhood—lean, straight, rugged as a jack-pine. He had the noble aquiline features of the red side of the house, and his dark face was wonderfully set off by a luxuriant, snowy thatch.

Ambrose, indifferent as he was, could not but be struck by the old man's beauty, and his dignity was equal to his good looks. Young Tole's naive pride in his parent was explained.

Ambrose was introduced to a wide interior of a dignified bareness. This was the main room of the house; the kitchen they called it, though the cooking was done outside.

It was spotlessly clean; none too common a thing in the north. Clearly these people had their pride.

Still Ambrose was reminded of the difference between white and red, for the women of the house were ignored, and when later he sat down to sup with Simon and his five strong sons the wives waited humbly on the table.

Afterward the men sat before the door, smoking. Simon kept Ambrose at his right hand, and conversed with him as with an honored guest. He avoided all reference to what had brought him.

When Ambrose, not understanding the reason for his delicacy, asked about the coming meeting, Simon said:

“When all come you learn what every man thinks. I not want to shape your mind to my mind until all are here.”

They came by ones and twos, a little company of twenty-odd. Many anomalies of race were exhibited. Some showed a Scotch cast of feature, some French, some purely Indian.

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One or two might have been taken for white men had it not been for an odd cast of the eye. Yet it might happen the Indian and the white man were full brothers. The general character of the faces was stolid rather than passionate.

There was little talk.

The room having been cleared, they went inside. The women had disappeared. Simon Grampierre sat at an end of the room, with Ambrose at his right, and his sons ranged about him. The other men faced them from the body of the room.

There were not chairs for all, but indeed chairs suggested church, the trader's house, and other places of ceremony; and those without, squatting on their heels around the walls, were the happier.

Talk was slow to start. They kept their hats on and stolidly looked down their noses. When it began to grow dark a single little lamp was brought in and stood upon a dresser in the corner.

The wide room with its one spot of light and all the still, shadowy figures conveyed an effect of grimness.

Simon Grampierre opened the meeting. Out of courtesy to Ambrose all the talk was in English.

"Men!" said the patriarch. "John Gaviller send word that he will pay only one-fifty a bushel for our grain. We meet to talk and decide what to do. All must agree. In agreement there is strength.

"Already there has been much talk about our grain. I will waste no words now. For myself and my sons I pledge that we will not sell one bushel of grain less than dollar-seventy-five. What do the others say?"

One by one the men arose and repeated the pledge, each raising his right hand. Ambrose began to be aware that the stolidity masked a high emotional tension. It was his own presence that restrained them.

Simon rose again. "I have heard talk that you will spoil your grain," he said. "Some say let the cattle and horses in the field while it is green. Some say burn it when it gets ripe. That is foolish talk.

"Grain is as good as money or as fur. A man does not feed money to cattle nor burn up fur. I say cut your grain and thrash it and store it. Some one will buy it.

"Gaviller himself got to buy when he see we mean to stand together. He has made contracts to send flour to the far north. Who wants to speak?"

A little man of marked French characteristics sprang to his feet. His eyes flashed. “I speak!” he cried.

“This Jean Bateese Gagnon,” explained Simon to Ambrose.

“Simon Grampierre say wait!” cried the little man passionately. “Always he say, ‘Wait, wait, wait!’ All right for Simon Grampierre to wait. He got plenty beef and potatoes and goods in his house. He can wait.

“What will a poor man do while he wait? What will I do—starve, and see my children starve? If we not sell grain we get no credit at the store. Where I get warm clothes for the winter and meat and sugar and powder for my gun?

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"What do we wait for, *un miracle*? Do we wait for Gaviller's heart to soften? We wait a long tam for that I fink, me! While we wait I think Gaviller get busy. He say he come and cut our grain. Will we wait and let him?"

The old man interrupted here: "If Gaviller put his men on our land we fight," he said.

"Aha!" cried Jean Bateese. "He will not wait then. You say let us cut our grain and store it and wait for one to buy," he went on. "What will Gaviller do? I tell you. He will go to law! It is not the first time. He mak' the law to serve him.

"We all owe him for goods. He will send out and get law papers to say because we owe him money for goods our grain is his grain. If he got law-papers the police come and take our grain for him. Wat you say to t'at, hein?"

Old Simon was plainly disconcerted. He turned to Ambrose. "Will you speak?"

Ambrose's heart sank. How is a dead man to sway passionate, living men? However, he rose with the best assurance he could muster.

"I have only one thing to say," he began, conscious of the feebleness of his words. "John Gaviller is a sick man. I have seen the doctor. You cannot fight a sick man. I say do not accept his price—do not refuse it. The grain is not ripe yet. Wait till he is well."

A murmur of dissent went around the room. Ambrose being a stranger, there was a note of politeness in it.

Jean Bateese sprang to his feet again. "Ambrose Doane say wait!" he said. "He is good man. We lak him. But me, I am sick of waiting!

"To-day we hear John Gaviller is sick. All are sorry. All forget we have trouble wit' him. We wait to hear how he is. Wa! he say to us right out of his bed dollar-fifty or starve! Why should we wait till he get well? He does not wait!"

Another man, a burly, purple-cheeked son of earth, took up the harangue at the point where Jean Bateese dropped it. This was Jack Mackenzie, Simon said.

"Me, I am sick of waiting, too!" he cried. "Always we wait, and John Gaviller do what he like! Why he put down the price of grain? Why he do everything? It is to keep us in his debt. We can work till our backs break, but he fix it so we are still in debt.

"Because we can do not'ing when we are in his debt. We are his slaves! We got to break our slave chains. It is time to act. Now I say out loud what all are whispering: let us burn the store!"

Thirty men took a sharp breath between their teeth. There was a little silence; then quick cries of approval broke out. The meeting was with the speaker.

Ambrose, thinking of Colina, turned a little sick with apprehension. Simon rose to still the noise, but Mackenzie held the floor.

"I know w'at Simon Grampierre goin' to say!" he cried, pointing. "He goin' to say if you break the law you fix yourselves. They send many police and put you all in jail. Simon Grampierre got good property. He not want lose it.

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“Me, I say all right! I go to jail. There is a trial. Everything got come out. John Gaviller he cannot make slaves after that. I say let them send me to jail. My children will be free!”

The meeting went wild at this. Simon had lost control. Even his own sons, as could be read in their faces, sympathized with the speakers. The old man betrayed nothing in his face. He stood like a rock until he could get a hearing.

“Jack Mackenzie say I rich,” he said proudly. “Say I think of my property first. I now say whatever we do, we do together. We will decide by vote. If you vote to burn the store I will put the fire to it myself!”

They cheered him to the echo. Some cried: “Burn the store!” Some cried: “Vote!” By this move Simon captured their attention again. He held up a hand for silence.

“Wait!” he said. “I have a little more to say. Jack Mackenzie say we got to break our chains. Those are true words! But how? If we burn the store we only rivet them tighter.

“Gaviller will cry these are bad men and lawbreakers. These are *incendiaries*! It is a word the white men hate. They will say do what you like to the incendiaries. They deserve no better.”

The strange word intimidated them. But a voice cried defiantly: “Must we wait some more?” And their cries threatened to down the old man.

“No!” he cried in a voice that silenced them. “Here is Ambrose Doane!” He paused for dramatic effect.

“I ask Ambrose Doane to our meeting to talk with us. I now say to him”—he turned to Ambrose—“you have heard these men. They are so much wronged they cannot see the right. They are so mad they don’t know what they do.

“I ask, Ambrose Doane, will you save them from their madness? Will you help us break our chains? *Buy our grain?*”

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE PLAN OF CAMPAIGN.

An absolute silence followed Simon Grampierre’s unexpected words. The astute old man had withheld his proposal until the psychological moment. Ambrose was a little dazed by it. He rose, feeling every eager eye upon him, and said slowly:

"I must have a little time to consider. I must talk with Simon Grampierre. I will give him my answer before morning."

Simon said to the company: "Men, will you sell your wheat to Ambrose Doane at a dollar-seventy-five?"

The question broke the spell of silence. There could be no mistake that the proposal was successful. A chorus of acclamations filled the room.

"Very good!" said Simon. "I will talk with Ambrose Doane and try to make him trade with us."

The meeting broke up. It was then a little after nine.

Simon and Ambrose went apart to a bench on the river bank. There were innumerable questions to be asked and answered. Simon estimated that the grain in question, provided they had no frost, would amount to twenty thousand bushels of wheat, and half as much oats. It was a momentous decision for a youth like Ambrose to be called upon to make.



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The greatest difficulty was how to grind the wheat.

"You have an engine here?" asked Ambrose.

"Yes, for our thrashing-machine," said Simon.

"I could order a small process mill from outside," said Ambrose, "but it's doubtful if we could get it in this year."

"I have a hand mill," said Simon. "We call her the mankiller. Work all day, grind a couple bags of flour. It is very old."

"Could it be rigged to the engine?" Ambrose asked.

"Wa! I never think of that," said Simon. "Maybe grind four bags a day, then."

Ambrose had no intention of giving an answer until he had communicated with Colina. Strongly against Simon's advice, he insisted that Gaviller, as he said, must be given one more chance to relent. Simon unwillingly yielded. At ten o'clock Ambrose and Tole started down the river in a dugout.

Ambrose did not mean to seek the interview with Colina. Before starting he scribbled a hasty note.

### **DEAR COLINA:**

The farmers have asked me to buy their grain. I've got to do it unless you will pay their price. It's not much good to say it now, but I'd sooner cut off my hand than seem to be fighting you.

I can't help myself. You won't believe it, but it's a fact just the same, if you won't pay their price I must, in order to save you. If you will agree to pay them one-seventy-five, I'll go back to Moultrie to-morrow, and never trouble you again. **AMBROSE.**

Landing below Gaviller's house Ambrose sent Tole up the bank with this. In a surprisingly short time he saw the half-breed returning.

"Did you see her?" he demanded.

"Yes," said Tole.

"Did she send an answer back?"

"Only this."

Ambrose held out his hand, and Tole dropped the torn fragments of his own letter into it. Ambrose stared at them stupidly. He had steeled himself against a possible humiliation at her hands—but to be humiliated before the half-breed!

He drew a long breath to steady himself, and opening his hand, let the fragments float away on the current.

“Let us go back,” he said quietly.

During the whole of the way he did not speak.

Grampierre was waiting for them in the big kitchen.

“I will now give you my answer,” said Ambrose.

“Well?” said the old man eagerly.

“It is only a partial answer. I agree to purchase enough of your grain at one-seventy-five to see you all through the winter; and I agree to bring a stock of goods here to supply your necessities.”

Simon warmly grasped his hand. “It is well!” he cried. “I expected no more.”

“I will return to Moultrie to-morrow,” Ambrose went on in his dull, quiet way. “I will consult with my partner, and if we can finance it, we will buy all your grain.”

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"Tole shall go with you," said Simon. "You can send him back to me with a letter."

Ambrose went to bed, and slept without dreaming. Nature is merciful. After a certain point of suffering has been passed, she administers an anesthetic.

Next morning Ambrose transacted his business with Simon, and prepared for the journey, to all appearances his usual matter-of-fact self.

Only Job perceived the subtle change in his master. The faithful brown eyes continually sought Ambrose's face, and the ridiculous curly tail was agitated in vain to induce a smile.

On the afternoon of the sixth day following, Ambrose and Tole landed at Moultrie. Nothing was changed there. The sight of Peter's honest red face was like balm to Ambrose's sore heart.

Seeing Ambrose, the remnants of Peter's anger evaporated like mist in the sun. He clapped his young partner on the back until the other's lungs rang.

Peter's blue eyes beamed with honest gladness, meanwhile he uttered loud abuse in his own style.

"So you're back, damn you! You ornery little whipper-snapper! To sneak off from working like a breed after you feed him! I was hoping I'd never lay eyes on you again. But here you are to plague me!"

Ambrose smiled sheepishly, and gripped his hand.

Peter sent Tole off to Eva to be fed, while he went with Ambrose to the latter's little shack. Ambrose looked around his own place curiously. It was like another man's house now. He had lost the old self who used to live here.

"What's happened to you?" asked Peter with an offhand air.

"Why do you ask?" said Ambrose quickly. He hated to think it was all written in his face.

"You look older," said Peter. "I don't see you grinning so much."

Ambrose immediately grinned—after a fashion. "I've got a lot to tell you," he said. "We'll talk after supper."

Half the night they talked. Ambrose laid his proposal before Peter in anxious trepidation. Peter earned the young man's lifelong gratitude by the promptness and heartiness of his response.

“You did right!” he cried with another clap on the back. “It will be a fine adventure! We’ll go into Fort Enterprise and make a killing! We’ll buy all the grain in sight!”

“It’s a big weight to swing,” murmured Ambrose.

“Sure!” cried Peter. “But no man would refuse it. What if it does break us? We’re young. And we’ll have a grand run for our money.”

The excess of Ambrose’s relief unnerved him a little. “Peter, you’re a man!” he murmured brokenly. “I was near crazy, wondering if you’d stand by me!”

“Hey, cut it out!” cried Peter. “Buck up! We got work to do to-night!”

Throughout the hours of darkness they counted up their resources, decided as to the friends they could call on for assistance, and planned ways and means.

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There was not a day to be lost, and it was first of all decided that Ambrose must start for the outside world next morning. Once started he would be out of touch with his partner for good, therefore every question had to be discussed that night, and there were a hundred.

Ambrose was astonished by Peter's pluck and dash in business affairs. Like many another junior partner he had been accustomed to patronize his elder a little.

"I'll stand by you to the limit," Peter had said. "But this is your put. You must do everything yourself."

Therefore, after the details had been arranged, it fell to Ambrose to compose the letter to Simon Grampierre. It was the longest letter he had ever written.

Tole and I arrived yesterday after a quick trip. I have talked with my partner. We agree to purchase all the grain grown around Fort Enterprise this season at one-seventy-five per bushel.

We will load up a york boat immediately with a small load of supplies for present use. Tole will steer it up the river. He will take this letter to you. It may take four or five days to get a crew.

### **(Here followed an inventory of the goods they had decided to send.)**

We appoint you our agent to distribute these goods. I will send you a book in which to put down all the charges. Let the crew of the york boat have two dug-outs to return home in, and keep the york boat at your place to send down grain and flour later.

I have missed the steamboat on her first trip out. I will start to-day by canoe with an Indian. It will take me ten days to cross the lake and go up the Miwasa to the landing and so to town.

I will order a full outfit in town, and bring it in immediately by way of Caribou Lake, and down stream to you. I will bring a little process mill if I can get one. If I have no trouble you will see me about the first of September. Anyway I will be in before the ice begins to run.

Coming back I will have no trouble going up the Miwasa or Musquasepi or across Caribou Lake, because Martin Sellers has steamboats there, and he is independent and friendly to us. They can't stop me on the Spirit River either, because I can build a raft and bring my stuff down.



Where they will try to get me is on the portage between Caribou Lake and the Spirit. They will try to tie up the teams. On my way out I will see Martin Sellers about it. He has power.

As soon as the grain is begun to be thrashed start the mankiller going to try and get a little ahead with the flour.

Send Tole and another good man in a dugout up to the crossing to meet me. Let them start August 8.

I am sending by Tole two bottles of Madeira wine. Send it to the sick man at the fort without letting him know it comes from me. For yourself Peter Minot sends a box of cigars with his compliments.

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If I think of anything else I'll write at the landing and send it in by the August mail. My regards to the boys.

Yours truly,

AMBROSE DOANE.

## CHAPTER XVI.

COLINA COMMANDS.

On August 25, well within his schedule, Ambrose arrived at Spirit River Crossing with ten loaded wagons.

For six long days they had been floundering through the bottomless mudholes of the portage trail and men and horses were alike played out; but the rest of the way to come was easy, and Ambrose paid off his drivers with a light heart.

The yoke boat and crew he had engaged at the crossing were non-existent, and no explanation forthcoming. He had met with similar small reverses all along the line. This one was not important; it meant three days delay to build a raft.

There was a current of nearly four miles an hour to carry him to his destination, and no rapids in the three hundred miles to endanger his cargo.

Tole Grampierre and his brother Germain were waiting for Ambrose. With two such aides he could afford to smile at the mysterious scarcity of labor which developed on his arrival.

Tole's budget of news from down the river contained nothing startling. John Gaviller had been very sick all summer with pneumonia as a result of his wound. He was getting better: "pale and skinny as an old rabbit in the snow," in Tole's words.

Gaviller had sent up the launch to get what grain had been grown at the crossing; but it was not enough to fill his contracts for flour up north. He had been obliged to pay two dollars a bushel for it. Ambrose smiled at this piece of information.

Ambrose waited eagerly for some word of her who was seldom out of his thoughts, but to Tole the matter was not of such great importance. Ambrose could not bring himself to name her name. Not until Tole had covered everything else did he say casually:

"Colina Gaviller rides all around on her yellow horse. She is proud now. Never speaks to the people."

That was all. Ambrose's heart stirred with compassion for the one, who by her loyalty was forced to embrace the wrong cause.

Another time Tole remarked: "Gordon Strange run the store all summer."

"So!" said Ambrose. "What do the people say about him? What does your father say?"

Tole shrugged. "He say not'ing," he said cautiously. He could not be induced to commit himself further in this direction.

They built their raft, and loading up, started without untoward incident. Traveling day and night, allowing for stoppages and delays, they expected to be nearly five days on the way.

On the third day, Ambrose chafing at their slow progress, put the dugout overboard, and set off ahead to warn the settlement of their coming. He had no hesitation leaving the raft with the Grampierre boys; they could handle it better than himself.



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He paddled all day, and at night cut down a tree so that it would fall in the water, and tied his canoe to it, that he might not be blown ashore while he slept.

For hours he lay waiting for sleep, watching the stars circle round his head as his canoe was swung in the eddies, and considering his situation.

He could not rest for his eagerness to be at the end of his journey, though he had no hope of what awaited there—that is to say not much hope; there is always a perhaps.

But how could Colina relent when she beheld him arriving laden with ammunition to make war upon her? Ambrose wondered sadly if any lover before him ever found himself in such a plight.

By ten o'clock next morning he was within a mile or two of Grampierre's place. The river was dazzling in the morning sunlight, the air like wine.

The poplar trees had put on their gorgeous autumn dress of saffron and scarlet, which showed like names against the chocolate colored hills. Suddenly in a grassy ravine on his right, Ambrose saw the "yellow" horse feeding.

His heart set up a furious beating. No power on earth could have prevented him from landing, though common sense told him clearly no good could come of it. That "perhaps" drew him ashore, that hope against hope.

After a short search he found her sleeping under a poplar-tree in a hollow of the bank that was hidden from the river.

She wore her khaki riding-habit, as usual; her head was couched in the crook of her arm, and in the other hand she held her Stetson hat by its strap. Ambrose brooded over her wistfully.

Her face was paler and thinner; evidently she herself had not been having too easy a time these two months past.

These blemishes on her beauty made her seem infinitely more beautiful and dearer to him. And all relaxed and disarmed in sleep as she was, it seemed so easy a thing to gather her up in his arms and make her forget what divided them.

Ambrose's dim thought was: "If somehow I could only send her real self a message while her head-strong, unreasonable self is asleep, maybe she'd confess the truth when she woke."

While he was hungrily gazing at her her eyelids fluttered. He moved back to a more respectful distance. She awoke without alarm. For an instant she lay looking at him as calmly as a babe in its crib.



Then in a flash recollection returned, and she sprang to a sitting position, both hands, womanlike, flying to her hair. She eyed him with a certain discomposure. It was as if she felt that she ought to be furiously angry, and was somewhat dismayed because it did not come.

"What do you want?" she asked coldly.

In her cold eye Ambrose was conscious of a wall between them more impenetrable than granite. His heart gave up hope. "Nothing," he said sullenly.

"It's not exactly agreeable," she said, frowning, "to find oneself spied upon."

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Ambrose started and frowned. This construction of his act had not occurred to him. "I saw Ginger from the river," he said indignantly. "I landed to find you."

"What did you want?" she asked coolly.

"I don't know," said Ambrose.

There was a silence between them. Her cold look told him to go. Pride and common sense both urged him to obey—but he could not. He was like a bit of iron filing in the presence of a magnet.

"I—I suppose I wanted to find out how you were," he said at last. "Was that so extraordinary?"

She ignored the question. "I am well," she said.

"How is your father?" he asked.

She looked at him levelly and did not answer.

A slow red crept up from Ambrose's neck. "I asked you a civil question," he muttered.

"If you want a truthful answer," said Colina clearly, "I think you have a cheek to ask."

"I didn't shoot him!" Ambrose burst out.

"What is the use of our bandying words?" she asked with cold scorn. "Nothing you can say to me or I to you can help matters now."

"Good Lord, but women can be stony!" Ambrose cried involuntarily.

Colina took it as a compliment. Her eye brightened with a kind of pride. "I don't know what men are!" she cried. "Apparently you want to fight me with one hand and hold the other out in friendship. Only a man could think of such a thing."

Ambrose gazed at her sullenly. "You are right!" he said abruptly. "I am a fool!"

He left her with his head up, but inwardly beaten and sore. Somehow she had got the better of him, he could not have told how. He was conscious of having intended honestly. This cold parting was worse than the most violent of quarrels.

Simon Grampierre was waiting on a point of his land that commanded a view up and down river. Here he had set up a lookout bench like that at the fort. At sight of Ambrose he shouted from a full breast and hastened down to the waterside. He received him with both hands extended.

"You have come!" he cried. "It is well!"

Ambrose was surprised and a little disconcerted to see the grim old patriarch so moved.

"Where is your outfit?" Simon asked anxiously.

"Half a day behind me," said Ambrose. "It is safe."

"Have you flour?" asked Simon.

"Flour? No!" said Ambrose staring. "With twenty thousand bushels of wheat here?"

"Have you got a little mill?"

Ambrose shook his head. "There was none in Prince George," he said. "I had to telegraph to the East. It had not arrived when I was ready to start, and I couldn't wait.

"I made arrangements for it to be forwarded; a friend of mine will bring it in. Martin Sellers promised to hold the last boat at the landing until October 1st for it."

"Wa!" said Simon, raising his hands. "That is bad! We need flour. We cannot wait a month for flour."

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"What's the matter with the mankiller?"

"Broke," was the laconic answer. "We fix it. Every day it break again. Now it is all broke."

"Well, every family will have to grind for themselves," said Ambrose.

Simon shrugged. "We have a new trouble here."

"What is it?" Ambrose anxiously demanded.

"The Kakisa Indians," Simon said. "They are the biggest tribe around this post, and the best fur bringers. They live beside the Kakisa River, hundred fifty miles northwest.

"All summer they come in two or six or twenty and get a little flour, little sugar, tea, tobacco from me. They want to trade with you because Gaviller is hard to them like us. They are good hunters, but he keep them poor.

"In the late summer they come all together to get a fall outfit. They are here now. They want a hundred bags of flour. They come to me. I say I have got no flour. They go to the fort.

"Gaviller say; 'Ambrose Doane bought all the grain. You want to trade with him; all right. Make him sell you flour now.'

"They are here a week now—sixty teepees. I feed them what I can. It is not much. They are ongrly. They begin to talk ugly."

Ambrose would not let Simon see that he was in any way dismayed by this situation. "Where are the Indians camped?" he asked coolly.

"Mile and a half down river. Across from the fort."

"Very well," said Ambrose. "Tell them at your house to keep watch here until Tole and Germain come with the raft. Six men should be ready to help them land and unload. You come with me in the dugout, and we will go down and talk to the Indians."

A gleam of approval shot from under Simon's beetle brows. "Good!" he said. "You go straight to a thing. I like that, me!"

Ambrose found the teepee village set up in the form of a square on a grassy flat beside the river. The quadrangle was filled with the usual confusion of loose horses, quarrelsome dogs, and screaming children.

Simon called his attention to a teepee in the middle of the northerly side distinguished by its size and by gaudy paintings on the canvas.

"Head man's lodge," he said. "Name Joey Providence Watusk."

"A good mouthful," said Ambrose.

"Joey for English, Providence for French, Watusk for Kakisa," explained Simon.

He called a boy to him, and made him understand that they wished to see the head man.

"I send a message that we are coming," he explained to Ambrose. "He lak to be treated lak big man. It is no harm when you are trading with them."

Ambrose agreed. "So this what's-his-name fancies himself," he remarked while they waited.

"It is so," said Simon, grimly. "Thinks he is a king! All puff up with wind lak a bull frog. He mak' me mad with his foolishness. What would you? You cannot deal with the Kakisas only what he say. Because only Watusk speaks English. He does what he wants."

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"And can nobody here speak Kakisa?" Ambrose asked.

"Nobody but Gordon Strange. It is hard talk on the tongue."

"What else about him?"

"Wa! I have told you," said Simon. "You will know him when you see! All tam show off lak a cock-grouse in mating-time. He is not Kakisa. He is a Cree who went with them long tam ago. Some say his father was a black man."

"So!" said Ambrose. "And they stand for that?"

Simon shrugged. "The Kakisas a funny people. Not mix with the whites, not mix with other Indians lak Cree. They keep old ways. They not talk about their ways to other men. So nobody knows what they do at home." Simon lowered his voice. "Some say cannibals."

"Pooh!" said Ambrose, "that yarn is told about every strange tribe!"

"Maybe," said Simon, cautiously. "I do not know myself."

The Indian boy returning, signified that Joey Providence Watusk awaited them.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE STAFF OF LIFE.

Lifting the blind over the entrance, Ambrose dived inside the teepee, Simon Grampierre at his heels. In the center a small fire burned on the ground, and behind it sat five dark-skinned figures in a semicircle.

Not one of the five faces changed a muscle at their entrance. The principal man with a grave inclination of the head, waved them a blanket which had been placed for them opposite him.

It was like an old-time Indian council, but the picturesqueness was a good deal spoiled by the gingham shirts they wore, and the ill-fitting coats and trousers from the store.

Moreover, the red men's pipes, instead of the graceful calumets were English briars with showy silver bands. The bowl of Watusk's pipe, of which he appeared to be inordinately proud, was roughly carved into the likeness of a death's head.

Watusk was an extraordinary figure. Ambrose was reminded of a quack doctor in poor circumstances. He was middle-aged and flabby, and had long, straggling gray hair, bound round with a cotton fillet, none too clean.

He wore a frock coat all buttoned up before, each button constricting his fat, with a bulge between. His trousers were made from a blanket once white, with a wide black band around the calf of each leg, and he wore fine doeskin moccasins, richly embroidered with silk.

His dirty fingers displayed a quantity of brass rings from the store, set with gems of colored glass. His heavy, loose-featured face was unremarkable, except for the extraordinarily bright, quick, shallow eyes, suggesting at different moments the eyes of a child, an animal, and a madman.

His skin showed a tinge of yellow as distinguished from the pure copper of his companions, and Ambrose was reminded of the black man.

Watusk grandiloquently introduced his four companions. "My councilors," he said: "Toma, minister of state; Lookoovar, minister of war; Mahtsonza, minister of interior; Tatateecha, minister of medicine."



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Thus their uncouth names as Ambrose got them. He avoided Simon's eye, and bit his lip to keep from laughing. The four were all small men with the fine characteristic faces of pure bred savages.

They understood not a word of what was said, but preserved an unshakable gravity throughout. Ambrose, as they were named, christened them anew, according to their several characteristics: Coyote, Moose, Bear and Weasel.

The last was a little shriveled creature, hung with charms and amulets in tobacco bags until he looked like a scarecrow. He had an eye even wilder and shiftier than his master's.

"Conjure-man," murmured Simon in Ambrose's ear.

"Let Ambrose Doane speak," said Watusk. He used good English.

Ambrose had adopted from Peter Minot the maxim: "Make the other man speak first, and get a line on him." He bowed politely. "Ambrose Doane will not speak until Watusk has spoken," he said.

Watusk highly gratified, bowed again, and forthwith began. "I am glad to see Ambrose Doane. He is good to my eyes lak the green leaves in spring. He is come to Fort Enterprise and there is no more winter.

"The name of Peter Minot and the name of Ambrose Doane make good words to my ear. They are the friends of the red men. They pay good price for fur. They sell outside goods cheap. I want a box of cigars me, same lak you send Simon Grampierre."

Ambrose recognizing Watusk's type was not put out by the sudden drop from the sublime to the ridiculous. He now had a "line" on his man. Swallowing his laughter, he answered in a similar strain.

"I am glad to see Watusk. I wish to be his friend. I come from the big lake six days' journey toward the place of the rising sun. So far as that men tell me of the Kakisa nation, and tell of Watusk who rules them.

"Men say the Kakisa men are the best hunters of the north and honest as the sun in summer-time. Men say Watusk is a wise chief and a good friend of the white men. I have plenty cigars in my outfit."

The chief swelled with gratification until his much-tried buttons threatened altogether to part company with his coat.

A good deal more of this airy exchange was necessitated before Watusk could be induced to talk business. When he finally condescended to it, the story was as Simon had forecast:

“When Ambrose Doane come here I say to my people: ‘Trade with him. He will be your father. He will feed you.’ Now when they come for flour Simon Grampierre say you got no flour.

“When I go to John Gaviller for flour, he mock me. He say: ‘You take Ambrose Doane for your father. All right. Let him feed you now.’ So I am not know what to do. Every day my people more ongary, more mad.

“Pretty soon the young men make trouble. There is no game here. We can’t stay here without flour. We can’t go back without flour. I am feel moch bad. But Ambrose Doane is come now. It is all right!”

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The last of this was delivered with something like a leer, warning Ambrose's subconsciousness that Watusk, notwithstanding the flowery compliments, wished him no good.

"I have plenty of grain," he said warily. "Let each woman grind for her own family."

Watusk shook his head. "Long tam ago we got stone bowls for grind wild rice in," he said. "So many years we buy flour all the bowls is broke and throw away now."

Ambrose could not deny to himself the gravity of the situation. He was reminded afresh that he was dealing with a savage by the subtle, threatening note that presently crept into Watusk's smooth voice.

"John Gaviller say to Gordon Strange for say to me: 'Ambrose Doane got all the grain. Let Ambrose Doane sell his grain to me, and I give you flour.'"

Ambrose, perceiving the drift, swore inwardly.

"Gordon Strange tell that in Kakisa language," Watusk went on slyly; "some hear it and tell the others. All know now. If my people get more hungry what can I do? Maybe my young men steal the grain and take it to Gaviller."

"If they lay hands on my property they'll be shot," said Ambrose, curtly.

Watusk spread out his hands deprecatingly. "Me, I tell them that," he said. "But they are so mad!"

"John Gaviller is trying to use you to work his own ends," said Ambrose.

Watusk shrugged indifferently. This was the real man, Ambrose thought. "Maybe so. You got trouble with Gaviller. That is not my trouble. All I want is flour."

"You shall have it!" cried Ambrose boldly. "Enough to-morrow morning to feed every family. Enough in three days to fill your order."

Watusk appeared to be a little taken aback, by the prompt granting of his demand. "Where will you get it?" he asked.

"I will get it," Ambrose said. "That is enough."

When Ambrose and Simon got outside the teepee Simon asked the same question: "Where *will* you get it?"

"I don't know," said Ambrose. "Give me time. I'll find a way!"

“If Gaviller gets the Kakisa fur you’ll make no profit this year,” suggested Simon.

“I have to consider other things as well as profit,” Ambrose said. “There are more years to come.”

Reaching the dugout, Simon asked: “Where now?”

“To the Fort,” said Ambrose. “You don’t have to come.”

“We are together,” said Simon grimly.

Ambrose, deeply moved by gratitude, growled inarticulately. He felt himself young to stand alone against such powerful forces.

Crossing the river, they landed below the big yellow house and applied at the side door for Colina. She had returned from her ride, they were told. They were shown into the library.

In this little room Ambrose had already touched the summit of happiness, and tasted despair. He hated it now. He kept his eyes on the carpet.

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Simon was visibly uneasy while they waited. “You think this any good?” he suggested.

“No,” said Ambrose bitterly. “I know well enough what I’ll get. But I’ve got to go through with it before taking the next step.”

“John Gaviller live well,” said Simon significantly, but without bitterness.

Colina came in with her queenliest air. She had changed her riding habit for clinging white draperies that made her look like a lovely, arrogant saint. Ambrose, raising his sullen eyes to her, experienced a new shock of desire that put the idea of flour out of his head.

To old Simon, Colina inclined her head as gracefully and indifferently as a swan. The grim patriarch became humble under the spell of her white beauty. He fingered his hat nervously. To Ambrose Colina said with subtle scorn meant for his ear alone:

“What is it?”

Ambrose screwed down the clamps of self-control. “I asked for you,” he said stolidly, “because I did not know if your father was well enough to talk business. May I see him for five minutes?”

“No,” she said, without condescending to explain.

“Then I will tell you,” said Ambrose. “It is about the Indians across the river. I must have some flour for them.”

“Must?” she repeated, raising her eyebrows.

“They are suffering from hunger,” he said firmly.

“You will have to see Mr. Strange,” she said coolly. “He is in charge of the business.”

“This is a question for the head to decide,” warned Ambrose.

“You will have to see Mr. Strange,” she repeated, unmoved.

Ambrose’s eyes flamed up. For a moment the two pairs contended—Ambrose’s passionate, Colina’s steely. The man was struggling with the atavic impulse to thrash the maddening, arrogant woman creature into a humbler frame of mind.

It may be, too, that deep in her heart of hearts Colina desired something of the kind. Perhaps she could not master her worser self alone. Anyhow, it was impossible there in her own stronghold, with Simon looking on. They were too civilized or not civilized enough.

Ambrose merely bowed to her and led the way out of the room and out of the house.

“Thank God, that is over!” he murmured outside.

Crossing the square, they entered the store. It was the first time Ambrose had been inside that famous show-place of the north, but he had no eyes for it now. Gordon Strange welcomed them with smiling heartiness.

“Come in! Come in!” he cried, leading the way into the rear office. “Sit down! Have a cigar!”

The scowling Ambrose stared as if he thought the man demented. He waved the cigar away and came directly to the point.

“I want to find out what you’re willing to do about the Kakisa Indians.”

“Sure!” cried Strange with apparently the best will in the world. “Sit down. What do you propose?”

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"How much will you charge me to grind me five hundred bushels of grain for them?"

"I'm sorry," said Strange. "The old man won't hear of it."

"Will you let them starve?" cried Ambrose.

"What can I do?" said Strange distressfully. "I'm not the head."

"Grind it in spite of him," said Ambrose. "Humanity and prudence would both be on your side. You'll get their fur by it."

"I think Mr. Gaviller expects to get the fur anyway," said Strange with a seeming deprecatory air—but the suspicion of a smirk wreathed his full lips.

"Then I am to understand that you refuse to grind my grain at any price," said Ambrose.

"Orders are orders," murmured Strange.

"Has Gaviller given you this order since he knew the people were hungry?"

"He has told me his mind many times."

"That is not a direct answer. Some one must take the full responsibility. If I write a short note to Gaviller will you deliver it and bring me back an answer?"

Strange hesitated for the fraction of a second. "Yes," he said.

Ambrose wrote a succinct statement of the situation, and Strange departed.

"Gaviller will never do it," said Simon.

"I don't expect him to," said Ambrose. "But he's got to commit himself."

In due course Strange returned. He offered Ambrose a note, still with his deprecating air. It was in Colina's writing. Ambrose read:

"John Gaviller begs to inform Mr. Ambrose Doane that the only proposal he is willing to discuss will be the sale to him of all the grain in Mr. Doane's possession at one dollar and a half per bushel. In such an event he will also be willing to purchase Mr. Doane's entire outfit of goods at cost. It will be useless for Mr. Doane to address him further in any other connection.

"Enterprise House, September 3."

Ambrose stood reflecting with the note in his hand. For a single moment his heart failed him. His inexperience was appalled by the weight of the decision he had to make.

Oh, for Peter Minot's strong, humorous sense at this crisis! The thought of Peter nerved him. Peter had taken it for granted that he would make good. Ambrose remembered the sacrifices Peter had cheerfully made to finance this expedition.

To accept John Gaviller's contemptuous offer would not only be to confess a humiliating failure, it would mean pocketing a loss that would cripple the young firm for the time being.

Peter would say: "Lose it if you must, but lose it fighting." This thought was like an inspiration to Ambrose. His jaw stiffened, and a measure of serenity returned to his eyes. He passed the note to Simon.

"Read it," he said coolly, "and save it. It may be useful as evidence, later."

A subtle change passed over Gordon Strange's face. For the moment he was pure Indian. Quickly veiling his eyes, he asked with an innocent air: "What does Mr. Gaviller say?"



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This was too much for Ambrose to stomach. "You know damned well what he says!" he answered scornfully.

Strange swallowed it. "Is there any answer?" he asked.

"No!" said Ambrose.

The half-breed's curiosity overcame his prudence. "What are you going to do?" he asked slyly.

Ambrose strode out of the store without answering.

The two men paddled back to Grampierre's place in silence. Simon with native tact, forbore to ask questions. Such is the potency of the white man's eye that the leader of the breeds had unhesitatingly yielded the direction of affairs to the youth who was little more than a third of his age.

Upon landing, Ambrose pointed to the lookout bench. "Let us sit there and talk," he said.

"Simon," he said immediately, "suppose it came to a fight, how many men do you think Gaviller could count on?"

The old man took the question as a matter of course. "There is the policeman, the doctor and the parson," he said. "The parson is best for praying. There is the engineer and the captain of the steamboat; there is young Duncan Greer.

"In summer he is purser on the steamboat; in winter he is the miller. That is six white men. John Gaviller is no good yet. There is the crew of the steamboat, and the men who work for wages, maybe fifteen natives, not more."

"What sort of a man is Greer?" asked Ambrose.

"A lad; full of fun and jokes; a good machinist."

"Where does he sleep at the Fort?"

"He has a room in the old quarters. Gaviller's old house."

"Does he sleep alone?"

"He does."

"Simon," said Ambrose, finally, "can you get me twenty-five good men by dark; steady men with cool heads, who will do what I tell them?"

"I can," said Simon.

"Let them meet at your house," Ambrose went on. "Let every man carry his gun, but you must see that the magazines are emptied, and that no man has any shells in his pocket. I will have no shooting. Above all, do not let the Indians know that anything is going on to-night."

"It is well!" said Simon laconically. The old dark eyes gleamed.

## **CHAPTER XVIII.**

### **A BLOODLESS CAPTURE.**

In a more innocent state of society such as that which exists in the north, such a thing as a nightwatch is undreamed of. Insomnia is likewise unknown there. At eleven o'clock every soul in Fort Enterprise was drowned deep in slumber.

There was no light in any window; the very buildings seemed to crouch on the earth as if they slept, too. At sundown a film of cloud had crept across the sky, and the moon was dark. It was the very night for deeds of adventure.

Down on the current came a rakish yark boat floating as idly as a piece of wreckage. Its hold was filled with bags of grain, on which squatted and lay many dark figures scarcely to be distinguished from the bags.

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No whisper marked its passage; not a pipe-bowl glowed. On the little steering platform stood Simon Grampierre wielding a long sweep run through a ring astern. The ring was muffled with strips of cloth.

Simon kept the craft straight in the current, and as they approached the Company buildings, gradually edged her ashore.

The dark steamboat lay with her nose drawn up on a point of stones below the flagstaff. Steamboat and point together caused a little backwater to form beyond, of which Simon was informed.

All he had to do was to urge the nose of his boat into it, and she grounded of herself at the spot where they had chosen to land; that is immediately below the mills.

A dozen moccasined men let themselves softly into the water, and putting their backs under the prow lifted her up a little on the stones. Instantly, as if by the starting of a piece of machinery a chain of bags was started ashore from hand to hand.

Ambrose and Tole, who was to be engineer, climbed the bank to reconnoiter. So far no word had been spoken.

Above, along the edge of the bank, were three small buildings in a line, close together. That in the middle was the engine house, with the sawmill on the left and the flour mill on the right.

Ambrose and Tole made for the engine which was housed in a little structure of corrugated iron. The door faced the sawmill. It was an iron sliding door, fastened with hasp and padlock.

Ambrose inserted the point of a crowbar under the hasp, and the whole thing came away with a single metallic report. If any sleeper was awakened by the sound, hearing no other sounds, he probably fell asleep again. Anyhow no alarm was raised as yet.

Tole went back to get assistance in carrying slabs into the engine room. The sawmill was merely an open shed, and there was an abundance of fuel in sight.

The water supply, being furnished by gravity from a tank overhead, was secure.

With the aid of his electric torch, Ambrose found the belt to run the flour mill in a corner of the engine room. So far so good. His instructions to Tole were simple.

"I'll let you have one man to help you. If they besiege us, I won't be able to communicate with you. Whatever happens, keep the engine going. Store enough slabs in here to keep her going all night, then close the door, and fasten it some way."

The flour mill was likewise built of corrugated iron. It had two iron doors, one giving on the road, fastened with a padlock, the other on the river side, hooked from within.

Ambrose broke open the first, and throwing back the second, allowed the grain bags to be hustled inside direct from the beach.

He lit a lantern, and cloaking it within his coat, examined the machine. His heart sank at the thought of his difficulties, supposing the next step of his plan should fail.

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Ambrose was enough of a machinist to appreciate the difficulty of operating this complicated arrangement of wheels and rollers and frames by lantern light.

Taking five velvet-footed men, he set off around the back of the store, and across the corner of the square to the “quarters.” The building so designated was in the middle of the side of the square facing the river.

It was a low, spreading affair, of several dates of construction. Once Gaviller’s residence, it was now used to house the white employees of the company and chance travelers.

Greer’s room was in the end of the building nearest the store. The policeman slept at the other side, separated by several partitions.

The room they were making for had a door opening directly on the yard. It was not locked. Ambrose merely lifted the latch and walked in with his five men at his heels.

Inside, in the thick darkness they heard the sound of deep breathing. Ambrose flashed his light around. A typical boy’s room was revealed, with college banners, colored prints, photographs and firearms.

On a bed in the corner lay the owner, a good-looking blond boy sleeping on his back with an arm flung above his head. He was a hearty sleeper.

Not until the command was twice repeated in no uncertain tones, did he waken. It was to find himself looking into the blazing white eye of the electric torch.

“What time is it?” he murmured, blinking.

One of the men chuckled.

“Time to get up,” said Ambrose grimly.

“Hey, what’s the matter?” cried the voice from the bed in accents of honest alarm.

“Get up and dress,” commanded Ambrose.

“What for?” stammered the boy.

“I have five armed men here,” said Ambrose. “Do what you’re told without asking questions. If you make a racket you’ll be cracked over the head with the butt of a gun.”

As he spoke Ambrose flashed the light from one to another of his men. The sight of the quiet dark-skinned breeds, each with a Winchester on his arm was sufficiently intimidating. The boy swung his legs out of bed.

"All right," he said, philosophically. "Throw your light on my clothes, will you?"

He commenced to dress without more ado. Presently he asked coolly; "What do you want me for, and who are you anyway?"

"I'm Ambrose Doane," said Ambrose. "I've seized the flour mill. You've got to run it."

"There's no grain there," said Greer.

"I brought my grain with me," said Ambrose.

A sound like a chuckle escaped the boy. No doubt he was well-informed as to the situation. "You didn't lose much time," he said.

They started back to the mill, a breed on either side of Greer with a hand upon his shoulder.

"If you make a break, you'll be knocked down and carried in," warned Ambrose.

Apparently Greer had no such intention. He was a matter-of-fact youth and prone to laughter. He laughed now. "Golly! the old man will be in a wax when he hears of it! How many men have you got?"

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"Twenty-five," said Ambrose.

"Well, he can't blame me if I'm forced to work by overwhelming numbers! Oh, golly! but there'll be a time to-morrow!"

Ambrose breathed more freely. This which had promised to be the most difficult part of his plan was proving easy.

Entering the mill, Greer looked around the dim place with its little crowd of still, silent, armed men, and chuckled again. "Darned if it isn't as good as a melodrama!" he said.

"Go to it!" said Ambrose, pointing to the machinery. He lit plenty of lanterns, careless now if the fort were aroused. They had to wake up sooner or later. "You can smoke," he said to his men.

Matches were quickly struck, and coals pressed into pipe bowls with guttural grunts of satisfaction.

Greer lit a cigarette, and picked up his oil can and wrench as a matter of course. He set to work, whistling softly between his teeth.

Ambrose, watching him, could not make up his mind whether this was due to pluck or sheer light-headedness. Either way, he was inclined to like the boy.

"I say, Ambrose," Greer said cheekily. "Give us a hand with these bolting frames, will you? Do you want fine flour or coarse?"

"The most in the least time," said Ambrose.

"We'll leave in the middlings then. It's wholesome."

They worked amicably together. Greer in his simplicity explained everything as they went, and Ambrose cannily stored it away.

Fortunately, the mill had lately been operated, grinding the grain from the Crossing, and all was practically in readiness to start. Within an hour after the landing of the party, Tole turned on his steam.

The wheels began to revolve, Greer threw in the clutch, and presently a veritable stream of flour began to issue from the mouth of the machine. Ambrose repressed an inclination to cheer.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### WOMAN'S WEAPONS.

The steady hum of machinery was more effective to awaken the inhabitants of the Fort than any scattered noises.

The sounds of movement began to be heard among the houses. Lights were lit, and doors opened. No one who looked out of doors could mistake what was going on, for a stream of sparks was now issuing from the engine-house stack.

The first notice of attack came in a single shot from across the road. A bullet sang through the doorway, flattening itself with a whang on the iron wall. Those around the opening fell back.

Some one crashed the door to. Ambrose as quickly opened it, and stooping low, peered out. He was in time to see a crouching figure disappear around the corner of the store. Something in the bulk of it, the neat outline gave him a clue.

"Strange, by gad!" he said to himself.

Aloud, Ambrose said: "The door must be open. We've got to see and hear what they're up to. Let every man keep out of range. Make a wall of the bags of grain on this side of the machine, and put the lanterns behind it, so Greer will have light."



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While they worked to obey him, Ambrose, flinging himself down at full length, watched with an eye at the crack of the door. He saw a group of men gradually gather at the corner of the store. They advanced, hesitated, fell back.

Finally, an authoritative figure showed itself. Ambrose guessed it to be Macfarlane, the policeman. He advanced boldly down the sidewalk, and took up a position across the road. The others straggled after him.

"Who is there?" challenged the leader. Ambrose distinguished the tunic and forage cap.

Ambrose rose, and opening the door wider, showed himself. "Ambrose Doane," he said. He warily watched the crowd, for any movement suggestive of raising a gun.

"You're under arrest!" cried the policeman.

"All right," said Ambrose coolly. "What charge?"

"Unlawful entry."

"You'll have to come and take me!"

"If you resist the law the consequences will be on your own head!"

"I accept the consequences."

"Stop the machinery!" cried the policeman. "If you destroy the mill we'll all starve!"

"The miller himself is running it," said Ambrose coolly. "With a gun to his head," he added, grinning over his shoulder. "I seized him in his bed and carried him here."

"Good man!" Greer, behind him, gratefully murmured.

"If you refuse to give yourself up I'll take you by force!" cried Macfarlane.

"Come ahead!" sang Ambrose. "I've got twenty-five men here. They have orders not to shoot, but if you open fire on us, the consequences will be on your head!"

"I'll do my duty!" shouted the policeman.

"Get your crowd together!" taunted Ambrose. "Lay your guns down, and come on over and put us out if you're men enough. We'll stand by the result."

The men behind Ambrose raised a cheer. The sound did not improve the morale of the other side. Even in the dark, the difference between the two crowds could be felt.

Ambrose's men were fighting for what they felt to be their rights; the men behind the policeman had no incentive—except their jobs. Macfarlane paused to consult with another man—probably Gordon Strange.

The others talked in excited whispers, and circled on one another without making any forward movement. Messengers were despatched up and down the road.

Suddenly a petticoated figure came flying down the sidewalk from the store. Ambrose's heart leaped up, and then as suddenly calmed. He told himself grimly he was cured.

It was Colina. "What are you standing here for?" she cried passionately. "Are you afraid? They are nothing but common robbers! Go and put them out!"

No man moved.

"Fire on them!" cried Colina. "I order it! I take the responsibility."

They still hung back. Macfarlane could be seen attempting to expostulate with her.

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"Don't speak to me!" cried Colina. "When you find robbers in your house you shoot them down! You're afraid! I will go myself!"

All in a breath she came flying across the road. Ambrose, surprised, fell back a step from the door. Before he could recover himself she stood in the middle of the shed facing them with blazing eyes.

She had risen hastily; her glorious hair was twisted in a loose coil and pinned insecurely; the habit she had thrown on was still open at the throat.

She had caught up a riding-crop; the knuckles that gripped it were white. Ambrose, admiring her in an odd, detached way, was reminded of Bellona, the goddess of anger.

"What does this mean?" she cried.

"What you see," said Ambrose coldly.

"Get out!" she cried. "All of you! I order it!"

The men cringed under her angry glances, and their eyes bolted. Only the sight of Ambrose standing firm, kept them in their places. Colina turned on Ambrose.

"You thief!" she cried with ringing scorn.

Ambrose coldly faced her out. Somehow he found it was his turn to smile. As a matter of fact he had suffered so much at her hands that he had become callous and strong enough to resist her.

Indeed there was a kind of bitter sweetness in this moment. She, who had humiliated him so many times was now powerless before him, let her rage as she might. He was only human.

Seeing the cold smile Colina felt as if the ground was suddenly cut from under her. Her cheeks paled, and the imperious blaze of her eyes was slowly dimmed.

When the bolt of passion is launched without effect, a horrible blankness faces the passionate one. The men seeing Colina falter breathed more freely. They were frankly terrified of her.

Colina fought on though her forces were in confusion. "Have you anything to say for yourself?" she demanded of Ambrose. "What are you doing on my father's property?"

"I have nothing to say," said Ambrose. "You know the situation as well as I."

Once more their eyes contended. Hers fell. She turned away from him. When she came back it was with an altered air. "May I speak to you alone?" she asked in low tones.

"Please say it here," said Ambrose. "They cannot hear."

"My father—" she murmured with a deprecating air, "I am afraid this will kill him. I have locked him in his room. I don't know what he will do. Can't you stop until to-morrow?"

"If you will pledge yourself for him to finish grinding my grain to-morrow," said Ambrose.

"How can I pledge him?" she said pettishly. "I am not his master."

"Then we must grind on."

She was silent for a moment, looking on the ground. When she raised her eyes the look in them sent all the blood flying from his heart. "Ambrose!" she murmured on the deep note he remembered so well. "Have you forgotten?"

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He stared at her in a kind of horror.

“How can you be so hard to me?” she murmured.

She overdid it. Behind the intoxicating, soft appeal of her eyes, he perceived a dangerous glitter, and steeled himself.

“Come outside a moment,” she whispered, turning up her face a little.

The unregenerate man in him leaped to accept what she offered and still hold firm. If she chose to play that game let her take the consequences? His more generous self held back. Somehow he realized that the humiliation would almost kill her—later.

“It is too late,” he said coldly.

This in itself was a humiliation the proud Colina could not have conceived herself living after. From between narrowed lids she shot him a glance of the purest hate, and quickly turned away.

The riding crop switched the air like the tail of an angry cat. There was a silence. All watched to see what she would do next.

Meanwhile the mill was grinding smoothly. The young miller was hidden from Colina by the barricade of grain bags. Finally she looked over the top and saw him attending the machine.

“Greer!” she exclaimed in surprise.

The boy started, and turned a pair of stricken eyes in her direction. His ruddy cheeks paled a little. Manifestly she wielded a power over him too.

“Are you against me?” she murmured sadly.

This was the same tone she had just used to Ambrose. His lip curled. “He has to do what I tell him or be knocked on the head,” he said quickly.

Colina ignored this. “You could fight for me if you would,” she murmured to the boy.

A hot little flame of jealousy scorched Ambrose’s breast. He laughed jeeringly. “Who’s next?” he cried.

Colina, not looking at him, drew a baleful breath between her teeth. Suddenly she turned, and with hanging head slowly made her way toward the door.



Ambrose thought she was beaten, and a swift wave of compassion almost unmanned him. He abruptly turned away. He could stand anything but to see Colina defeated and grieving. He clenched his teeth to keep from crying out to her.

She had another card to play. She stopped at the door, and looked about through her lashes to see if the way out was clear.

"Duncan!" she softly cried. The word was accompanied by a dazzling smile of invitation.

The boy dropped his wrench as if he had been shot, and vaulting over the grain bags, was out through the door after her before any one could stop him.

## **CHAPTER XX.**

### **UNDERCURRENTS.**

As Greer disappeared in the darkness several men started in pursuit.

Ambrose was quicker. He flung himself into the opening, and thrust them back. Though he was on fire with jealousy, he would not go after Greer, nor let the others go.

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He could scarcely have explained why—perhaps because he dimly apprehended that it was Colina's game to drive him mad with jealousy.

"Let him go," he said thickly. "I will run the mill myself!"

So long as the wheels revolved smoothly and the stream of creamy flour issued from the mouth of the machine the miller had a sinecure. Ambrose scowling and grinding his teeth scarcely saw what his eyes were turned on. His mind was busy outside.

He was sharply recalled to his job by a tearing sound from within the machinery. The flour came out mixed with bran. The wheels jammed and stopped.

Ambrose threw out the clutch, and doggedly attacked the problem. It was cruelly hard to concentrate his mind on machinery while a damnable little voice in his brain persisted in asking over and over:

"Where are they? What are they doing? How far will rage carry her?"

He contrived to remove the torn frame without much difficulty, but how to clean out the mass of stuff that clogged every part of the mechanism defied his ingenuity. Apparently the thing must be taken apart. How could he hope to put it together by lantern light?

There was a stir at the door, and Duncan Greer slouched in with a hang-dog scowl. Never in his life had Ambrose been so glad to see a man. He was careful to mask his joy. He glanced at the boy carelessly and went on with his work. Duncan came directly to him.

"I'm your man," he muttered. "For keeps, if you want me."

"Sure," said Ambrose, very offhand. "Help me get this thing going, will you?"

As they worked side by side in the lantern light, Ambrose perceived a red welt across the boy's forehead and cheek that was momentarily growing darker. He smiled grimly. Duncan, finding his eyes fixed on it, flushed up painfully.

"Women are the devil!" he muttered.

A great unholy joy filled Ambrose's breast. In his relief he could have hugged the boy, and laughed.

"Don't abuse the women, my son," he said grimly. "They have to fight with what weapons they can. You were warned. You only got what was coming to you!"

When the machine was running smoothly again, Ambrose went to the door to reconnoiter.

"They've gone," he said. "I don't think they'll trouble us again before morning. You can all sleep."

Daybreak and the following hours found Ambrose and his party on the *qui vive* for a renewed demonstration from the other side. None was made.

Neither Macfarlane, Gordon Strange, nor Colina could have mustered a corporal's guard of the natives to their aid. The breeds in their own mysterious way had simply disappeared.

Without them, the half dozen whites could do nothing against Ambrose's strong party. Colina herself had suffered a moral defeat, and required time to recoup her losses.

In the back of the store the white men and Gordon Strange held lengthy consultations without agreeing on any course of action. Strange in his modest way deferred to Macfarlane and the others.



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But John Gaviller's absolute sway at the post had sapped the lesser men's initiative. He was not able to be present, and they were helpless.

It was decided to send for help to police headquarters at Caribou Lake. They could not despatch the big steam-boat which had been dismantled for the winter, but the launch was available.

Gaviller had it to use at the end of summer when the water ran low in the river. They managed to collect enough half-breeds for a crew; Masters ran the engine, and Captain Stinson piloted.

Thus in order to send for help the little force had to rob itself of two of its best defenders. They got away in the middle of the afternoon. With luck they could be back with the red-coats in two weeks or three.

Meanwhile the mill was grinding blithely.

Ambrose, who desired at all costs to keep the Indians in ignorance of what was happening, for fear they might get out of hand, sent Germain Grampierre to his father's house to get what little flour they had, and carry it to Watusk to feed the Kakisas for that day.

As far as he could see there was no other communication from one side of the river to the other. He observed the departure of the launch, with a calm brow. He guessed its errand, and was not at all averse to having the police brought down, and the whole matter thoroughly aired.

All day the wheels revolved, and all during the following night, Ambrose and young Greer watching the machine by turn.

At breakfast time on the second morning the hopper was empty, and the last bag of flour tied up. They had enough to satisfy the Kakisas demands, and something besides.

In the center of the shed Ambrose left the miller's tithe in payment, with an ironical note affixed to one of the bags. The flour was loaded in the york boat, and the entire party set off in high feather.

Their arrival with the flour at the Indian camp created something of a sensation. The children came running down to the water, capering and shrieking, accompanied by the barking dogs.

Men followed, eager to toss the bags to their shoulders. They made a long procession back to the teepees, the women crowding around, laughing, gesticulating, and caressing the fat, dusty bags.

By Ambrose's orders the bags were piled up in an imposing array in the middle of the square. He knew the value of a dramatic display.

The half-breeds who had been on duty for thirty-six hours, scattered to their homes up and down the river. Simon Grampierre and Tole remained with Ambrose.

The yolk boat was left drawn up on the beach below the camp. To this fact Ambrose traced all the subsequent disasters. But he could not have foreseen what would happen. The Indians at the sight of so much food were as candid and happy as children.

When the last bag of flour topped the pile, Ambrose sought out Watusk. He found the head man as before, evidently awaiting an official communication, with his dummy councilors on either hand. Watusk's smooth, flabby face was as blank as a plaster wall.

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"I have brought your flour," said Ambrose with a note of exultation justifiable under the circumstances.

Watusk was not impressed. "It is well," he said with a stolid nod.

Ambrose was somewhat taken aback. An instant told him that Watusk alone of all the tribe was not glad to see the flour. Ambrose scented a mystery.

"Where you get the flour?" asked Watusk politely.

"I borrowed Gaviller's mill to grind it," Ambrose answered in kind.

Watusk's eyes narrowed. He puffed out his cheeks a little, and Ambrose saw that an oration was impending.

"I hope there will be no trouble," the Indian began self-importantly. "Always when there is trouble the red man get blame. When the fur is scarce, when summer frost turn the wheat black it is the same. They say the red man make bad medicine.

"Two white men have a fight, red man come along, know nothing. Those two white men say it is his fault, and kick him hard. You break open Gaviller's mill. Gaviller is mad, send for police. When the police come I think they say it is Watusk's fault. Send him to jail!"

It was evident from this that Watusk was pretty well informed of what had happened. "How do you know they have sent for the police?" Ambrose demanded.

Watusk shrugged expressively. "I see the launch go up the river in a hurry," he said.

In the light of his insolent demand two days before, the Indian's present attitude was more than exasperating. "This is foolishness," said Ambrose sharply. "I sell you the flour. How I got it is my affair. I take the responsibility. The police will deal with *me*!"

"I hope so," said Watusk smugly.

"I have made out a receipt," Ambrose went on. "You sign it, then distribute the flour among the people, and give me the men's names so I can charge them on my book.

"To-morrow I give it out," said Watusk. "To-day I put the flour in Gaston Trudeau's empty house by the river. Maybe goin' to rain to-night."

"Just as you like about that," said Ambrose. "When are you going to pull out for home?"

"Soon," replied Watusk vaguely.

“They tell me it is the best time now to hunt the moose,” remarked Ambrose suggestively. “And the bear’s fur is coming in thick and soft. You have been here two weeks without hunting.”

Again Watusk’s eyes narrowed like a sulky child’s. “Must the Kakisas got hunt every day?” he asked spreading out his hands. “The people are weak with hunger. We got eat before we travel.”

Ambrose left this interview in a highly dissatisfied state of mind.

Later in the day Watusk must have thought better of his surliness for he sent a polite message to Ambrose at Simon Grampierre’s house, requesting him and Simon to come to a tea dance that night.

He had borrowed Jack Mackenzie’s house for the affair since no teepee was big enough to contain it. Mackenzie’s was the first house west of the Kakisa encampment.

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"Tea-dance! Bah! Indian foolishness!" said Simon.

"Let us go anyway," said Ambrose. "I feel as if there was something crooked going on. This Indian will bear watching."

### CHAPTER XXI.

#### THE SUBTLETY OF GORDON STRANGE.

At the same moment Gordon Strange was sitting on the bench at the foot of the flag-staff, smoking, and gazing speculatively across the river at the teepee village.

Colina issued out of the big house, and seeing him, joined him. It was her first public appearance since the scene at the mill, and it was something of an ordeal.

Her face showed what she was going through. She was elaborately self-conscious; defiance struggled with a secret shame. In her heart she knew she was wrong, yet she thirsted for justification.

"What is the situation?" she asked haughtily.

Strange told her briefly. His air was admirable. He betrayed no consciousness of anything changed in her; he was deferential without being obsequious.

He let her understand that she was still his peerless mistress who could do no wrong. This was exactly what Colina wanted. She warmed toward him, and sat down.

"Ah! I can talk straight to you," she said. "The others act as if the truth was too strong for me!"

"I know better than that," said Strange quietly. "You have the best head of any of us."

"Except when I lose it!" Colina thought. She smiled at him more warmly than she knew. A little flame that leaped up behind the man's eyes warned her. "Would he ever dare!" she thought.

"How is your father?" asked Strange quietly.

She shrugged helplessly. "Still weak," she said, "but there has been no return of fever. I have managed to keep the truth from him, but he suspects it. I cannot keep him in his room much longer."

"Ah! It makes me mad when I think of him!" Strange muttered.

There was a silence between them. His sympathy was sweet to her. She allowed it to lull her instinct of danger.

“What about the Kakisas?” she asked. “I gathered from Macfarlane’s and Dr. Giddings’s careful attempts to reassure me, that they feared danger from that source.”

Strange smiled enigmatically.

“Surely the idea of an Indian attack is absurd,” said Colina. “There hasn’t been such a thing for thirty years.”

“I know the Indians better than any man here,” said Strange. “One may expect danger without being afraid.”

“Danger!” cried Colina, elevating her eyebrows. “They would never dare!—”

“Not of themselves—but with a leader!”

“Ambrose Doane?” said Colina quickly. Her intelligence instantly rejected the suggestion, but self-love snatched at it in justification. Wounded vanity makes incongruous alliances. “That would be devilish!” she murmured.

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Strange shrugged. "I can't be sure of what is going on," he said. "I don't want to alarm you unnecessarily. But I have a reason to suspect danger."

Colina turned pale. "Tell me exactly what you mean," she said.

"The Indians have learned by now how easy it was to seize the mill," he said with admirable gravity. "It seems to me that to the Indian mind looting the store will next suggest itself. We know they are incensed against your father. His long weakness makes them bold."

"But these are merely surmises!" cried Colina.

"There is something else. Their minds work obliquely. They never come out straight with anything. I have received a kind of warning. It was an invitation to spend the night with Marcel Charbois down the river. But it came from the other side."

"Why should they warn you?" asked Colina.

"Some man among them probably has compunctions," said Strange. "Watusk, the head man is a decent sort. Perhaps this is his way of letting me know that he cannot keep his people in hand."

"What do you expect will happen?" she asked.

"I think there will be an attack to-night," he said quietly. "It is my duty to tell you. If it doesn't come, no harm done."

Strange's quiet air was terribly impressive. Colina sat pale and silent, letting the horror sink in. She was no weakling, but this was a prospect to appal the strongest man.

"We are so helpless!" she murmured at last.

A spark, one would have said of satisfaction, shot from beneath Strange's demurely lowered eyelids. "We cannot depend on our breeds," he went on soberly, "and Greer has gone over to the other side."

Colina winced.

"That leaves us four men and yourself and your father. If we had a stone building we could snap our fingers at them but everything is of wood. And fire is their favorite weapon. There are two courses open to us. We can go before they come, or we can stay and defend ourselves."

Colina stared before her, wide-eyed. “Father would never let us take him away without an explanation,” she murmured. “And if we told him what we feared, he would flatly refuse to go—”

Strange maintained a discreet silence.

Colina suddenly flung up her head. “We stay here!” she cried.

Strange’s dark eyes burned—but with what kind of a feeling Colina was in no state to judge. “You’re brave!” he cried. “That’s what I wanted you to say!”

“What must we do to prepare?”

“There is little we can do. We must abandon the store. There is no way to defend it. Perhaps they will be satisfied with looting it. We will all take up our station in the house. At the worst, I do not fear any harm to any of us, except perhaps—”

“Father?” murmured Colina.

“They have been wrought up to a high pitch against him,” Strange said deprecatingly.



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"Oh, why did that man have to come here!" murmured Colina.

They were silent for a while, Colina looking on the ground, and Strange watching Colina with his peculiar limpid, candid eyes, which, when one looked deep enough, were not candid at all.

He finally looked away from her.

"There is something I want to say," he began in low tones. "Your father—he shall be my special care to-night. They can strike at him—only through me."

"Ah, you're so good to me!" murmured Colina.

"Do not thank me," he said quickly. "Remember I owe him everything. All I am. All I have I would gladly—gladly—I sound melodramatic, don't I. But I don't often inflict this on you. You know what I mean. If I could save him!"

Colina impulsively seized his hand. Tears of gratitude sprang to her eyes. "I will thank you!" she cried. "You're the best friend I have in the world!"

"And even if I owed him nothing," Strange went on, not looking at her, "he would still be your father!"

An hour before Colina would have crushed him. But it came at an emotional moment. She was blind to his color then.

"I will never, never forget this," she said.

He respectfully lifted her hands to his lips.

The under devil whose especial business it is to preside over fine acting must have rubbed his hands gleefully at the sight of his dark-skinned protege's aptitude.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE "TEA DANCE."

When Ambrose and Simon Grampierre arrived at the tea-dance they found present as many of the Kakisas of both sexes as could be wedged within Jack Mackenzie's shack.

All around the room they were pressed in tiers, the first line squatting, the second kneeling, the third standing, and others behind, perched on chairs, beds and tables, that all might have a clear view of the floor.



The cook-stove occupied the center of the room, and around it a narrow space had been left for the dancers. The air was suffocating to white lungs, what with human emanations combined with the thick fumes of kinnikinic.

Watusk, still sporting the frock coat and the finger-rings, had improved his costume by the addition of a battered silk hat with a chaplet of red paper roses around the brim.

He squatted on the floor in the center of the back wall, and places had been left at his right and left for Ambrose and Simon. He was disposed to be gracious and jocular to-night.

For very slight cause, or for none at all he laughed until he shook all over. This was his way of appearing at his ease.

As they took their places Ambrose was struck by the pretty, wistful face of a girl who knelt on the floor behind Watusk. It had a fine quality that distinguished it sharply from the stolid flat countenances of her sisters.

It was more than pretty; it was tragically beautiful, though she was little more than a child. What made it especially significant to Ambrose was the fact that the girl's sad eyes instantaneously singled him out when he entered.

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As he sat in front of her he was aware that they were dwelling on him. When he caught her glance, the eyes naively suggested that she had a communication to make to him, if she dared!

The fun had not yet commenced. The two drummers sat idle in a corner, and all the company sat in stolid silence. Only Watusk chatted and laughed. The women stared at Ambrose, and the men looked down their noses. All were somewhat embarrassed by the presence of a white man. Ambrose, looking around, was struck by the incongruity of the women's neat print dresses and the men's store clothes taken with their savage, walled faces. Such faces called for blankets, beads, war paint and eagles' feathers.

Ambrose, seeing the entire tribe gathered here as it seemed, thought a little anxiously of the flour he had been at such pains to grind.

Mackenzie's house was a good distance from the teepees, and the shack they were using for a store-house almost as far on the other side.

"Is anybody watching your flour?" he asked Watusk.

"I send four men to watch," was the reply.

"Good men? Men who will not sneak up to the dance?"

"Good men," said Watusk calmly.

Watusk presently gave a signal to the stick-kettle men, and they commenced to drum with their knuckles. The drums were wide wooden hoops with a skin drawn over one side.

The drummers had a lamp on the floor between them, and when the skin relaxed they dried it over the chimney. Like dances everywhere this one was slow to get under way. No one liked to be the first one to take the floor.

Gradually the drummers warmed to their work. The stick-kettle had a voice of its own, a dull, throbbing complaint that caused even Ambrose's blood to stir vaguely.

Finally a handsome young man arose and commenced to hitch around the stove with stiff joints, like a mechanical figure. The company broke into a wild chant in a minor key, commencing on a high note and descending the whole gamut, with strange pauses, lifts and falls.

Half way down the women came in with a shrill second part. It died away into a rumble, ever to be renewed on the same high, long-drawn note. Ambrose was reminded of the baying of hounds.

The dancer knotted his handkerchief as he circled the stove. Dancing up to another man, he offered him the end of it with some spoken words.

It was accepted, and they danced together around the stove, joined by the handkerchief.

The hunching, spasmodic step never varied. Ambrose asked Watusk about it.

"This is the lame man's dance," his host explained.

"What lame man?" asked Ambrose. "How did it begin?"

Watusk shrugged. "It is very old," he said.

The first man dropped out, and the second chose a new partner. Sometimes there were two or three couples dancing at once. Partners were chosen indiscriminately from either sex.

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In each case the knotted handkerchief was offered with the same spoken formula. Ambrose asked what it was they said.

"This is give-away dance," Watusk explained. "He is say: 'This my knife, this my blanket, this my silk-worked moccasins.' What he want to give. After he got give it."

Ambrose observed that each dancer laid two matches on the cold stove as he took his place, and when he retired from the dance picked them up again. He asked what that signified.

Watusk shrugged again. "How do I know?" he said. "It is always done."

Ambrose learned later that this was the invariable answer of the Kakisas to any question concerning their customs.

Watusk was exerting himself to be hospitable, continually pressing cups of steaming bitter tea on Ambrose and Simon. Ambrose, watching him, made up his mind that the chief's unusual affability masked a deep disquiet.

The sharp, shifty eyes were continually turning with an expectant look to the door. Ambrose found himself watching the door, too.

To Ambrose the uncouth dance had neither head nor tail; nevertheless, it had a striking effect on the participators and spectators.

Minute by minute the excitement mounted. The stick-kettles throbbed faster and ever more disquietingly. It seemed as if the skin of the drums were the very hearts of the hearers, with the drummers' knuckles searching out their secrets.

Eyes burned like stars around the walls, and the chant was renewed with a passionate abandon. The figures hitched and sprang around the homely iron stove like lithe animals.

Suddenly the noise of running feet was heard outside, and a man burst in through the door with livid face and starting eyes. The drumming, the song, and the dance stopped simultaneously.

The man cried out a single sentence in the Kakisa tongue. Cried it over and over breathlessly, without any expression.

The effect on the crowd was electrical. Cries of surprise and alarm, both hoarse and shrill, answered him. A wave of rage swept over them all, distorting their faces. They jammed in the doorway, fighting to get out.

"What is it?" cried Ambrose of Watusk.

Watusk's face was working oddly with excitement.

But it was not rage like the others. The difference between him and all his people was marked.

"The flour is burning!" the chief cried.

"This was what he expected," thought Ambrose.

As he struggled to get out, Ambrose's hand was seized and pressed by a small warm one.

He had a momentary impression of the wistful girl beside him. Then she was swept away.

## **CHAPTER XXIII.**

**FIRE AND RAPINE.**

The Kakisas ran down the trail like a heap of dry leaves propelled by a squall of wind. To Ambrose it all seemed as senseless and unreal as a nightmare.

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The alarm had been given at a moment of extreme emotional excitement, and restraint was thrown to the winds. It was like a rout after battle.

The men shouted; the women wailed and forgot their children. The throng was full of lost children; they fell by the road and lay shrieking.

Ambrose never forgot the picture as he ran, of an old crone, crazed by excitement, whirling like a dervish, rocking her skinny arms and twisting her neck into attitudes as grotesque as gargoyles.

The trail they covered was a rough wagon-road winding among patches of poplar scrub and willow. Issuing out upon the wide clearing which contained their village they saw afar the little storehouse burning like a torch, and redoubled their cries.

They swept past the teepees without stopping, the biggest ones in the van, the little ones tailing off and falling down and getting up again with piteous cries.

Reaching the spot, all could see there was nothing to be done. The shack was completely enveloped in flames. There were not half a dozen practicable water-pails in the tribe, and anyhow the fire was a good furlong from the river.

Ambrose, seeing what a start it had got, guessed that it was no accident. It had been set, and set in such a way as to insure the shack's total destruction. He considered the sight grimly.

The mystery he had first scented that morning was assuming truly formidable proportions. He believed that Watusk was a party to it; but he could not conceive of any reason why Watusk should burn up his people's bread.

There was nothing to be done, and the people ceased their cries. They stood gazing at the ruby and vermilion flames with wide, charmed eyes.

Among the pictures that this terrible night etched with acid on Ambrose's subconsciousness, the sight of them standing motionless, all the dark faces lighted by the glare, was not the least impressive.

With a sickening anxiety he perceived the signs of a rising savage rage. The men scowled and muttered. More than once he heard the words: "John Gaviller!" Men slipped away to the teepees and returned with their guns.

Ambrose looked anxiously for Watusk. He could not reach the people except through the man he distrusted.

He found him by himself in a kind of retreat among some poplars a little way off, where he could see without being seen. Ambrose dragged him back willy-nilly, adjuring him by the way.

“The people are working themselves into a rage. They speak of Gaviller. You and I have got to prevent trouble. You must tell them Gaviller is a hard man, but he keeps the law. He did not do this thing. This is the act of another enemy.”

“What good tell them?” said Watusk sullenly. “They not believe.”

“You are their leader!” cried Ambrose. “It’s up to you to keep them out of trouble. If you do not speak, whatever happens will be on your head! And I will testify against you. Tell the people to wait until to-morrow and I pledge myself to find out who did this.”



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"You know who did it?" asked Watusk sharply.

"I will not speak until I have proof," Ambrose said warily.

"What happened to the men you left on guard?"

"They say they play jack-pot with a lantern near the door," said Watusk. "See not'ing. Hear not'ing. Poof! she is all burn!"

"H-m!" said Ambrose.

They were now among the people.

"Speak to them!" he cried. "Tell them if they keep quiet Ambrose Doane will pay for the flour that is burned up, and will grind them some more. Tell them to wait, and I promise to make things right. Tell them if they make trouble to-night the police will come and take them away, and their children will starve!"

Watusk did, indeed, move among the men speaking to them, but with a half-hearted air. He cut a pitiful figure. It was not clear whether he was unwilling to oppose them or afraid.

Ambrose did not even know what Watusk was saying to them. At any rate the men ignored their leader. Ambrose was wild at the necessity which made him dependent on such a poor creature.

He followed Watusk, imploring them in English to keep their heads. Some of the sense of what he said must have reached them through his tones and gestures, but they only turned sullen, suspicious shoulders upon him.

That Ambrose should take the part of his known enemy, John Gaviller, seemed to their simple minds to smack of double-dealing.

The roof of the burning shack fell in, sending a lovely eruption of sparks to the black sky. At the same moment as if by a signal one of the savages brandished his gun aloft and broke into a passionate denunciation.

Once more Ambrose heard the name of Gaviller. Instantly the crowd was in an uproar again. Cries of angry approval answered the speaker from every throat. The man was beside himself. He waved his gun in the direction of the river.

Ambrose waited to hear no more. He saw what was coming. Black horror faced him. He ran to the river, straining every nerve. He heard them behind him. Then it was that he so bitterly reproached himself for having left the yolk boat within reach.

Leaping down the bank, he put his back under the bow and struggled to push it off. He would gladly have sacrificed it. It was too heavy for him to budge. Tole Grampierre and Greer reached his side.

“Quick!” cried Ambrose breathlessly. “Set her adrift!”

But at that moment the whole tribe came pouring over the bank like a flood. Ambrose and the breed sprang into the bow of the boat in an endeavor to hold it against them. Old Simon presently joined them.

“Back! Back!” cried Ambrose. “For God’s sake listen to me, men! Go to your lodges and talk until morning. The truth will be clear in the daylight! The police are coming. They will give you justice.

“Justice is on your side now. If you break the white man’s law he will wipe you out! Where is your leader? He knows the truth of what I say. Watusk is not here! He won’t risk his neck!”

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It had about as much effect as a trickle of water upon a conflagration. They made no attempt to dislodge Ambrose from in front, but swarmed into the water on either side, and putting their backs under the boat, lifted her off the stones. Scrambling over the sides, they shouldered Ambrose and the breed ashore from behind.

Ambrose shouted to the breeds: "Go home and stay there all night. You must not be mixed up in this."

"What will you do?" cried Simon.

The york boat was already floating off, the crew running out the sweeps. Ambrose, without answering, ran into the water and clambered aboard. In the confusion and the dark the Indians could not tell if he were white or red.

He made himself inconspicuous in the bow. His only conscious thought was how to get a gun. He had no idea of what to do upon landing.

Upon pushing off, moved by a common instinct of caution, the Indians fell silent, and during the crossing there was no sound but the grumbling of the clumsy sweeps in the thole-pins, and the splash of the blades.

Standing on the little platform astern, silhouetted against the sky, Ambrose recognized the man who had given the word to attack Gaviller.

He marked him well. He was of middle size, a tall man among the little Kakisas, with a great shock of hair cut off like a Dutchman's at the neck.

On the way over Ambrose was greatly astonished to feel his sleeve gently plucked. He studied the men beside him, and finally made out Tole under his flaring hatbrim.

Into his ear he whispered: "I told you to go home."

"I go with you," Tole whispered back. "I your friend."

Ambrose's anxious heart was warmed. He needed a friend. He gripped Tole's shoulder.

"Have you a gun?" he asked.

The breed shook his head.

"Get guns for us both if you can," said Ambrose.

On the other side, the instant the york boat touched the shingle, the Indians set up a chorus of yelling frightful to hear, and scrambled ashore.

Ambrose and Tole were among the first out. Together they drew aside a little way into the darkness to see what would happen. There was no need to warn the Company people; the yelling did that.

The Indians set off across the beach and up the bank, working themselves up with their strident, brutish cries. The habits of thirty years of peace were shed like a garment. The young men of the tribe had never heard the war-cry until that moment.

Ambrose followed at their heels. At the top of the bank, to his unbounded relief, they turned toward the store. He still had a little time. All he could do was to offer himself to the defenders.

"I'm going to the side door of Gaviller's house," he said to Tole. "Get guns for us, somehow, and come to me there."

He knew that Tole, who was as dark as the Kakisas, and in no way distinguished from them in dress, ran little risk of discovery in the confusion.

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There was no sign of life about the post; every window was dark. The Indians swarmed across the quadrangle without meeting any one.

As Ambrose reached the fence around Gaviller's house he heard the store-door and the windows go in with a series of crashes. He crouched beside the gate to wait for Tole. It was useless for him to offer himself without a weapon.

They started a fire outside the store. Fed with excelsior and empty boxes, the flames leaped up instantaneously, illuminating every corner of the quadrangle, and throwing gigantic, distorted shadows of men on the store front.

On the nearer side of the fire the silhouettes darted back and forth with the malignant activity of demons in a pit. Men issued out of the store with armfuls of goods that they flung regardless to the flames.

Already they were dressing themselves up in layer after layer of clothes until they no longer resembled human creatures. What they could not wear they hung about their necks.

Some came out tearing at food like wolves. Others darted into dark corners of the square to hide their prizes. A man appeared dressed in a woman's wrapper and hat, and capered around the fire to the accompaniment of shrieks of obscene laughter.

There was a continuous sound of rending and crashing from within the store. The trader in Ambrose groaned to witness the destruction of good weapons and cloth stuffs and food. Some one would suffer for the lack of it in the winter.

Within the store, by the door, a furious altercation arose. This was where the case of cheap jewelry stood. Two men rolled out on the platform fighting.

Ambrose saw a raised arm, and the gleam of steel. After a few moments one of the men got up and the other lay still. Thereafter, all who went in and came out stepped indifferently over his body.

Ambrose gazed fascinated and oddly unmoved. It was like a horrible play in a theater. The insane yelling rose and fell intermittently.

At last Ambrose saw a man detach himself from the group and run around the square, darting behind the houses for cover. The runner reappeared nearer to him, and he saw that it was Tole. He came to him, running low under shelter of the palings. He thrust a rifle into Ambrose's hands.

"Loaded!" he gasped. "Plenty more shells in my pocket."

"Did you hear any talk?" asked Ambrose. "Are they coming over here?"

“Talk no sense,” said Tole. “Only yell. It is moch bad. They got whisky.”

“Whisky!” echoed Ambrose, aghast.

“A big jug. It was in the store.”

Ambrose’s heart sank. “Come,” he said grimly.

## **CHAPTER XXIV.**

COLINA RELENTS.

As Ambrose and Tole started in the gate they were hailed from the dark doorway under the porch. “Stand, or I fire!” It was the voice of Macfarlane.

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"It is Ambrose Doane and Tole Grampierre," cried Ambrose.

They heard an exclamation of astonishment from the door.

"What do you want?" demanded the voice.

"To help you defend yourselves."

From the sounds that reached him, Ambrose gathered that the door was open and that Macfarlane stood within the hall. From farther back Colina's voice rang out:

"How dare you! Do you expect us to believe you? Go back to your friends!"

"They are not my men," Ambrose answered doggedly.

"Wait!" cried still another voice. Ambrose recognized the smooth accents of Gordon Strange. "We can't afford to turn away any defenders. I say let him come in."

Ambrose was surprised, and none too well pleased to hear his part taken in this quarter. There was a silence. He apprehended that they were consulting in the hall. Finally Macfarlane called curtly:

"You may come in."

As he went up the path Ambrose saw that the windows of the lower floor had been roughly boarded up. The thought struck him oddly: "How could they have had warning of what was going to happen?"

"There's barbed wire around the porch," said Macfarlane, "You'll have to get over it the best way you can."

Ambrose and Tole helped each other through the obstruction. They found Macfarlane sitting on a chair in the doorway, with his rifle across his knees.

"Go into the library," he said.

The door was on the right hand as one entered the hall. Within a lamp had just been lighted; even as Ambrose entered Colina was turning up the wick.

Heavy curtains had been bung over the windows to keep any rays of light from escaping, and the door was instantly closed behind Ambrose and Tole.

Inside the little room that he already knew so well Ambrose found all the defenders gathered. The only one strange to him was little Pringle, the missionary, who sat primly

on the sofa. It had much the look of an ordinary evening party, but the row of guns by the door told a tale.

John Gaviller sat in his swivel chair behind his desk, leaning his head on his hand. Ambrose was shocked by the change that three months' illness had worked in him.

The self-assured, the scornfully affable trader had become a mere pantaloon with sunken cheeks and trembling hands. Ambrose looked with quick compassion toward Colina.

She went to her father and stood by his chair with a hand on his shoulder. She coldly ignored Ambrose's glance.

"What have you to say for yourself?" Gaviller demanded in a weak, harsh voice.

"Do you know the reason for this attack?" demanded Ambrose.

Several voices answered "No!"

"All the flour was stored in Michel Trudeau's shack. Some wretch set fire to it and destroyed it all. Naturally they thought it was done by John Gaviller's orders. This is their reprisal."



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"You dared to think we would stoop to such a thing!" cried Colina.

The general animosity that he felt like a wall around him made Ambrose defiant.

"I said they thought so," he retorted. "I harangued them until my throat was sore. I couldn't hold them, and I hid myself and came with them, thinking perhaps I could help you."

"How did they come?" asked Strange smoothly.

"In my boat that they seized," said Ambrose.

"It all comes back to you whichever way you trace it," cried Gaviller. "If you had not attacked us yesterday, they would never have dared to-day! You have brought us to this! I hope you're satisfied. I warned you what would happen as a result of your tampering with the natives. If we're all murdered it will be on your head!"

"On the contrary, if we're murdered it will be because they found whiskey in your store," retorted Ambrose.

"Impossible!" cried Gaviller and Strange together.

Ambrose laid a hand on Tole's shoulder. "This man saw it on the counter," he said. "I sent him to the store to get guns for us both. It had no business to be there, as you all know."

"They must have brought it with them," said Strange. "I locked the store myself."

"Of course they brought it," said Gaviller.

"Not much use to discuss that point," said Ambrose curtly. "They have it, and it has robbed them of the last vestiges of manhood. They're nothing but brutes now."

The old man rose. "Silence!" he cried quaveringly. "You are insolent! By your light-mindedness and vanity you have raised a storm that no man can see the end of! You have plunged us into the horrors of Indian warfare after thirty years' peace! How dare you come here and attempt to hector us! Silence, I say, and keep your place!"

"Father," murmured Colina remonstratingly. "You must save your strength."

He shook her off impatiently. "Must I submit to be bearded in my own house by this scamp, this fire-brand, this destroyer?"

Ambrose could not bandy words with this wreck of a strong man. He signed to Tole, and they went outside and joined Macfarlane.

The three of them waited in the doorway in a kind of armed truce, smoking and watching the Indians across the square. At any moment they expected to see the yelling demons turn against the house.

By and by Ambrose heard the library door open. The light inside had been put out again for greater safety.

He heard Colina come out, and go the other way in the passage. He knew her by the rustle of her skirts. She went up-stairs on some errand.

His heart leaped up. He could no longer deceive himself with the fancy that he had ceased to love her. Not with death staring them both in the face. He quietly made his way back into the house to intercept her on her return.

When he heard her coming he whispered her name. Here in the middle of the house it was totally dark.

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"You!" she gasped, stopping short. But the scorn had gone out of her voice, and somehow he knew that he was already in her thoughts when he spoke. He put out a hand toward her.

"Don't touch me!" she whispered, shrinking sharply.

There, in the compelling darkness, with danger waiting outside, they could not hide their souls from each other. "Colina," he whispered, "don't harden yourself against me tonight. I love you!"

Her breath came quickly. She could not speak. Her anger against Ambrose was, at the best, a pumped-up affair. She felt obliged to hate him because she loved her father. And her overweening pride had supported it. All this fell away now. She longed to believe in him.

Perceiving his advantage he followed it close.

"It may be the last night," he whispered. "I'm not afraid to speak of death to you. You're no coward. Colina, it would be hard to die thinking that you hated me!"

"Don't!" she murmured painfully. "Don't try to soften me. I need to be hard."

"Not to me," he whispered. "I love you!"

She was silent. He heard her breathing on a shaken breast.

"If I knew it was my last word I should say the same," he went on. "I came back to Enterprise because I thought I had to come to save you!"

"It hasn't turned out that way, has it?" she said sadly and bitterly.

"There is some evil influence working against us all," he said. "If I live I shall show you."

"I don't know what to think," she murmured.

They were standing close together. Suddenly the sense of her nearness in the dark, the delicate emanation of her hair, of her whole person, overwhelmed his senses like a wave.

"Oh, my darling," he murmured brokenly. "Those devils outside can only kill me once. You make me die a thousand deaths!"

"Ah, don't!" she whispered sharply. "Not now. First, I must believe in you!"

He beat down the passion that dizzied him. He sought for her hand and gripped it firmly. She allowed it. "Listen," he said. "Take me into the light and look in my eyes."

Her hand turned in his and took command of it, drawing him after her. Crossing the stair-hall they entered the dining-room. Colina closed the door and lighted the lamp.

Ambrose gazed at her hungrily. She came to him straight and, offering him both her hands, looked deep into his eyes.

"Now tell me," she murmured.

This was the real Colina, simple as a child. Her eyes—the lamp being behind her—showed as deep and dark as the night sky.

Her lovely face yearned up to his, and Ambrose's self-command tottered again—but this was no moment for passion. His voice shook, but his eyes were as steady as hers.

"I love you," he said quietly. "When you hated me most I was doing the best for you that I could. I—I'm afraid I sound like a prig. But it is the truth. I stood out against you when I thought you were wrong because I loved you!"

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Her eyes fell. Her hands crept confidingly up his arms. "Ah! I want so to believe it," she faltered.

He thought he had won her again. His arms swept around her, crushing her to him. "My love!" he murmured.

She went slack in his arms and coldly averted her head. "Do not kiss me," she said.

He instantly released her.

"It's not the time," she murmured. "It seems horrible to-night. I—I am not ready. By what happens to-night I will know for always!"

"But, Colina—" he began.

She offered him her hand with a beseeching air. "I do not hate you any more," she said quickly. "You have a lot to forgive in me, too. Be merciful to me. Show me—to-night."

He drew a steadying breath. "Very well," he said. "I am contented."

## CHAPTER XXV.

### ACCUSED.

The long suspense wore terribly on the defenders of the house.

To wait inactive, listening to the frightful yelling and watching the play of the fire, not knowing at what moment yelling, bullets, and fire might be directed at themselves, was disorganizing to the stoutest nerves.

When the attack should come all knew that their refuge was more like a trap than a fortress. Ambrose wished to abandon the house for the Catholic church up the river.

This little structure was stoutly built of squared logs; moreover, it was possible that some lingering religious feeling might restrain the Indians from firing it.

The suggestion was received with suspicion. John Gaviller refused point-blank to leave his house.

As the hours passed without any change in the situation they began to feel as if they could endure no more. They were almost ready to wish that the savages might attack them and have done with it.

They endlessly and vainly discussed what might be passing in the red men's minds. Tole Grampierre, hearing this talk, offered to go and find out.

There was no danger to him, he said. Even if they should discover that he was not one of themselves, they had no quarrel with his people. Ambrose let him go.

He never returned. Ambrose and Macfarlane helped him through the barbed wire, and he set off, making a wide detour behind the houses that faced the river, meaning to join the Indians from the other side.

Most of the Indians had for some time been engaged in rifling the warehouse, which adjoined the store behind.

Ambrose and Macfarlane, anxiously watching from the porch, heard a sudden outcry raised in this quarter, and saw a man come running desperately around the corner of the store, pursued by a howling dozen.

Ambrose knew the runner by his rakish, broad-brimmed hat and flying sash. His heart leaped into the race. Tole was gaining.

"Go it! Go it!" Ambrose cried.

Tole was not bringing his pursuers back to the big house, but led the way off to one side by the quarters. Only a few yards separated him from the all-concealing darkness.

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"He's safe!" murmured Ambrose.

At the same moment half of Tole's pursuers stopped dead, and their rifles barked. The flying figure spun around with uptossed arms, and plunged to the ground.

Ambrose groaned from the bottom of his breast. Nerved by a blind rage, his own gun instinctively went up. He could have picked off one or two from where he stood. Macfarlane flung a restraining arm around him.

"Stop! You'll bring the whole mob down on us!" he cried. He looked at Ambrose not unkindly. The sacrifice of Tole obliged him to change his attitude.

Ambrose turned in the door, silently grinding his teeth. At the end of the passage he found a chair, and dropped upon it, holding his head between his hands.

The face of Tole as he had first beheld it—proud, comely, and full of health—rose before him vividly.

He remembered that he had said to himself then: "Here is one young, like myself, that I can make a friend of." And almost the last thing Tole had said to him was: "I am your friend."

It was his youth and good looks that made it seem most horrible. Ambrose pictured the bloody ruin lying in the square, and shuddered.

Gordon Strange offered to go out in order to make sure that Tole was beyond aid. It seemed like a kindly impulse, but Ambrose suspected its genuineness.

Even from where they were, a glance at the huddled figure was enough to tell the truth. None of the others would hear of Strange's going. Colina and Giddings pleaded with him. Gaviller forbade him. Strange with seeming reluctance finally gave in.

Whenever he witnessed such evidences of their trust in the half-breed Ambrose's lip curled in the darkness. He was more than ever convinced that Strange was a blackguard.

Evidence he had none, only his warning intuition, which, among the male sex at least, is not considered much to go on.

It gave Ambrose a shrewd little twinge of jealousy to hear Colina begging this man not to risk his life by leaving the house.

About three o'clock it began to seem as if they might allow themselves to relax a little. The madness of the Indians had burned itself out. There had not been enough whisky perhaps to maintain it for more than a few hours.

In any case, since the whites had been spared at the height of their fury, it seemed reasonable to hope they might escape altogether. The yelling had ceased.

Most of the men were now engaged in carrying flour and other goods down to the yolk boat. The watchers from the house wondered if they dared believe this signified an early departure.

As the tension let down it could be seen that John Gaviller was on the verge of a collapse. Colina strove with him to go to his room and rest on his bed.

He finally consented upon condition that she lay in her own room up-stairs. Colina and Gordon Strange half led, half carried the old man up-stairs.



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Strange, returning, relieved Macfarlane's watch at the side door. Macfarlane, Ambrose, Giddings, and Pringle lay down on the sofa and on the floor of the library.

Three of them were almost instantly asleep. Not so Ambrose. As soon as he saw the half-breed left in sole charge his smoldering suspicions leaped into activity.

"If he's meditating anything queer this is the time he'll start it!" he thought. He took care to choose his position on the floor nearest the door. He left the door open.

From the outside only occasional sounds came now. The Indians were busy and silent. Within the house it was so still that Ambrose could hear Gordon Strange puffing at his pipe.

The half-breed was sitting in the doorway outside, with his chair tipped back against the wall. By and by Ambrose heard the front legs of the chair drop to the floor, and an instinct of caution bade him close his eyes and breathe deeply like a man asleep.

Sure enough Strange came into the library. He was taking no pains to be silent. Stepping over Ambrose he crossed to the mantel, where he fumbled for matches, and striking one made believe to relight his pipe.

Now Ambrose knew that Strange had matches, for when they took John Gaviller up he had seen him light the lamp at the foot of the stairs and return the box to his pocket.

This then must be a reconnoitering expedition. Ambrose had no doubt that when the match flared up the half-breed took a survey of the sleeping men.

He left the room, and Ambrose heard the chair tipped back against the wall once more.

A little later Ambrose became conscious that Strange was at the library door again, though this time he had not heard him come.

He paused a second and passed away as silently as a ghost—but whether back to his chair or farther into the house Ambrose could not tell.

Rising swiftly to his hands and knees he stuck his head out of the door. There was light enough from the outside to reveal the outlines of the chair—empty.

Without a thought Ambrose turned in the other direction and crept swiftly and softly through the passage into the stair hall. He did not know what he expected to find. His heart beat thick and fast.

He scarcely suspected danger to Colina, who was strong and brave. Was it her father? Reaching the foot of the stairs he heard a velvet footfall above.

He hastened up on all fours. The stairs were thickly carpeted. Gaining the top his strained ears detected the whisper of a sound that suggested the closing of Gaviller's door.

He knew the room. It was over the drawing-room, and cut off from the other rooms of the house. To reach the door one had to pass around the rail of the upper landing.

Arriving at the door he did indeed find it closed. Under the circumstances he was sure Colina would have left it open.

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He did not stop to think of what he was doing. With infinite slow patience he turned the knob with one hand, holding his electric torch ready in the other.

When the door parted he flashed the light on the spot where he knew the bed stood. The picture vividly revealed in the little circle of light realized his unacknowledged fears.

He saw Strange kneeling on the bed, his face hideously distorted, his two hands at the old man's throat.

Strange yelped once in mingled terror and rage like an animal surprised—and with the quickness of an animal sprang at Ambrose.

The two men went down with a crash athwart the sill, and the door slammed back against the wall. There was a desperate struggle on the floor.

Strange was nerved with the strength of a madman. He could not have seen who it was that surprised him, but in that frantic embrace he learned.

"It's you, is it?" he snarled. "I've got you now!"

Forthwith he began to shout lustily for help. "Macfarlane! Giddings!"

Colina was already out of her room. She did not scream. The three men were on the stairs.

"Bring a light!" gasped both the struggling men.

It was Colina who lit a lamp and carried it out into the hall with a steady hand. Ambrose was seen to be uppermost. Recognizing the two men her face darkened with anger.

"What does this mean?" she cried. "Get up instantly!"

Ambrose wrenched himself free and stood up.

"Don't let him escape!" cried Strange.

Ambrose laughed a single note.

"He tried to kill your father!" panted Strange. "I arrived in the nick of time!"

Ambrose gasped and fell back in astonishment. Such stupendous effrontery was beyond the scope of his imagination.

"It's a lie!" he cried. "It was I who discovered him in the act of strangling your father!"

Then for the first Colina swayed. "Oh, God!" she murmured, "have we all gone mad!"

Macfarlane seized the lamp from her failing hand. Colina ran unevenly into her father's room. They heard her cry out within. Giddings ran to her aid. He made a light in the room and closed the door. The little parson moaned and wrung his hands.

Macfarlane had drawn his revolver. "If you make a move I'll shoot you down!" he said to Ambrose—thus making it clear whose story he believed.

"You can put it up," said Ambrose coolly. "I'm going to see this thing through."

Strange had got his grip again. His smoothness was largely restored. He actually laughed. "He's a cool hand!" he said.

"You damned black villain!" said Ambrose softly. "I know you now. And you know that I know you!"

It did not improve Ambrose's case to say it, but he felt better. The half-breed changed color and edged behind Macfarlane's gun.

Colina presently reappeared, showing a white and stony face. "Mr. Pringle," she said, "go down and lock the side door and bring me the key. The rest of you go to the library and wait for me."

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Ambrose flushed darkly. That Colina should even for a moment hold the balance between him and the half-breed made him burn with anger. Passionate reproaches leaped to his lips, but pride forced them back.

Turning stiffly he marched downstairs before Macfarlane without a word. She should suffer for this when he was exonerated, he vowed. That he might not be exonerated immediately did not occur to him.

In the library Strange and Macfarlane whispered together. When Pringle rejoined them all were silent. For upward of ten minutes they waited, facing each other grimly.

The strain was too great for the nerves of the little parson. He finally broke into a kind of terrified, dry sobbing.

"For God's sake say something!" he faltered. "This is too horrible!"

Macfarlane glanced at him with a contemptuous pity and stood a little aside from the door. "Better go into the front room," he said. "You can't do any good here."

The little man shook his head, and going to the window turned his back on them and endeavored to master his shaking.

Shortly afterward Colina came down-stairs. At her entrance all looked the question none dared put into words.

Colina veiled her eyes. "My father only fainted," she said levelly. "Dr. Giddings says he is little worse than before."

A long breath escaped from her hearers.

Strange cunningly contrived to get his story out first. As he spoke all eyes were bent on the ground. They could not face the horror of the other eyes.

Pringle was obliged to sit on the sofa to control the trembling of his limbs. The others stood—Macfarlane, Colina, and Strange near the door—Ambrose facing them from in front of the desk.

"You will remember," Strange began collectedly, "it was I who advised that this man should be admitted to the house. I thought we could watch him better from the inside. I have never ceased to watch him from that moment.

"When you all turned in and I was left at the side door I kept my eye on this room. The last time I looked in I saw that he had disappeared. He had slipped so softly down the hall I had not heard anything.

"I instantly thought of danger to those up-stairs, and crept up as quickly as I could without making any sound. I found the door of Mr. Gaviller's room closed. I knew Miss Colina had left it open. I opened it softly, and saw Doane on the bed with his hands at Mr. Gaviller's throat."

A shuddering breath escaped from Colina. The little parson moaned.

"He sprang at me," Strange went on. "We rolled on the ground. I called for help, and you all came. That is all."

Ambrose was staggered by the breed's satanic cleverness. After this his own story must sound like a pitiful imitation. He could never tell it now with the same assurance.

"Surely, surely they must know that a true man couldn't take it so coolly," he thought. But they were convinced; he could see it in their faces.

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He felt as powerless as a dreamer in the grip of a nightmare.

### CHAPTER XXVI.

CONVICTED.

When Strange finished there was a significant silence. They were waiting for Ambrose to speak. Stiffening himself he told his story as manfully as he could. Conscious of its weakness he wore a hang-dog air which contrasted unfavorably with Strange's seeming candor.

No comment was made upon it. Ambrose could feel their unexpressed sneers like goads in the raw flesh. Only Colina gave no sign. Macfarlane turned to her for instructions.

She contrived to maintain her proud and stony air up to the moment she was obliged to speak. But her self-command went out with her shuddering voice. "I—I don't know what to say," she whispered tremblingly.

"Surely there can be no question here!" cried Strange with a voice full of reproachful indignation. "I have served Mr. Gaviller faithfully for nearly thirty years. This man's whole aim has been to ruin him!"

"This is the tone I should be taking instead of letting him run me out," Ambrose thought dispassionately, as if it were somebody else. But he remained dumb.

"What earthly reason could I have for trying to injure my benefactor?" cried Strange. His voice broke artistically on the final word. "You all know what I think of him. Your suspicions hurt me!"

Macfarlane crossed over and clapped him on the shoulder. Colina kept her eyes down. She was very pale; her lips were compressed and her hands clenched at her sides.

Ambrose bestirred himself to his own defense. "Let me ask a question," he said quietly to Strange. "You say when you opened the door you saw me with my hands on Mr. Gaviller. How could you see me?"

"With my electric flash-light," Strange instantly answered.

"That's a lie," said Ambrose. "The flash-light was mine. I can prove it by a dozen witnesses."

"Produce it," said Strange sneering.

"You knocked it out of my hand," said Ambrose. "It will be found somewhere on the floor up-stairs."

Strange drew his hand out of his pocket. "On the contrary, it is here," he said. "And it has never been out of my possession. As to your identifying it, there are dozens like it in the country. It is the style all the stores carry."

Ambrose shrugged. "I've nothing more to say," he said. "The man is a liar. The truth is bound to come out in the end."

The white men paid little attention to this, but it stung Strange to reply. "If Mr. Gaviller were able to speak he'd soon decide between us!"

At that moment, as if Strange's speech had evoked, him, they heard Giddings in the hall.

"Has he spoken?" they asked breathlessly.

Colina kept her eyes hidden.

Giddings nodded. "He sent me down-stairs to order Macfarlane to arrest Doane."



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Colina fell back against the door-frame with a hand to her breast. "Did he—did he see him?" she whispered.

"No," said Giddings reluctantly. "He did not see his assailant. But said to accuse Strange of the deed was the act of a desperate criminal."

"You're under arrest!" Macfarlane said brusely to Ambrose. Turning to Colina, he added deprecatingly: "You had better leave the room, Miss Gaviller."

She shook her head. Clearly speech was beyond her. Not once during the scene had Ambrose been able to see her eyes, Macfarlane waited a moment for her to go, then shrugged deprecatingly.

"Will you submit to handcuffs or must I force you?" he demanded of Ambrose.

Ambrose did not hear him. His eyes were fastened on Colina. So long as he was tortured by a doubt of her he was oblivious to everything else.

The heart knows no logic. It deals directly with the heart. Love looks for loyalty as its due. Ambrose was amazed and incredulous and sickened by his love's apparent faint-heartedness.

"Colina!" he cried indignantly, "have you nothing to say? Do you believe this lie?"

Her agonized eyes flew to his—full of passionate gratitude to hear him defend himself. His scorn both abased and overjoyed her. Her heart knew.

None of the others recognized what was passing in those glances.

Macfarlane took a step forward. "Here! Leave Miss Gaviller out of this!" he said harshly.

Ambrose did not look at him, but his hand clenched ready to strike. His eyes were fixed on Colina, demanding an answer.

Color came back to her cheeks and firmness to her voice. "Stop!" she cried to Macfarlane in her old imperious way. "I'm the mistress here. My father is incapable of giving orders. You've no right to judge this man. None of us can choose. There is no evidence. I will not have either one handcuffed!"

Macfarlane fell back disconcerted. "I was thinking of your father's safety," he muttered.

"I will watch over him myself," she said. She went swiftly up the stairs.

Ambrose sat by himself on a chair at the junction of the side passage with the stair hall. Naturally, after what had passed, he avoided the other men—and they him.

It was growing light. He saw the panes of the side door gray and whiten. Later he could make out the damaged front of the store across the square.

Macfarlane was again upon watch by the door. Strange and Pringle were in the library. Giddings was with Colina and the sick man up-stairs.

Ambrose watched the coming of day with grim eyes. He had had plenty of time to consider his situation. True, Colina had not failed him, but he did not minimize the dangers ahead.

He knew something of the uncertainty of men's justice. Out of the tumult of rage that had at first shattered him had been born a resolve to guard himself warily.

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Daylight had an odd effect of novelty. It seemed to him as if years separated him from the previous day.

Strange came out of the library to take an observation. At the sight of him Ambrose's eyes burned. If scorn could kill the half-breed would have fallen in his tracks.

"They're still quiet," remarked Macfarlane.

"Too quiet," said Strange. "If they made a noise we could guess what they were up to!"

The two men held a low-voiced colloquy by the door. Ambrose supposed that Strange was again offering to go out to reconnoiter. The policeman was expostulating with him.

He heard Strange say; "I'm afraid they may attempt to wreck the mill before they go. That would be fatal for all of us. I had no opportunity yesterday to put on new locks."

Macfarlane begged Strange not to risk himself.

"He's safe enough," thought Ambrose grimly.

Strange finally had his way.

Ambrose speculated on what his real object might be. "That bull-headed redcoat is likely to get a surprise!" he thought.

In less than ten minutes the half-breed returned. Macfarlane warmly grasped his hand.

"It's all right," said Strange. "I went straight up to them. I had no trouble. Even now the older heads are thinking of the consequences. I think they'll be gone directly."

After some further talk in low tones Strange went back into the library, and Macfarlane sat down with his gun across his knees.

Once more quiet ruled the house. Ambrose's head fell forward on his breast and he slept uneasily.

He was roused by the cry they had waited all night in dread of hearing: "They're coming!"

Strange and Pringle ran out into the hall. Low as the cry was it was heard above. Colina and Giddings came flying down-stairs. Ambrose had already joined the others.

In the face of the deadly danger that threatened the men forgot their animosity for the moment. They were all crowded together in the narrow passage, far enough back from the closed door to see through the panes without being seen.

The five whites were afraid, as they might well be—but without panic. The half-breed was suspiciously calm. They lacked an unquestioned leader.

“That is Myengeen leading them,” said Strange; “a bad Indian!”

“Macfarlane—tell us what to do,” said Giddings.

“They’re quiet now,” said Colina. “I shall speak to them!”

Macfarlane put out a restraining hand. “Leave this to me!” he said quickly.

“We’re in each other’s way here,” cried Ambrose. “Let us spread through some of the rooms.”

“Right!” said Macfarlane. “Doane, Giddings, and Miss Colina—go into the library and throw up the windows on this side. Shoot between the boards if I give the word. The guns are inside the door.”

A cry from Strange brought them out into the hall again. “They’ve raised a white flag! They want to parley not to fight.”

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The others murmured their relief.

“Open the door!” cried Strange. “I will speak to them.”

Ambrose fell back a little. The other men crowded around Strange, urging him to be careful of himself. Strange was doing the modest hero!

It was a pretty little play. At the sight of it a harsh jangle of laughter rang inside Ambrose. Colina took no part in the scene.

Strange stepped out on the porch. Ambrose heard him speaking the uncouth Kakisa tongue, and heard the murmur of replies. He would have given a bale of furs to understand what was being said.

The exchange was brief. Strange presently stepped inside and said:

“They say they want their leader—Ambrose Doane.”

A dead silence fell on the little group. They turned and stared at Ambrose. He, for the moment, was stunned with astonishment. He was aware only of Colina’s stricken, white face. She looked as if she had been shot.

“They say they are ready to go,” Strange went on. “They promise to make no more trouble if we give Doane up. If we refuse, they say they will take him, anyway.”

“It’s an infernal lie!” cried Ambrose desperately. “I am no leader of theirs!”

She did not believe him. Her eyes lost all their luster and her lovely face looked ashen. She seemed about to fall.

Giddings went to her aid, but she pushed him away. She seemed unconscious of the presence of the ethers. Her accusing eyes were fixed on Ambrose.

“I believed in you,” she murmured in a dead voice. “I believed in you! Oh, God!” Her hands were flung up in a despairing gesture. “Let him go!” she cried to Macfarlane over her shoulder, and ran down the hall and up the stairs.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### A CHANGE OF JAILERS.

There was a significant silence in the passage when Colina had gone.

Finally Macfarlane said stubbornly, "He's my prisoner. It's my duty to hold him against any odds. It's the first rule of the service."

Giddings and Pringle urgently remonstrated with him. Strange held apart as if he considered it none of his business. At last, with a deprecating air, he added his voice to the other men's.

"Look here," he said smoothly; "you know best, of course; but aren't there times when a soldier must make his own rules? All of us men would stand by you gladly, but there's a sick man up-stairs that they have been taught to hate. And a woman."

Macfarlane gave in with a shrug. "I suppose you'll stand by me if I'm hauled up for it," he grumbled.

He drew his revolver and stood aside to let Ambrose pass. The others likewise drew back, as from one marked with the plague. Every face was hard with scorn.

Ambrose kept his eyes straight ahead. When he appeared on the porch, cries, apparently of welcome, were raised by the Kakisas.

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Ambrose supposed that Strange had made a deal with the Kakisas to put him out of the way. He believed that he was going straight to his death.

He accepted it sooner than make an appeal to those who scorned him. He wished to speak to them before he went; but it was to warn them, not to ask for aid for himself.

He faced the little group in the doorway. "I tell you again," he said, "this is all a put-up job. You know nothing of what is going on but what this breed chooses to tell you. He's a liar and a murderer. If you put yourselves in his hands, so much the worse for you."

The white men laughed in Ambrose's face. The breed smiled deprecatingly and forgivingly.

"Hold your tongue, and be thankful you're getting off so easy," Macfarlane said, full of honest contempt.

Ambrose became very pale. He turned his back, on them, and, climbing over the wire barrier, marched stiffly down to the gate. The consciousness of innocence is supposed to be sufficient to armor a man against any slanders, but this is only partially true.

When one's accusers are honest, their scorn hurts, hurts more than any other wound we are capable of receiving. Ambrose was of the type that rages against a hurt. At present, for all he was outwardly so pale and still, he was deafened and blinded by rage.

It was now full daylight. An extraordinary picture faced the watchers from the doorway—the ruined store in the background, the grotesque crew hanging to the fence palings.

Their ordinary rags were covered with layers of misfit clothing out of the store, while many of them wore several hats, and others had extra pairs of shoes hanging around their necks.

There was a great display of gaudy silk handkerchiefs. Pockets bulged with small articles of loot, and nearly every man lugged some particular treasure according to his fancy, whether it was an alarm clock or a glass pitcher or a bolt of red flannel.

The younger men, still susceptible to gallantry, mostly were burdened with crushed articles of feminine finery, gaily trimmed hats, red or blue shawls, fancy satin bodices, corsets with the strings dangling.

The faces, after a night of unbridled license, showed dull and slack in the daylight.

Myengeen, whom Ambrose had marked earlier as a leader of the mob, gripped his hand at the gate and cried out with hypocritical joy. Others crowded around, those who could not obtain his hands, stroking his sleeves and fawning upon him.

There was an ironical note in the demonstration. Ambrose observed that the majority of the Indians looked on indifferently. He smelted treachery in the air.

The mob, facing about, started to move in open order toward the river. Ambrose, as they opened up, caught sight of the two dead bodies. It afflicted him with a dull at the pit of the stomach—these were the first deaths by violence he had witnessed.



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They still lay where they had fallen—the Indian sprawling in the middle of a black stain on the platform; Tole huddled on the bare earth of the quadrangle. Ambrose's heart sank at the thought of returning to Simon Grampierre with the gift of a dead son.

The Indians gave no regard to the bodies—apparently they meant to leave them behind. Ambrose with no uncertain gestures commanded Myengeen to have them taken up and carried to the boat. It was done.

When they got down the bank out of sight of the house Myengeen and the others gave over their hollow pretense of enthusiasm at Ambrose's release.

Thereafter none paid the least attention to him.

He saw that they had not only loaded the boat they came in, but on the principle of in for a penny, in for a pound, had also taken possession of one of the company york boats, and had loaded it to the gunwale.

They immediately embarked and pushed off. Ambrose secured a place below Myengeen's steering platform. In the bottom of the boat, at his feet, lay the wizened Indian in his rags, and the straight, slim body of Tole—side by side like brothers in a bed.

Tole's face was not disfigured; serene, boyish, and comely, it gave Ambrose's heart-strings a fresh wrench. He covered them both with a piece of sail-cloth.

Across the river, as the Indians started to unload, Watusk came down to the beach, followed by several of his councilors. It was impossible to tell from his inscrutable, self-important air what he thought of all this.

His flabby, yellow face changed neither at the sight of all the wealth they brought nor at the two dead men. Ambrose demanded four men of him to carry Tole's body to his father's house.

Watusk kept him waiting while he listened to a communication from Myengeen. Ambrose guessed that it had to do with himself, for both men glanced furtively at him. Watusk finally turned away without having answered the white man.

Ambrose, growing red, imperiously repeated his demand. Watusk, still without looking at him directly, spoke a word to some Indians within call, and Ambrose was immediately seized by a dozen hands.

He was finally bound hand and foot with thongs of hide. This was no more than he expected, still he did not submit without a fierce but ineffectual struggle.

When it was done his captors looked on him with respect—they did not laugh at him nor evince any anger. It was impossible for him to read any clue in their stolid faces what was going forward.

Half a dozen of them carried him up the bank and laid him at the door of a teepee. Presently Watusk passed by. Ambrose so violently demanded an explanation that the Indian was forced to stop. He said, still without meeting Ambrose's eye:

“Myengeen say you kill Tom Moosa. You got to take our law.”

“It's a lie!” cried Ambrose, suffocating with indignation.

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Watusk shrugged and disappeared. It was useless for Ambrose to shout at any of the others. He fumed in silence. The Indians gave his dangerous eyes a wide berth.

Meanwhile the camp was plunged into a babel of confusion by the order to move.

Boys ran here and there catching the horses, the teepees came down on the run, and the squaws frantically to pack their household gear. Infants and dogs infected with a common excitement outvied each other in screaming and barking.

Ambrose saw only the beginning of the preparations. A horse was brought to where he lay, and the six men whom he was beginning to recognize as his particular guard unbound his ankles and lifted him into the saddle.

They never dared lay hands on him except in concert—he took what comfort he could out of that tribute to his prowess. They tied his bound wrists to the saddle-horn, and also tied his ankles under the horse's belly, leaving just play enough for him to use the stirrups.

The six then mounted their own horses, and they set off at a swift lope away from the river—one leading Ambrose's horse.

They extended themselves in single file along a well-beaten trail. This, Ambrose knew, was the way to the Kakisa River—their own country.

A chill struck to his breast. Any intelligible danger may be faced with a good heart, but to be cast among capricious and inscrutable savages, whom he could neither command nor comprehend, was enough to undermine the stoutest courage.

Nevertheless he strove with himself as he rode. "They cannot put it over me unless I knuckle under," he thought. "They're afraid of me. No Indian that ever lived can face out a white man when the white man knows his power."

Several dogs followed them out of camp. There was one that the others all snapped at and drove from among them. Ambrose suddenly recognized Job, and his heart leaped up.

He had left him at Grampierre's the night before. The faithful little beast must have followed him down to the Kakisa camp and have been waiting for him ever since to return.

During the events of the last half-hour Job had no doubt been regarding his master from afar. The other dogs would not let him run at the horses' heels, but he followed indomitably in the rear.

Every time they went over a hill Ambrose saw him trotting patiently far behind in the trail. When they stopped to eat there was a joyful reunion.

Ambrose no longer felt friendless. He divided his rations with his humble follower. The Indians smiled. In this respect they evidently considered the formidable white man a little soft-headed.

## **CHAPTER XXVIII.**

A GLEAM OF HOPE.

In the middle of the third day of hard riding over a flower-starred prairie, and through belts of poplar bush, they came to the Kakisa River.

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By this time Ambrose had become somewhat habituated to his captivity. At any rate, he was more philosophical. He had been treated well enough.

There was a village at the end of the trail. Hearing the astonishing news of what had happened, the people stared at Ambrose with their hard, bright eyes as at a phenomenon.

Ambrose figured that they had left Fort Enterprise a hundred and fifty miles behind. He looked at the river with interest. He had heard that no white man had ever descended it.

He saw a smoothly flowing brown flood some two hundred yards wide winding away between verdant willows. A smaller stream joined it at this point, and the teepees stretched along either bank.

Across the larger stream loomed a bold hill-point with a striking clump of pines upon it, and under the trees the gables of an Indian burying-ground like a village of toy houses.

The flat where the rivers joined was hemmed all around by low hills. On the right, half-way up the rise, a log shack dominated the village—and to it Ambrose's captors led him.

This was evidently intended to be his prison. Window and door were closely boarded up. The Indians tore the boards from the doorway and, casting off Ambrose's bonds, thrust him inside. They closed the door, leaving him in utter darkness. He heard them contriving a bar to keep him in.

Ambrose, after waving his arms about to restore the circulation, set to exploring his quarters by sense of touch. First he collided with a counter running across from side to side.

Behind, in the middle of the room, he found an iron cook-stove; against the right hand wall were tiers of empty shelves; at the back a bedstead filled with moldy hay; on the left side an empty chest, a table, and a chair.

Thus it was a combination of store and dwelling; no doubt it had been built for Gordon Strange's use when he came to trade with the Kakisas.

The window was over the table. Ambrose found it nailed down, besides being boarded up outside. He had no intention of submitting to the deprivation of light and air.

He picked up the chair and swinging it delivered a series of blows that shattered the glass, cracked the frame, and finally drove out the boards. He found himself looking into the impassive faces of his jailers.

They did not even seem surprised, and made no demonstration against him. Ambrose whistled. Job came running and scrambled over the window-sill into his master's arms.

Later one of the Indians came with strips of moose hide which he pinned across outside the window. From each strip dangled a row of bells, such as are fastened to dog-harness. It was cunningly contrived—Ambrose could not touch one of the strips ever so gently without giving an alarm.

Thereafter, as long as it was light, he could see them loafing and sleeping in the grass outside with their guns beside them. After dark their pipe-bowls glowed.

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Three days of inexpressible tedium followed. Had it not been for Job, Ambrose felt he would have gone out of his mind. His window overlooked the teepee village, and his sole distraction from his thoughts lay in watching the Indians at work and play.

His jailers put up a teepee outside the shack. There were never less than three in sight, generally playing poker—and with their guns beside them.

Ambrose knowing the inconsequentiality of the Indian mind guessed that they must have had strong orders to keep them on guard so faithfully. Any thought of escape was out of the question. He could not travel a hundred and fifty miles without a store of food. He sought to keep out a little from every meal that was served him, but he got barely enough for him and Job, too.

On the fourth day the arrival of the main body of Indians from Fort Enterprise created a diversion. They came straggling slowly on foot down the hill to the flat, extreme weariness marked in their heavy gait and their sagging backs.

Only Watusk rode a horse. Every other beast was requisitioned to carry the loot from the store. Some of the men—and all the women bore packs also. This was why they had been so long on the way.

True to their savage nature they had taken more than they could carry. As Ambrose learned later, there were goods scattered wantonly all along the trail.

Ambrose naturally anticipated some change in his own condition as a result of the arrival of Watusk. But nothing happened immediately. The patient squaws set to work to make camp, and by nightfall the village of teepees was increased fourfold.

In the motionless twilight each cone gave a perpendicular thread of smoke to the thin cloud that hung low over the flat.

As the darkness increased the teepees became faintly luminous from the fires within, and the streets gleamed like strings of pale Japanese lanterns. Ambrose, expecting visitors, watched at his window until late.

None came.

In the morning he made the man who brought his breakfast understand by signs that he wished to speak with Watusk. The chief did not, however, vouchsafe him a call.

To-day it transpired that the Indians were only making a temporary halt below. After a few hours' rest they got in motion again, and all afternoon were engaged in ferrying their baggage across the river in dugouts and in swimming their horses over.

On the following morning, with the exception of Watusk's lodge and half a dozen others, all the teepees were struck, and the whole body of the people crossed the river and disappeared behind the hill. All on that side was no man's land, still written down "unexplored" on the maps.

Thereafter day succeeded day without any break in the monotony of Ambrose's imprisonment. He occasionally made out the portly figure of Watusk in his frock coat, but received no word from him.



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It was now the 20th of September, and the poplar boughs were bare. Every morning now the grass was covered with rime, and to-day a flurry of snow fell. Winter would increase the difficulties of escape tenfold.

Ambrose speculated endlessly on what might be happening at Fort Enterprise. He thought, too, of Peter Minot who was relying on him to steer the hazarded fortunes of the firm into port—and groaned at his impotence.

As with all solitary prisoners, throughout the long hours Ambrose's mind preyed upon itself. True, he had Job, who was friend and consoler in his dumb way, but Job was only a dog.

To joke or to swear at his jailers was like trying to make a noise in a vacuum. Not to be able to make himself felt became a positive torture to Ambrose.

On the night of this day, lying in bed, he found himself wide awake without being able to say what had awakened him. He lay listening, and presently heard the sound again—the fall of a little object on the floor.

The chinks of the log walls were stopped with mud which had dried and loosened; nothing strange that bits of it should fall—still his heart beat fast.

He heard a cautious scratching and another piece dropped and broke on the floor. Now he knew a living agency was at work. Job growled. Ambrose clutched his muzzle.

Suddenly a whisper stole through the dark—in his amazement Ambrose could not have told from what quarter. “Angleysman! Angleysman!”

Awe of the supernatural shook Ambrose's breast. He had come straight from deep slumber. A fine perspiration broke out upon him. It was a woman's whisper, with a tender lift and fall in the sound.

Job struggled to release his head. Ambrose sternly bade him be quiet. The dog desisted, but crouched trembling.

The whisper was repeated; “Angleysman!”

A man must answer his summons. “What do you want?” asked Ambrose softly.

“Come here.”

“Where are you?”

“Here—at the corner. Come to the foot of your bed.”

Ambrose obeyed. Reaching the spot he said: "Speak again."

"Here," the voice whispered. "I mak' a hole in the mud. Put your ear down and I spik sof'."

Ambrose identified the spot whence the sound issued. He put his lips to it. "Who are you?" he whispered.

"Nesis," came the softly breathed answer. "I your friend."

Friend was always a word to warm Ambrose's breast, and surely at this moment of all his life he needed a friend. "Thank you," he said from a full heart.

"I see you at the tea-dance," the voice went on.

Ambrose had an intuition. "Were you the girl—"

"Yes," she said. "I sit be'ind you. I think you pretty man. When we run out I squeeze your hand."

Ambrose grinned into the darkness. "I thought you were pretty, too," he returned.

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"Oh, I wish I in there," she whispered.

He was a little nonplused by her naive warmth.

"The men say you strong as one bear," she went on. "They say you got gold in your teeth. Is that true?"

"Yes," said Ambrose laughing.

"I lak' to see that."

In spite of the best intent on both sides conversation languished. It is difficult to make acquaintance through a wall of logs. Finally Ambrose asked how it was she could speak English, and that unlocked her simple story.

"My fat'er teach me," she said. "He is half a white man. He come here long tam ago and marry Kakisa. He spik ver' good Angleys. When Watusk is make head man he mad at my fat'er because my fat'er spik Angleys.

"Watusk not want nobody spik Angleys but him around. Watusk fix it to mak' them kill my fat'er. It is the truth. Watusk not know I spik Angleys, too. My fat'er teach me quiet. If Watusk know that he cut out my tongue, I think. I lak spik Angleys—me. I spik by myself so not forget. I come spik Angleys with you."

"Your father is dead?" said Ambrose. "Who do you live with?"

"Watusk," came the surprising answer. "I Watusk's youngest wife. Got four wives."

"Good Lord!" murmured Ambrose.

"When my fat'er is kill, Watusk tak' me," she went on. "I hate him!"

"What a shame!" cried Ambrose, remembering the wistful face.

"I wish I in there!" she whispered again.

"Will you help me to get out?" Ambrose asked eagerly. "I can make it if you can slip me some food."

"I not want you go 'way," she said slowly.

"I can't live locked up like this!" he cried.

"Yes, I help you," she whispered.

"Could you get me a horse, too?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. "But many men is watch the trail for police. Tak' a canoe and go down the river."

"Where does this river go?"

"They say to the Big Buffalo lake."

"Good! I can get back to Moultrie from there. Can you bring me a strong knife?"

"I bring him to-morrow night, Angleysman."

"I will cut a hole in the floor and dig out under the wall."

Nesis was not anxious to talk over the details of his escape. "Have you got a wife?" she asked. "Why not?" There was no end to her questions.

Finally she said with a sigh: "I got go now. I put my hand inside. You can touch it."

Ambrose felt for the little fingers that crept through the slit, and gratefully pressed his lips to them.

"Ah!" she breathed wonderingly. "Was that your mouth? It mak' me jomp! Put your hand outside, Angleysman."

He did so, and felt his fingers brushed as with rose-petals.

"Goo'-by!" she breathed.

"Nesis," he asked, "do you know why Watusk is keeping me locked up here? What does he think he's going to do with me?"

## Page 107

"Sure I know," she said. "Ev'rybody know. If the police catch him he say he not mak' all this trouble. He say you mak' him do it all. Gordon Strange tell him say that."

A great light broke on Ambrose. "Of course!" he said.

"Goo'-by, Angleysman!" breathed Nesis. "I come to-morrow night."

## CHAPTER XXIX.

NESIS.

After this, Ambrose's dreary imprisonment took on a new color. True, the hours next day threatened to drag more slowly than ever, but with the hope that it might be the last day he could bear it philosophically.

Hour after hour he paced his floor on springs. "Tomorrow the free sky over my head!" he told himself. "I'll be doing something again!"

He watched the teepees with an added interest, wondering if any of the women's figures he saw might be hers. The most he could distinguish at the distance was the difference between fat and slender.

In the middle of the morning he saw Watusk ride forth, accompanied by four men that he guessed were the councilors. Watusk now had a military aspect.

On his head he wore a pith helmet, and across the frock coat a broad red sash like a field marshal's. He and his henchmen climbed the trail leading back to Enterprise.

Later, Ambrose saw a party of women leave camp, carrying birch-bark receptacles that looked like school-book satchels. They commenced to pick berries on the hillside. Ambrose wondered if his little friend were among them.

They gradually circled the hill and approached his shack. As they drew near he finally recognized Nesis in one who occasionally straightened her back and glanced toward his window. She was slenderer than the others.

The shack stood on a little terrace of clean grass. Above it and below stretched the rough hillside, covered with scrubby bushes and weeds. It was in this rough ground that the women were gathering wild cranberries.

Coming to the edge of the grass, they paused with full satchels, talking idly, nibbling the fruit and casting inquisitive glances toward Ambrose's prison.

There were eight of them, and Nesis stood out from the lot like a star. The four men playing poker in the grass at one side paid no attention to them.

Nesis with a sly smile whispered in her neighbor's ear. The other girl grinned and nodded, the word was passed around, and they all came forward a little way in the grass with a timid air.

Their inquisitive eyes sought to pierce the obscurity of the shack. Ambrose, not yet knowing what was expected of him, kept in the background.

The fat girl, prompted and nudged by Nesis, suddenly squalled something in Kakisa, which convulsed them all. Ambrose had no difficulty in recognizing it as a derisive, flirtatious challenge.

Not to be outdone, he came to the window and answered in kind. They could not contain their laughter at the sound of the comical English syllables.

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Badinage flew fast after that. Ambrose observed that Nesis herself never addressed him, but circulated slyly from one to another, making a cup of her hand at each ear.

Becoming emboldened, they gradually drew closer to the window. They made outrageous faces. Still the poker-players affected not to be aware of them. As men and hunters they disdained to notice such foolishness.

Suddenly Nesis, as if to prove her superior boldness, darted forward to the very window. Ambrose, startled by the unexpected move, fell back a step. Nesis put her hands on the sill and shrieked an unintelligible jibe into the room.

The other girls hugged themselves with horrified delight. This was too much for the jailers. They sprang up and with threatening voice and gestures drove the girls away. They scampered down-hill, shrieking with affected terror.

When Nesis placed her hands on the sill a thin package slipped out of her sleeve and thudded upon the floor. Ambrose's heart jumped.

As the girls ran away, under cover of leaning out and calling after them, he pushed her gift under the table with his foot. One of the jailers, coming to the window and glancing about the room, found him unconcernedly lighting his pipe.

When the poker game was resumed Ambrose retired with his prize to the farthest corner of the shack. It proved to be the knife he had asked for, a keen, strong blade.

She had wrapped it in a piece of moose hide to keep it from clattering on the floor. Ambrose's heart warmed toward her anew. "She's as plucky and clever as she is friendly," he thought. He stuffed the knife in his bed and resigned himself as best he could to wait for darkness.

Fortunately for his store of patience, the days were rapidly growing shorter. His supper was brought him at six, and when he had finished eating it was dark enough to begin work.

Outside the moon's first quarter was filling the bowl of the hills with a delicate radiance, but moonlight outside only made the interior of the shack darker to one looking in.

Ambrose squatted in the corner at the foot of his bed, and set to work as quietly as a mouse in the pantry.

He had finished his hole in the flooring and was commencing to dig in the earth, when a soft scratching on the wall gave notice of Nesis's presence outside.

"Angleysman, you there?" she whispered through the chink.

"Here!" said Ambrose.

"The boat is ready," she said. "I got grub and blanket and gun."

"Ah, fine!" whispered Ambrose.

"You almost out?" she asked.

He explained his situation.

"I dig this side, too," she said. "We dig together. Mak' no noise!"

Since the shack was innocent of foundation it was no great matter to dig under the wall. With knife and hands Ambrose worked on his side until he had got deep enough to dig under.



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Occasional little sounds assured him that Nesis was not idle. Suddenly the thin barrier of earth between them caved in, and they clasped hands in the hole.

Five minutes more of scooping out and the way was clear. Ambrose extended his long body on the floor and wriggled himself slowly under the log.

Outside an urgent hand on his shoulder restrained him. Throwing herself on the ground, she put her lips to his ear. "Go back!" she whispered. "The moon is moch bright. You must wait little while."

Ambrose, mad to taste the free air of heaven, resisted a little sullenly.

"Please go back!" she whispered imploringly. "I come in. I got talk with you."

He drew himself back into the shack with none too good a grace. Standing over the hole when she appeared, he put his hands under her arms and, drawing her through, stood her upon her feet.

He could have tossed the little thing in the air with scarcely an effort. She turned about and came close to him.

"I so glad to be by you!" she breathed.

She emanated a delicate natural fragrance like pine-trees or wild roses—but Ambrose could only think of freedom.

"You managed to get here without being seen," he grumbled.

"You foolish!" she whispered tenderly. "I little. I can hide behind leaves sof' as a link. Your white face him show by the moon lak a little moon. Are you sorry you got stay with me little while?"

"No!" he said. "But—I'm sick to be out of this!"

She put her hands on his shoulders and drew him down. "Sit on the floor," she whispered. "Your ear too moch high for my mouth."

They sat, leaning against the footboard of the bed, Like a confiding child she snuggled her shoulder under his arm and drew the arm around her. What was he to do hut hold her close?

"It is true, you ver' moch strong," she murmured. "Lak a bear. But a bear is ogly."

"You didn't think I was pretty to-day, did you," he said with a grin, "with a week's growth on my chin?"

She softly stroked his cheek. "Wah!" she said, laughing. "Lak porcupine! Red man not have strong beard lak that. They say you scrape it off with a knife every day."

"When I have the knife," said Ambrose.

"Why you do that?" she asked. "I lak see it grow down long lak my hair. That would be wonderful!"

Ambrose trembled with internal laughter.

"I lak everything of you," she murmured.

He was much troubled between his gratitude and his inability to reciprocate the naive passion she had conceived for him. It is pleasant to be loved and flattered and exalted, but it entails obligations.

"I never can thank you properly for what you've done," he said clumsily.

"I do anything for you," she said quickly. "So soon my eyes see you to the dance I know that. Always before that I am think about white men. I not see no white men before, only the little parson, and the old men at the fort. They not lak you? My father is the same as me. He lak white men. We talk moch about white men. My fat'er say to me never forget the Angleys talk. Do I spik Angleys good, Angleysman?"

## Page 110

"Fine!" whispered Ambrose.

She pulled his head forward so that she could breathe her soft speech directly in his ear.

"My father and me not the same lak other people here. We got white blood. Men not talk with their girls moch. My fat'er talk man talk with me. Because he is got no boys, only me. So I know many things.

"I think, women's talk foolish. Many tam my fat'er say to me, Angleys talk mak' men strong. He say to me, some day Watusk kill me for cause I spik the Angleys.

"So in the tam of falling leaves lak this, three years ago, my fat'er he is go down the river to the big falls to meet the people from Big Buffalo Lake.

"My fat'er and ten men go. Bam-by them come back. My fat'er not in any dugout. Them say my fat'er is hunt with Ahcunza one day. My fat'er is fall in the river and go down the big falls.

"They say that. But I know the truth. Ahcunza is a friend of Watusk. Watusk give him his vest with goldwork after. My fat'er is dead. I am lak wood then. My mot'er sell me to Watusk. I not care for not'ing."

"Your mother, sell you!" murmured Ambrose.

"My mot'er not lak me ver' moch," said Nesis simply. "She mad for cause I got white blood. She mad for cause my fat'er all tam talk with me."

"Three years ago!" said Ambrose. "You must have been a little girl then!"

"I fourteen year old then. My mot'er got 'not'er osban' now. Common man. They gone with Buffalo Lake people. I not care. All tam I think of my fat'er. He is one fine man.

"Las' summer the priest come here. Mak' good talk, him. Say if we good, bam-by we see the dead again. What you think, is that true talk, Angleysman?"

Ambrose's arm tightened around the wistful child. "Honest truth!" he whispered.

She opened her simple heart fully to him. Her soft speech tumbled out as if it had been dammed all these years, and only now released by a touch of kindness.

Ambrose was touched as deeply as a young man may be by a woman he does not love, yet he could not help glancing over her head at the square of sky obliquely revealed through the window. It gradually darkened.

“The moon has gone down,” he said at last.

Nesis clung to him. “Ah, you so glad to leave me!” she whimpered.

He gently released himself. “Think of me a little,” he said. “I must get a long start before daylight.”

She buried her face on her knees. Her shoulders shook.

“Nesis!” he whispered appealingly.

She lifted her head and flung a hand across her eyes. “No good cry,” she murmured. “Come on!”

Nesis led the way out through the hole they had dug. Job followed Ambrose. Outside, for greater safety, he took the dog in his arms.

The moon had sunk behind the hill across the river, but it was still dangerously bright. Nesis took hold of Ambrose’s sleeve and pointed off to the right. She whispered in his ear:

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"Ev'ry tam feel what is under your foot before step hard."

She did not make directly for the river, but led him step by step up the hill toward a growth of timber that promised safety. The first hundred yards was the most difficult.

They rose above the shack into the line of vision of the guards in front, had they elevated their eyes. Nesis, crouching, moved like a cat after a bird.

Ambrose followed, scarcely daring to breathe. Even the dog understood and lay as if dead in Ambrose's arms.

The danger decreased with every step. When they gained the trees they could fairly count themselves safe. Even if an alarm were raised now it would take time to find them in the dark.

Nesis, still leading Ambrose, pattered ahead as if every twig in the bush was familiar to her. She did not strike down to the river until they had gone a good way around the side of the hill.

This brought them to the water's edge at a point a third of a mile or more below the teepees. Ambrose distinguished a bark canoe drawn up beneath the willows. In it lay the outfit she had provided.

He put it in the water, and Job hopped into his accustomed place in the bow.

"You love that dog ver' moch," Nesis murmured jealously.

"He's all I've got," said Ambrose.

Her hand swiftly sought his.

"Tell me how I should go," said Ambrose hastily, fearing a demonstration.

Nesis drew a long sigh. "I tell you," she said sadly. "They say it is four sleeps to the big falls. Two sleeps by quiet water. Many bad rapids after that. You mus' land by every rapid to look. They say the falls mak' no noise before they catch you. Ah! tak' care!"

"I know rivers," said Ambrose.

"They say under the water is a cave with white bones pile up!" she faltered. "They say my fat'er is there. I 'fraid for you to go!"

"I'll be careful," he said lightly. "Don't you worry!"

“At the falls,” she went on sadly, “you mus’ land on the side away from the sun, and carry your canoe on your back. There is pretty good trail. Three miles. After that one more sleep to the big lake. A Company fort is there.”

Like an honest man he dreaded the mere formulas of thanks at such a moment, but neither could an honest man forego them. “How can I ever repay you!” he mumbled.

She clapped a warm hand over his mouth.

As he was about to step in the canoe Ambrose saw a bundle lying on the ground to one side that he had not remarked before. “What is that?” he asked.

“Nothing for you,” she said quickly.

The evasive note made him insist upon knowing.

For a long time she would not tell, thus increasing his determination to find out. Finally she said very low: “I jus’ foolish. I think maybe—maybe you want tak’ me too!”

Ambrose’s heart was wrung. His arm went around her with a right good will. “You poor baby!” he murmured. “I can’t!”



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She struggled to release herself. "All right," she said stiffly. "I not think you tak' me. Only maybe."

"By God!" swore Ambrose. "If I live through my troubles I'll find a way of getting you out of yours!"

"Ah, come back!" she murmured, clinging to his arm.

"Good-by," he said.

"Wait!" she said, clinging to him. She lifted her face. "Kiss me once, lak' white people kiss!"

He kissed her fairly.

"Goo'-by," she whispered. "I always be think of you. Goo'-by, Angleysman!"

## CHAPTER XXX.

FREE!

Ambrose put off with a heart big with compassion for the piteous little figure he was leaving behind him. His impotence to aid her poisoned the joy of his escape.

The worst of it was that it was impossible for him to return the feeling she had for him—even though Colina were lost to him forever. Her unlucky passion almost forbade him to be the one to aid her.

Yet he had profited by that passion to make his escape. He must find some way.

As he drove his paddle into the breast of the dark river, and put one point of willows after another between him and danger, it must be confessed that his spirits rose steadily.

Never had his nostrils tasted anything sweeter than the smell of warm river water on the chill air, nor his eyes beheld a friendlier sight than the cheery stars. The one who fares forth does not repine.

After all he had only known Nesis for two days; she was fine and plucky—but he could not love her, and that was all there was to it. He had matters nearer his heart than the sad fate of an Indian maiden.

Master of his actions once more it was time for him to consider what to do to get out of the coil he was in. Nesis passed into the back of his mind.

No desire for sleep hampered him. He had had enough of sleeping the past two weeks. His arms had ached for this exercise. There was a fair current, and the willows moved by at a respectable rate.

He estimated that he could put forty miles between him and the Kakisa village by morning. The pleasant taste of freedom was heightened by the spice of heading into the unknown, and by night.

Night returns a rare sympathy to those who cultivate her. Ambrose, so far as he knew, was the first white man ever to travel this way. This river had no voice. The night was so still one could almost fancy one heard the stars.

Sometimes the looming shapes of islands confused him as to his course, but if he held his paddle the canoe would of itself choose the main current.

He had no apprehension as to what each bend in the stream would reveal, for with the experienced riverman's intuition he looked for a change in the character of the shores to warn him of any interruption of the current's smooth flow.



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"Like old times, old fel'!" he said to his dumb partner.

Job's tail thumped on the gunwale. Ambrose contended that at night Job purposely turned stern foremost to the most convenient hard object that his signals might be audible.

"To-night is ours anyway, old fel'," said Ambrose. "Let's enjoy it while we can. The worst is yet to come!"

It was many a day since Job had heard this jocular note in his master's voice. He wriggled a little and whined in his eagerness to reach him. Job knew better than to attempt to move much in the bark canoe.

In due course the miracle of dawn was enacted on the river. The world stole out of the dark like a woman wan with watching. First the line of tree-tops on either bank became blackly silhouetted against the graying sky, then little by little the masses of trees and bushes resolved into individuals.

Perspective came into being, afterward atmosphere, and finally color. The scene was as cool and delicate as that presented to a diver on the floor of the sea. As the light increased it was as if he mounted into shallower water toward the sun.

The first distinctive note of color was the astonishing green of the goosegrass springing in the mud left by the falling water; then the current itself became a rich, brown with creamy flakes of foam sailing down like little vessels. While Ambrose looked, the world blossomed from a pale nun into a ruddy matron.

With the rising of the sun the need of sleep began to afflict him. He had thought he never would need sleep again. His paddle became leaden in his hands, and Olympian yawns prostrated him.

He did not wish to take the time to sleep as yet, but he resolved to stimulate his flagging energies with bread and hot tea.

Landing on a point of stones, he built a fire, and hung his little copper pot over it. The sight of everything he had been provided with brought the thought of Nesis sharply home again, and sobered him.

Here was everything a traveler might require, even including two extra pairs of moccasins, worked, he was sure, by herself. "How can I ever repay her?" he thought uncomfortably.

Job was gyrating madly up and down the beach to express his joy at their deliverance. Ambrose was aroused from a drowsy contemplation of the fire by an urgent bark from the dog.

Looking up, he was frozen with astonishment to behold another bark canoe sweeping around the bend above. When motion returned to him, his hand instinctively shot out toward the gun. But there was only one figure. It was a woman—it was Nesis!

Ambrose dropped the gun and, jumping up, swore helplessly under his breath. He stared at the oncoming boat, fascinated with perplexity.

During the few seconds between his first sight of it and its grounding at his feet, the complications bound to follow on her coming presented themselves with a horrible clearness. His face turned grim.

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Nesis, landing, could not face his look. She flung up an arm over her eyes. "Ah, don't look so mad to me!" she faltered.

"God help us!" muttered Ambrose. "What will we do now?"

She sank down in a heap at his feet. "Don't, don't hate me or I die!" she wailed.

It was impossible for him to remain angry with the forlorn little creature. He laid a hand on her shoulder.

"Get up," he said with a sigh. "I'm not blaming you. The question is—what are we going to do?"

She lifted her head. "I go with you," she whispered breathlessly. "I help you in the rapids. I bake bread for you. I watch at night."

He shook his head. "You've got to go back," he said sternly.

"No! No!" she cried, wringing her hands. "I can't go back no more! Las' night when you go I fall down. I think I goin' die. I sorry I not die. I want jump in river; but the priest say that is a bad thing.

"I can't go back to Watusk's teepee no more. If he touch me I got kill him! That is bad, too! I don't know what to do! I want be good so I see my fat'er bam-by!"

Ambrose groaned.

She thought he was relenting, and came and wound her arms about him. "Tak' me wit' you," she pleaded like a little child. "I be good, Angleysman!"

Ambrose firmly detached the imploring arms. "You mustn't do that," he said as to a child. "We've got to think hard what to do."

"Ah, you hate me!" she wailed.

"That's nonsense!" he said sharply. "I am your friend. I will never forget what you did for me!"

He took an abrupt turn up and down the stones, trying to think what to do. "Look here," he said finally. "I've got to hurt you. I should have told you before, but I couldn't bring myself to hurt you. I can't love you the way you want. I'm in love with another woman."

She flung away from him, shoulder up as if he had raised a whip. Her face turned ugly.

"You love white woman!" she hissed with extraordinary passion. "Colina Gaviller! I know! I hate her! She proud and wicked woman. She hate my people!" Nesis's eyes flamed up with a kind of bitter triumph. Her voice rose shrilly.

"She hate you, too! Always she is bad to you. I know that, too. What you want wit' Colina Gaviller? Are you a dog to lie down when she beat you?"

Ambrose's eyes gleamed ominously. "Stop it!" he cried. "You don't know what you're talking about." His look intimidated her. The fury of jealousy subsided to a sullen muttering. "I hate her! She bad to the people. She want starve the people. She think her yellow horse better than an Indian!"

Ambrose, seeing her lip begin to tremble and her eyes fill, relented. "Stop it," he said mildly. "No use for us to quarrel."

She suddenly broke into a storm of weeping and cast herself down, hiding her face in her arms. Ambrose could think of nothing better to do than let her weep herself out. He sat down on a boulder.

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She came creeping to him at last, utterly humbled. "Angleysman, tak' me wit' you," she murmured, clasping her hands before him. Her breath was still caught with sobs. "I not expec' you marry me. I not bot'er you wit' much talk lak' a wife. I jus' be your little servant. You not want me, you say: Go 'way. I jus' wait till you want me again."

Ambrose turned his head away. He had never imagined a man having to go through with anything like this.

"Always, always I work for you," she whispered. "Let Colina Gaviller marry you. She not mind me. I guess she not mind that little dog you love. I jus' poor, common red girl. She think not'ing of me!"

Ambrose laughed a bitter note at the picture she called up. "That would hardly work," he said.

"But tak' me wit' you," she implored. She finally ventured to lay her cheek on his knee.

He laid a hand on her hair. "Listen, you baby," he said, "and try to understand me. You know that they are going to try to put off all this trouble on me. They will say I made the Indians do bad. They will say I tried to kill John Gaviller. The police will arrest me, and there will be a trial. You know what that is."

"Everybody see you not a bad man," she said.

"It's not as simple as that," he said with a wry smile. "I have nobody to speak for me but myself. Now, if you go away with me everybody will say: 'Ambrose Doane stole Watusk's wife away from him. Ambrose Doane is a bad man.' And then they will not believe me when I say I did not lead the Indians into wrong; I did not try to kill John Gaviller."

"I speak for you," cried Nesis. "I tell Gordon Strange and Watusk fix all trouble together."

"If you go with me, they will not believe you either," said Ambrose patiently. "They will say: 'Nesis is crazy about Ambrose Doane. He makes her say whatever he wants.'"

"It is the truth I am crazy 'bout you," said Nesis.

Ambrose sighed. "Listen to me. I tell you straight, if you go with me it will ruin me. I am as good as a jailbird already."

She gave her head an impatient shake. "I not understand," she said sadly. "You say it. I guess it is truth."

There was a silence. Nesis's childlike brows were bent into a frown. She glanced into his face to see if there was any reprieve from the hard sentence. Finally she said very low:

"Angleysman, you got go to jail if you tak' me?"

"Sure as fate!" he said sadly.

She got up very slowly. "I guess I ver' foolish," she murmured. She waited, obviously to give him a chance to speak. He was mum.

"I go back now," she whispered heart-brokenly, and turned toward her canoe.

With her hand on the prow she waited again, not looking at him, hoping against hope. There was something crushed and palpitating in her aspect like a wounded bird. Ambrose felt like a monster of cruelty.

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Suddenly a fresh fear attacked him. "Nesis," he asked, "how will you explain being away overnight? They will connect it with my escape. What will they do to you?"

She turned her head, showing him a painful little smile. "You not think of that before," she murmured. "I not care what they do by me. You not love me."

He strode to her and clapped a rough hand on her shoulder. "Here, I couldn't have them hurt you!" he cried harshly. "You baby! You come with me. I'm in as bad as I can be already. A little more or less won't make any difference. I'll chance it, anyway. You come with me!"

"Oh, my Angleysman!" she breathed, and sank a little limp heap at his feet.

Ambrose blew up the forgotten fire and made tea. Nesis quickly revived. Having made up his mind to take her, he put the best possible face on it.

There were to be no more reproaches. Her pitiful anxiety not to anger him again made him wince. Her eyes never left his face. If he so much as frowned at an uncomfortable thought they became tragic.

"Look here, I'm not a brute!" he cried, exasperated.

Nesis looked foolish, and quickly turned her head away.

Over their tea and bannock they became almost cheerful. Motion had made them both hungry.

Ambrose glanced at their slender store. "We'll never hang out to the lake at this rate," he said laughing.

"I set rabbit snare when we sleep," Nesis said quickly. "I catch fish. I shoot wild duck."

"Shall we leave one of the canoes?" asked Ambrose.

She shook her head vigorously. "Each tak' one. Maybe one bus' in rapids. You sleep in your canoe now. I pull you."

Ambrose shook his head. "No sleep until to-night," he said.

Ambrose was lighting his pipe and Nesis was gathering up the things when suddenly Job sprang up, barking furiously. At the same moment half a score of dark faces rose above the bank behind them, and gun-barrels stuck up.

Among the ten was a distorted, snarling, yellow face. Ambrose snatched up his own gun. Nesis uttered a gasping cry; such a sound of terror Ambrose had never heard.

“Shoot me!” she gasped, crawling toward him. “You shoot me! Angleysman, quick! Shoot me!”

Her heartrending cries had so confused him, he was seized before he could raise his gun.

## **CHAPTER XXXI.**

### **THE ALARM.**

Ambrose was pacing his log prison once more. The earth had been filled in, the hole in the floor roughly repaired, and now his jailers took turns in patrolling around the shack.

Imprisonment was doubly hard now. Day and night Nesis’s strange cries of terror rang in his ears. He knew something about the Indians’ ideas of punishing women. His imagination never ceased to suggest terrible things that might have befallen her.



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“God! Every one that comes near me suffers!” he cried in his first despair.

The explanation of their surprise proved simple. Watusk and his crew, pursuing them in two dugouts, had seen the smoke of their fire from up the river.

They had landed above the point and, making a short detour inland, had fallen on Ambrose and Nesis from behind. Nesis had been carried back in one dugout, Ambrose in the other.

During the trip no ill-usage had been offered her, as far as he could see, but upon reaching the village she had been spirited away, and he had not seen her since.

His last glimpse had shown him her child’s face almost dehumanized with terror.

Ambrose now for the first time received a visit from Watusk. Watusk had also traveled in the other dugout ascending the river, and they had exchanged no words.

He came to the shack attended by his four little familiars, and the door was closed behind them. These four were like supers in a theater. They had no lines to speak. Watusk’s aspect was intended to be imposing.

In addition to the red sash he now wore three belts, the first full of cartridges, the second supporting an old cavalry saber, the third carrying two gigantic .45 Colts in holsters.

He carried the Winchester over his arm, and still wore the grimy pith helmet. Ambrose smiled with bitter amusement. It seemed like the very sport of fate that he should be placed in the power of such a poor creature as this.

“How!” said Watusk, offering his hand with an affable smile.

Ambrose, remembering the look of his face when it rose over the bank, was sharply taken aback. He lacked a clue to the course of reasoning pursued by Watusk’s mongrel mind. However, he quickly reflected that it was only by exercising his wits that he could hope to help Nesis. He took the detestable hand and returned an offhand greeting.

“You mak’ beeg mistak’ you try run away,” said Watusk. “You mos’ safe here.”

“How is that?” asked Ambrose warily.

“I your friend,” said Watusk.

Ambrose suppressed the inclination to laugh.

"I keep you here so people won't hurt you," Watusk went on. "My people lak children. Pretty soon forget what they after. Pretty soon forget they mad at you. Then I let you out."

"Do you still mean to say that I killed one of your men?" demanded Ambrose hotly.

Watusk shrugged. "Myengeen say so."

"It's a lie!" cried Ambrose scornfully. An expectant look in Watusk's eye arrested him from saying more. "He's trying to find out how much Nesis told me," he thought. Aloud he said, with a shrug like Watusk himself: "Well, I'll be glad when it blows over."

"Two three day I let you out," Watusk said soothingly. "You can have anything you want."

"How is Nesis?" demanded Ambrose abruptly.

There was a subtle change in Watusk's eyes; no muscle of his face altered.

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"She all right," he said coolly.

"Where is she?"

"I send her to my big camp 'cross the river."

"You shouldn't blame Nesis for helping me out," Ambrose said earnestly—not that he expected to make any impression. "She's only a child. I made her do it."

Watusk spread out his palms blandly. "I not blame her," he said. "I not care not'ing only maybe you get drown in the rapids."

Ambrose studied the brown mask narrowly. Watusk gave nothing away. Suddenly the Indian smiled.

"You t'ink I mad for cause she go wit' you?" he said. He laughed silently. "Wa! There are plenty women. When I let you out I give you Nesis."

This sounded a little too philanthropic.

"H-m!" said Ambrose.

"You lak little Nesis, hey?" inquired Watusk, leering.

Ambrose was warned by a crafty shadow in the other man's eye.

"Sure!" he said lightly. "Didn't she help me out of here?"

"You lak talk wit' her, I t'ink."

Ambrose thought fast. The only English words Nesis had spoken in Watusk's hearing were her cries of fright at his appearance. In the confusion of that moment it was possible Watusk had not remarked them.

"Talk to her?" said Ambrose, simulating surprise. "Only by signs."

"How she get you out, then?" Watusk quickly asked.

This was a poser. To hesitate was to confess all. Ambrose drew a quick breath and plunged ahead.

"Why, she and a lot of girls were picking berries that day. They came around the shack here and began to jolly me through the window. I fixed Nesis with my eye and scared her. I made a sign for her to bring me a knife. She brought it at night. I put my magic on her and made her help me dig out and get me an outfit. I was afraid she'd raise an alarm as soon as I left, so I made her come, too."

“Why you tak’ two canoe?” asked Watusk.

“In case we should break one in the rapids.”

“So!” said Watusk.

Ambrose lighted his pipe with great carelessness. He was unable to tell from Watusk’s face if his story had made any impression. Thinking of the conjure-man, he hoped the suggestion of magic might have an effect.

“I let you out now,” said Watusk suddenly. “You got promise me you not go way from here before I tell you go. Give me your hand and swear.”

Ambrose smelled treachery. He shook his head. “I’ll escape if I can!”

Watusk shrugged his shoulder and turned away.

“You foolish,” he said. “I your friend. Good-by.”

“Good-by,” returned Ambrose ironically.

Ambrose walked his floor, studying Watusk’s words from every angle. The result of his cogitations was nil. Watusk’s mind was at the same time too devious and too inconsequential for a mind like Ambrose’s to track it. Ambrose decided that he was like one of the childish, unreasonable liars one meets in the mentally defective of our own race. Such a one is clever to no purpose: he will blandly attempt to lie away the presence of truth.

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In the middle of the afternoon Ambrose, making his endless tramp back and forth across the little shack, paused to take an observation from the window, and saw three horsemen come tearing down the trail into camp.

They flung themselves off their horses with excited gestures, and the camp was instantly thrown into confusion. The natives darted among the teepees like ants when their hill is broken into.

Watusk appeared, buckling on his belts. The women that were left in camp started to scuttle toward the river, dragging their children after them.

Ambrose's heart bounded at the prospect of a diversion. Whatever happened, his lot could be no worse. At the first alarm three of his jailers had run down to the teepees. They came back in a hurry.

The door of the shack was thrown open, and the whole six rushed in and seized him. Ambrose, seeking to delay them, struggled hard. They finally got his hands and feet tied, cursing him heartily in their own tongue. They hustled him down to the riverside.

All the people left on this side were already gathered there. They continually looked over their shoulders with faces ashen with terror. The men who had horses drove them into the river and swam across with a hand upon the saddle.

The women and children were ferried in the dugout. So great was their haste they came empty-handed. The teepees were left as they stood with fires burning and flaps up.

Watusk passed near Ambrose, his yellow face livid with agitation.

"What's the matter?" cried the white man.

The chief was afflicted with a sudden deafness. Ambrose was cast in a dugout. The indefatigable Job hopped in after and made himself small at his master's feet.

The mad excitement of the whole crowd inspired Ambrose with a strong desire to laugh. The water flew in cascades from the frantic paddles of the boat-men.

Arriving on the other side, Ambrose was secured on a horse, as on his first journey, and instantly despatched inland with his usual guard. As he was carried away they were dragging up the dugouts and concealing them under the willows. Watusk was sending men to watch from the cemetery on top of the bold hill.

Ambrose's guards led his horse at a smart lope around a spur of the hill and along beside a wasted stream almost lost in its stony bed. A dense forest bordered either bank. The trail was broken and spread by the recent passage of a large number of

travelers; these would be the main body of the Kakisas a week before. Ambrose guessed that they were following the bed of a coulee.

Through the tree-tops on either hand he had occasional glimpses of steep, high banks.

After a dozen miles or so of this they suddenly debouched into a verdant little valley without a tree. The stream meandered through it with endless twists.

Except for two narrow breaks where it entered and issued forth, the hills pressed all around, steep, grassy hills, fantastically knobbed and hollowed.

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The floor of the valley was about a third of a mile long and half as wide. It was flat and covered with a growth of blue-joint grass as high as a man's knee.

The whole place was like a large clean, green bowl flecked here and there with patches of bright crimson where the wild rose scrub grew in the hollows.

Ambrose, casting his eyes over the green panorama, was astonished to see at intervals around the sky-line little groups of men busily at work. They appeared to be digging; he could not be sure. One does not readily associate Indians with spades. His guards pointed out the workers to one another, jabbering excitedly in the uncouth Kakisa.

They rode on through the upper entrance of the valley and plunged into forest again. Another mile, and they came abruptly on the Indian village hidden in a glade just big enough to contain it.

It had grown; there were many more teepees in sight than Ambrose had counted before. They faced each other in two long double rows with a narrow green between. Down the middle of the green ran the stream, here no bigger than a man might step across.

Ambrose was unceremoniously thrust into one of the first teepees and, bound hand and foot, left to his own devices. He managed to drag himself to the door, where he could at least see something of what was going on. He looked eagerly for a sight of Nesis, or, failing her, one of the girls who had accompanied her on the berry-picking expedition, and who might be induced to give him some honest information about her. He was not rewarded.

All who entered the village from the east passed by him. Watusk and the rest of the people from the river arrived in an hour.

Here among safe numbers of their own people they recovered from their alarm. Ambrose suspected their present confidence to be as little founded on reason as their previous terror. Watusk, strutting like a turkey-cock in his military finery, issued endless orders.

At intervals the workers from the hills straggled into camp. Ambrose saw that they had been using their paddles as spades. A general and significant cleaning of rifles took place before the teepees.

At dusk two more men rode in, probably outposts Watusk had left at the river. One held up his two bands, opening out and closing the fingers twice. Ambrose guessed from this that the coming police party numbered twenty.

The last thing he saw as darkness infolded the camp was the boys driving in the horses from the hills.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### THE TRAP.

He shared the teepee with his six guards. Sleep was remote from his eyes. Nevertheless, he did fall off at last, only, it seemed to him, to be immediately awakened by his guards.

His ankles were unbound, and he was made to understand that he must ride again. Ambrose, seeing no advantage to be gained by resistance, did what they ordered without objection.



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He got to his feet and went outside. A pitiful little yelp behind him caused him to whirl about and dart inside again.

"Hands off my dog!" he cried in a voice that caused the Kakisas to fall back in affright.

There was a little light from the fire. Their attitude was conciliatory. In their own language they sought to explain. One pointed to a kind of pannier of birch-bark hanging from a teepee pole, whence issued a violent scratching.

"Let him out!" cried Ambrose.

They expostulated with him. None made any move to obey.

"Let him out!" commanded Ambrose, "or I'll smash something!"

Watusk, attracted by the noise, stuck his head in. The matter was explained to him. Lifting the cover of the pannier, he exhibited the frightened but unharmed Job to his master.

"Him all right," he said soothingly. "Let be. We got mak' new camp to-night. Can't tak' no dogs. Him come wit' women to-morrow."

Ambrose did not believe him, of course; but if help were really so near, he felt it would be suicidal to provoke a conflict at this moment. Apparently they intended the dog no harm. He assumed to be contented with Watusk's explanation.

"Good dog," he said to Job. "You're all right. Lie down."

Ambrose mounted, and they tied him on as usual. On every hand he could see men mounting and riding out of the village. His heart slowly rose into his throat.

Could it be meant that he was to take part in a night attack on the police? Surely the redcoats would never allow themselves to be surprised! Anyhow, if he was to be present, it would be strange if he could not help his own in some way.

His horse was led up the hill, off at right angles to the village. Watusk remained near him. As they rose to higher ground the moon came into view, hanging above the tree-tops across the valley, preparatory to sinking out of sight.

In its light the objects around him were more clearly revealed. Apparently the riders were straggling to a rendezvous. There was no haste. The terrible depression which had afflicted Ambrose since Nesis had disappeared was dissipated by the imminence of a great event.

He lived in the moment. Out of the tail of his eye he observed Watusk's mount, a lustrous black stallion, the finest piece of horseflesh he had seen in the north.

Ambrose heard a confused murmur ahead. Rising over the edge of the hill he saw its cause. A great body of horses was gathered close together on the prairie, each with its rider standing at its head.

The animals jostled each other, bit and squealed, stamped their forefeet, and tossed their manes. The men were silent. It made a weird scene in the fading moonlight.

Men and horses partook of a ghostly quality; the faces nearest him blank, oval patches, faintly phosphorescent, were like symbols of the tragedy of mankind.

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Watusk kept Ambrose at his side. Facing his men, he raised his hand theatrically. They sprang to their saddles and, wheeling, set out over the prairie. Gradually they lengthened out into single file.

Presently the leader came loping back, and the whole body rode around Watusk and Ambrose in a vast circle. It was like an uncanny midnight circus.

The riders maintained their silence. The only sounds were the thudding of hoofs on turf and the shaking of the horsemen in their clothes. Only one or two used saddles. The rifle-barrels caught dull gleams of moonlight.

At another signal from Watusk they pulled up and, turning their horses' heads toward the center, made as small a circle as their numbers could squeeze into.

Watusk addressed Ambrose with a magniloquent air. "See my children, white man! Brave as the white-face mountain bear! Swift as flying duck! This only a few my men. Toward the setting sun I got so many more wait my call.

"By the big lake I got 'nother great army. Let white men tak' care how they treat us bad. To-morrow red man's day come. He got Watusk lead him now. Watusk see through white man's bluff!"

It was impossible for Ambrose not to be impressed, ridiculous as Watusk's harangue was. There were the men, not less than two hundred—and twenty police to be attacked.

Watusk now rode around the circle, addressing his men in their own tongue, singling out this man and that, and issuing instructions. It was all received in the same silence.

Ambrose believed these quiet, ragged little warriors to be more dangerous than their inflated leader. At least in their ignorance they were honest; one could respect them.

In more ways than one Ambrose had felt drawn to the Kakisas. They seemed to him a real people, largely unspoiled as yet by the impact of a stronger race.

If he could only have talked to them, he thought. Surely in five minutes he could put them to rights and overthrow this general of straw!

Watusk rode out of the circle, followed by Ambrose and Ambrose's guard. Several of the leading men, including one that Ambrose guessed from his size to be Myengeen, joined Watusk in front, and the main body made a soft thunder of hoofs in the rear.

They were headed in a southeasterly direction—that is to say, back toward the Kakisa River. They rode at a walk. There was no conversation except among the leaders. The moon went down and the shadows pressed closer.



In a little while there was a division. Myengeen, parted from Watusk and rode off to the right, followed, Ambrose judged from the sounds, by a great part of the horsemen.

The remainder kept on in the same direction. Half a mile farther Watusk himself drew aside. Ambrose's guards and others joined him, while the balance of the Indians rode on and were swallowed in the darkness.

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Watusk turned to the right. Presently they were stopped by a bluff of poplar saplings growing in a hollow. Here all dismounted and tied their horses to trees.

Ambrose's ankles were loosed and, with an Indian's hand on either shoulder, he was guided through the grass around the edge of the trees. He speculated vainly on what this move portended.

No attack, certainly; they were striking matches and lighting their pipes. Suddenly the dim figures in front were swallowed up.

Immediately afterward Ambrose was led down an incline into a kind of pit. The smell of turned earth was in his nostrils; he could still see the stars overhead. They gave him a corner, and his ankles were again tied.

Soon it began to grow light. Little by little Ambrose made out the confines of the pit or trench. It was some twenty-five feet long and five feet wide. When the Indians stood erect, the shortest man could just look over the edge.

Ambrose counted twenty-one men besides Watusk and himself. It was close quarters. When it became light enough to see clearly, they lined up in front of him, eagerly looking over. One was lighting a little fire and putting grass on it to make a smudge.

Ambrose got his feet under him, and managed after several attempts to stand upright. He was tall enough to look over the heads of the Indians.

Stretching before him he saw the valley he had remarked the evening before, with the streamlet winding like a silver ribbon in a green flounce.

But what the Indians were looking at were little pillars of smoke which ascended at intervals all around the edge of the hills, hung for a moment or two in the motionless air, and disappeared. Ambrose counted eight besides their own.

Watusk exclaimed in satisfaction, and ordered the fire put out. This, then, was the explanation of the digging—rifle-pits!

Ambrose marveled at the cunning with which it had all been contrived. The excavated earth had been carried somewhere to the rear.

Wild-rose scrub had been cut and replanted in the earth around three sides of the pit, leaving a clear space between the stems for the men to shoot through, with a screen of the crimson leaves above.

So well had it been done that Ambrose could not distinguish the other pits from the patches of wild-rose scrub growing naturally on the hills.

Ambrose's heart sank with the apprehension of serious danger. He began to wonder if he and all the other whites in the country had not under-rated these red men. Where could Watusk have learned his tactics? The thing was devilishly planned.

With the cross-fire of two hundred rifles they could mow down an army if they could get them inside that valley. Each narrow entrance was covered by a pair of pits. Every part of the bowl was within range of every pit.

Ambrose feared that the police, in their careless disdain of the natives, might ride straight into the trap and be lost.

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“Watusk, for God’s sake, what do you mean to do?” he cried.

Watusk was intensely gratified by the white man’s alarm. He smiled insolently. “Ah!” he said. “You on’erstan’ now!”

“You fool!” cried Ambrose. “If you fire on the police you’ll be wiped clean off the earth! The whole power of the government will descend on your head! There won’t be a single Kakisa left to tell the story of what happened!”

Watusk’s face turned ugly. His eyes bolted. “Shut up!” he snarled, “or I gag you.”

Ambrose, bethinking himself that he might use his voice to good purpose later, clenched his teeth and said no more.

At sunrise a fresh breeze sprang up from the south. Soon after a whisper of distant trotting horses was home upon it. Ambrose’s heart leaped to his throat. An excited murmur ran among the Indians. They picked up their guns.

Watusk’s pit was one of the pair covering the upper entrance to the valley. It was thus farthest away from the approaching horsemen. It faced straight down the valley. Through the lower gap they caught the gleam of the red coats.

Ambrose beheld them with a painfully contracted heart. He gaged in his mind how far his voice might carry. The wind was against him.

Presumably he would only be allowed to cry out once, so it behooved him to make sure it was heard. However, the same thought was in the minds of the Indians. They scowled at him suspiciously.

Suddenly, while it was yet useless for him to cry out, they fell upon him, bearing him to the ground!

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### THE TEST.

After a fierce struggle Ambrose was securely bound and gagged. He managed to get to his feet again. His soul sickened at the tragedy it forecast, yet he had to look.

To his overwhelming relief he saw that the redcoats had halted in the lower entrance to the valley. Evidently the possibility of an ambush in so favored a spot had occurred to their leader. The baggage was sent back.

His relief was short-lived. Presently the advance was resumed at a walk, and a pair of skirmishers sent out on either side to mount the hills. Ambrose counted sixteen redcoats in the main body, and a man in plain clothes, evidently a native guide.

One skirmisher on the left was headed all unconscious straight for a rifle pit. Ambrose, suffocated by his impotence, tugged at his bonds and groaned under the gag. "Turn back! Turn back!" shouted his voiceless tongue.

There was a shot. Ambrose closed his eyes expecting a fusillade to follow. It did not come. From his pit, Watusk hissed a negative order.

Ambrose heard a shrill whistle from the bottom of the valley, and opening his eyes, he saw the skirmishers riding slowly back to the main body. Even at the distance their nonchalant air was evident.



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The main body had quietly halted in the middle of the valley. After a moment's pause, one of their number raised a rifle with a white flag tied to the barrel.

The Indians surrounding Ambrose, lowered their guns, and murmured confusedly among themselves. Ambrose looked at Watusk.

The chief betrayed symptoms of indecision, biting his lip, and pulling his fingers until the joints cracked. Ambrose took a little encouragement from the sight.

To Ambrose's astonishment he saw the troopers dismounting. Flinging the lines over their horses' heads, they allowed the beasts to crop the rich grass of the bottoms.

The men stood about in careless twos and threes, lighting their pipes. Only their leader remained in the saddle, lolling comfortably sidewise. The breeze brought the sound of their light talk and deep laughter.

The effect on the Indians was marked. Their jaws dropped, they looked at each other incredulously, they jabbered excitedly.

Plainly they were divided between admiration and mystification. Watusk was demoralized. His hand shook, an ashy tint crept under his yellow skin, an agony of impotent rage narrowed his eyes.

Ambrose's heart swelled with the pride of race. "Splendid fellows!" he cried to himself. "It was exactly the right thing to do!"

Presently a hail was raised in the valley below; a deep English voice whose tones gladdened Ambrose's ears. "Ho, Watusk!"

Every eye turned toward the leader. Watusk had the air of a wilful child called by his parent. He pished and swaggered, and made some remark to his men with the obsequious smile with which child—or man—asks for the support of his mates in his wrong-doing.

The men did not smile back; they merely watched soberly to see what Watusk was going to do about it.

The hail was repeated. "Ho, Watusk! Inspector Egerton orders you to come and talk to him!"

So it was Colonel Egerton, thought Ambrose, commander of B district of the police, and known affectionately from Caribou Lake to the Arctic as Patch-pants Egerton, or simply as "the old man." He was a veteran of two Indian uprisings. Ambrose felt still further reassured.

Watusk, still swaggering, nevertheless visibly weakened. In the end he had to go, just as a child must in the end obey a calm, imperative summons.

He issued a petulant order. All the men except Ambrose's guard of six took their guns and filed out through the back of the pit.

Watusk went last. Glancing over his shoulder and seeing that those left behind were busily watching the troopers in the valley, he produced a flask from his pocket and took a pull at it. Ambrose caught the act out of the corner of his eye.

A few minutes later, Watusk and his followers rode over the edge of the hill to the left of the rifle pit, and down into the valley. The policemen scarcely looked up to see them come.

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Inspector Egerton and Chief Watusk faced each other on horseback. The other Indians remained at a respectful distance. Ambrose mightily desired to hear what was being said on either side. He learned later.

"Watusk!" cried the peppery little inspector. "What damn foolishness is this? Rifle pits! Do you think you're another Louis Riel?"

Watusk, glowering sullenly, made no answer.

"Have you got Ambrose Doane here?" the officer demanded.

"Ambrose Doane here," said Watusk.

"I want him," said Egerton crisply. "I also want you, Watusk, Myengeen, Tatateecha, and three others whose names I can't pronounce. I have a clerk belonging to the Company store who will pick them out.

"I've got to send you all out for trial before the river closes, so there's no time to lose. We will start back to-day. I will leave half my men here under Sergeant Plaskett to look after your people. You will instruct your people to bring in all the goods stolen from the Company store.

"Plaskett will have a list of everything that was taken and will credit what is returned. The balance, together with the amount of damage done the store will be charged in a lump against the tribe, and the sum deducted pro rata from the government annuities next year. They're lucky to get off so easy."

"We get pay, too, for our flour burn up?" muttered Watusk.

"That will be investigated with the rest," the inspector said. "Bring in your people at once. Look sharp! There's not an hour to lose!"

Watusk made no move. The fiery spirit he had swallowed was lending a deceitful warmth to his veins. He began to feel like a hero. His eyes narrowed and glittered. "Suppose I don' do it?" he muttered.

The inspectors white eyebrows went up. "Then I will go and take the men I want," he said coolly.

"You dead before you gone far," said Watusk. He swept his arm dramatically around the hills. "I got five hundred Winchesters point at your red coats!" he cried. "When I give signal they speak together!"

"That's a lie," said the inspector. "You've only a few over two hundred able men in your tribe."

“Two hundred is plenty,” said Watusk unabashed. “That is ten bullets for every man of yours. They are all around you. You cannot go forward or back. Ask Company man if Kakisas shoot straight!”

Inspector Egerton’s answer was a hearty laugh. “Capital!” he cried.

“Laugh!” cried Watusk furiously. “You no harder than ot’er man. You got no medicine to stop those bullets you sell us! No? If bullets go t’rough your red coats you die lak ot’er men I guess!”

“Certainly!” cried the old soldier with a flash of his blue eyes. “That’s our business. But it won’t do you any good. We’re but the outposts of a mighty power that encircles the world. If you defy that power you’ll be wiped out like the prairie grass in a fire.”

## Page 127

"Huh!" cried Watusk. "White man's bluff! White man always talk big about the power behind him. I lak see that power, me! I will show the red people you no better than them!"

"When it was known Watusk has beat the police, as far as the northern ocean they will take arms and drive the white men out of their country! I have sent out my messengers!"

"What do you expect me to say to that?" inquired the officer quizzically.

"Tell you men lay their guns on the ground," said Watusk. "They my prisoners. I treat them kind."

Inspector Egerton laughed until his little paunch shook. "Come," he said good-naturedly, "I haven't got time to exchange heroics with you. Run along and bring in your people. I'll give you half an hour."

The inspector drew out his watch, and took note of the time. He then turned to address his sergeant, leaving Watusk in mid air, so to speak.

There was nothing for the Indian leader to do but wheel his horse and ride back up the hill with what dignity he could muster. His men fell in behind him.

They had understood nothing of what was said, of course, but the byplay was sufficiently intelligible. The whole party was crestfallen.

Observing this air on their return to the rifle pit, Ambrose's eye brightened. Watusk seeing the keen, questioning eye, announced with dignity.

"We won. The red-coats surrendered."

This was so palpably a falsehood Ambrose could well afford to smile broadly behind his gag.

The half hour that then followed seemed like half a day to those who watched. Ambrose, ignorant of what had occurred, could only guess the reason of the armistice.

The police had taken down their white flag. He could see the inspector glance at his watch from time to time. Wondering messengers came from the other pits presumably to find out the reason of the inaction, to whom Watusk returned evasive replies.

Bound and gagged as he was, it was anything but an easy time for Ambrose. He had the poor satisfaction of seeing that Watusk was more uneasy than himself.

To a discerning eye the Indian leader was suffering visible torments. Egerton, the wily old Indian fighter, knew his man.

If he had made the slightest move to provoke a conflict, raged, threatened, fired a gun, the savage nature would instantly have reacted, and it would have all been over in a few moments. But to laugh and light a cigarette! Watusk was rendered impotent by a morale beyond his comprehension.

The longest half hour has only thirty minutes. Inspector Egerton looked at his watch for the last time and spoke to his men. The policemen caught their horses, and without any appearance of haste, tightened girths and mounted.

They commenced to move slowly through the grass in the track of Watusk's party, spreading out wide in open formation. The inspector was in the center of the line. He carried no arms. His men were still joking and laughing.

## Page 128

They commenced to mount the hill, walking their horses, and sitting loosely in their saddles. Each trooper had his reins in one hand, his rifle barrel in the other, with the butt of the weapon resting on his thigh.

They were coming straight for the rifle pit; no doubt they had marked the bushes masking it. Ambrose saw that they were young men, slim-waisted and graceful. The one on the right end had lost his hat through some accident. He had fair hair that caught the sun.

This was the critical moment. The fate of the nineteen boys and their white-haired leader hung by a hair. Ambrose held his breath under the gag. A cry, an untoward movement would have caused an immediate slaughter.

The Indians' eyes glittered, their teeth showed, they fingered their rifles. A single word from their leader would have sufficed. Watusk longed to speak it, and could not. The sweat was running down his yellow-gray face.

One of the horses stumbled. The Indians with muttered exclamations flung up their guns. Ambrose thought it was all over.

But at that moment by the grace of God, one of the troopers made a good joke, and a hearty laugh rang along the line. The Indians lowered their guns and stared with bulging eyes. They could not fight supermen like these.

Watusk, with the groan of total collapse, dropped his gun on the ground, and turned to escape by the path out of the pit.

Instantly there was pandemonium in the narrow place. Some tried to escape with their leader; others blocked the way. Ambrose saw Watusk seized and flung on the ground. One spat in his face. He lay where he had fallen.

Thus ended the Kakisa rebellion. The Indians had no further thought of resistance. The butts of their guns dropped to the ground, and they stared at the oncoming troopers with characteristic apathy.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### ANOTHER CHANGE OF JAILERS.

The police advanced to within twenty-five yards and, drawing closer together, halted.

"Watusk, come out of that!" barked the inspector in his parade ground voice.

Ambrose had his first look at him. He was a little man, trigly built, with a bullet head under a closely cropped thatch of white. A heavy white mustache bisected his florid face.

No one could have mistaken him in any dress, for aught but a soldier. He did not look as if patience and fair-mindedness were included among his virtues, which was unfortunate for Ambrose as the event proved.

As Watusk gave no sign of stirring, he was seized by many hands and boosted over the edge of the pit. He rolled over, knocking down some of the bushes and finally rose to his feet, standing with wretched, hang-dog mien.

His appearance, with the frock coat all rubbed with earth and the military gear hanging askew, caused the troopers to shout with laughter. Here was a change from the fire-eater of half an hour before.



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"Ho!" cried Inspector Egerton. "The conqueror of the English!"

Watusk drew closer and began to whine insinuatingly. "I sorry I mak' that talk, me. I can' help it at all. Ambrose Doane tell me that. He put his medicine on me. I sick."

Ambrose attempted to cry out in his angry astonishment, but only a muffled groan issued through the handkerchief. He was not visible to the troopers where he stood in the corner, and he could not move.

"Is Ambrose Doane there?" demanded the officer.

Watusk quickly turned and spoke a sentence in Kakisa. Ambrose saw the look of craft in his yellow face. One of the men who guarded Ambrose drew his knife and cut his bonds and untied the handkerchief.

Ambrose's heart beat high. It never occurred to him that they could believe the wretched liar! He drew himself over the edge of the pit, helped by those behind.

"Hello!" he cried.

There was no answering greeting. The faces before him were as grim as stone. For Watusk they had a kind of good-humored contempt—for him a cold and deadly scorn.

Evidently their minds were made up in advance. The inspector twirled his mustache and regarded him with a hard, speculative eye.

Ambrose's heart failed him terribly. These were men that he admired. "What's the matter?" he cried. "Do you believe this liar? I have been a prisoner up to this moment—bound hand and foot and gagged. The marks are still on my wrists!"

Inspector Egerton did not look at his wrists. "H-m! Not bad!" he said grimly. "You're a cool hand, my man!"

The blood rushed to Ambrose's face. "For God's sake, will you tell me what I could hope to gain by stirring up the Indians?" he demanded.

"Don't ask me," said the inspector. "You were ready to grasp at any straw, I expect."

In the face of injustice so determined, it was only humiliating for Ambrose to attempt to defend himself. His face hardened. He set his jaw and shrugged callously.

"You're under arrest," said the inspector.

"On what charge?" Ambrose sullenly demanded.

“A mere trifle,” said the inspector ironically. “Unlawful entry, conspiracy, burglary, and assault with intent to kill. To which we shall probably add treason.”

Ambrose made no answer. In his heart he had hoped that the empty charges at Fort Enterprise had fallen of their own weight before this.

The inspector turned his attention back to Watusk. “Deliver over your arsenal!” he said.

Watusk meekly unfastened his various belts and handed them to a trooper. Having observed Ambrose’s rebuff, his face had become smooth and inscrutable again.

By this time the Indians had issued out of the pit by the rear and were standing in an uncertain group a little way off.

“Order them to pile their weapons on the ground,” commanded the inspector. “Let each man make a mark upon the stock of his rifle so that he can identify it when it is returned. Send messengers to the other pits with orders for all the men to bring their guns here.”

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Watusk was eager to obey him.

"Where is your camp?" the inspector asked him.

Watusk pointed. "One mile," he said.

"After we get the guns you shall go there with me and we will examine the people."

Ambrose, hearing this, turned to the trooper who was nearest. "If you go to the camp get me my dog, will you?" he asked sullenly.

"What's that?" demanded the inspector.

Ambrose explained where his dog was to be found. They looked at him curiously as if surprised that such a desperate criminal should be solicitous about a dog. The trooper promised to bring him.

Inspector Egerton continued to issue his orders. "Bafford, ride back and bring up the baggage. Have my tent pitched in the middle of the valley below. Emslie"—this was the yellow-haired youth—"I shall hold you responsible for the white prisoner. You needn't handcuff him. He couldn't escape if he wished to."

Ambrose had to undergo the humiliation of walking down hill at the stirrup of the young trooper's horse. Emslie showed a less hard face than some of the others.

Ambrose sought to establish relations with him by asking for tobacco. He was hungry for speech with his own kind. But the look of cold contempt with which his request was granted precluded any further advances.

Upon Inspector Egerton's return from the Kakisa village a meal was served. Afterward the inspector sat at his folding-table inside his tent and held his investigations.

There was a deal of business to be transacted. In due course Ambrose was brought before him. Watusk, whose services were in continual demand as interpreter, was present, and several troopers.

"It is customary to ask a prisoner upon arrest if he has anything to say for himself," said the inspector. "I must warn you that anything you say may be used against you."

Ambrose felt their animosity like a wall around him. "What's the use?" he said sullenly. "You've already convicted me in your own mind."

"What I think of your case has nothing to do with it," said the inspector coldly. "You will be brought before competent judges."

“There is something I want to say,” said Ambrose, looking at Watusk. “But not before that mongrel.”

The inspector spoke to a trooper, and Watusk was led outside. “Now, then!” he said to Ambrose.

“Watusk means to turn king’s evidence,” said Ambrose. “He will make up what story he pleases, thinking that none of the Kakisas can testify except through him—or through Gordon Strange, who is his friend.”

“Are you accusing Strange now?” interrupted the inspector. “Let me tell you: Strange is pretty highly thought of back at the fort.”

“No doubt!” said Ambrose with a shrug. “There is one member of the tribe beside Watusk who can speak English,” he went on. “In the interest of justice I ask you to find her.”

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"Who is it?"

"Her name is Nesis. She is the youngest of the four wives of Watusk." Ambrose told her story briefly and baldly.

"So!" said the inspector with a peculiar smile. "According to your own story you eloped with Watusk's wife. Upon my word! Do you expect a jury to attach any weight to her evidence?"

"I take my chance of that," said Ambrose. "If you want to get at the truth you must find her."

"I'll have a search made at once."

"Watch Watusk," warned Ambrose. "He'll stop at nothing to keep her evidence out of court—not even murder."

The inspector smiled in an annoyed way. Ambrose's attitude did not agree with his preconceptions.

However, he immediately rode back to the Kakisa village with three troopers. In an hour he sent one of the men back for Watusk. In two hours they all returned—without Nesis.

Ambrose's heart sank like a stone. By instinct he strove to conceal his discouragement from his enemies under a nonchalant air.

The inspector, feeling that some explanation was due to Ambrose, had him brought to his tent again.

"I have searched," he said. "I can find no trace of any such person as you describe."

"Naturally, not with Watusk's help," said Ambrose bitterly.

The inspector bit his lip. According to his lights he was honestly trying to be fair to the prisoner.

"First I searched the teepees myself," he condescended to explain. "It appears there are several girls by that name. When I called on Watusk I had him watched and checked."

"The Indians were primed in advance," said Ambrose. "Watusk can pull wool over your eyes."

"Silence!" cried the exasperated inspector. "Your story is preposterous anyway. Pure romance. Nevertheless I have instructed Sergeant Plaskett to continue the search. If

any such girl should be found, which would surprise me, she will be sent out. You can go."

Inspector Egerton with half his force started back for the Kakisa River *en route* to Fort Enterprise that same afternoon. They convoyed seven prisoners, and five additional members of the Kakisa tribe, whom Watusk had indicated would be material witnesses.

Ambrose watched Watusk ingratiating himself with bitterness at his heart. The Indian ex-leader's air of penitent eagerness to atone for past misdeeds was admirable.

They rode hard, and crossed the river before making their first camp. The next day they covered sixty miles, reaching a station established by Inspector Egerton on the way over, where they found fresh horses. At the end of the third day they camped within thirty miles of Fort Enterprise.

Ambrose could never afterward think of these days without an inward shudder. Pain angered him. Outwardly he looked the hard and reckless character they thought him, because his sensibilities were raw and quivering.

## Page 132

The dog knew. He was free to move about; he was well-fed and freshly clothed, and the policemen acted toward him with a disinterestedness so scrupulous it was almost like kindness.

Nevertheless Ambrose felt their belief in his guilt like a hunchback feels the difference in the world's glance. In his moments of blackest discouragement the suggestion flitted oddly through his brain that maybe he was guilty of all these preposterous crimes.

If this was not enough, once he heard them discussing his case. He was lying in a tent, and there was a little group of troopers at the door, smoking. They thought he was asleep.

He heard Emslie say: "Doane looks like a decent-enough head, doesn't he? Shows you never can tell."

"The worst criminals are always a decent-looking sort," said another. "That's why they're dangerous."

"By gad!" said a third, "when you think of all he's responsible for, even if he didn't do it with his own hands—arson, robbery, murder—think what that girl at Enterprise has been through! By gad! hanging's too good for him!"

"Any man that would lower himself to rouse the passions of the Indians against his own kind—he isn't worth the name of white man!"

"The worst of it is nothing you can do to Doane will repair the damage. He's put back the white man's work in this country twenty years!"

Ambrose rolled over and covered his head with his arms. These were honest men who spoke, men he would have chosen for friends.

Nest morning he showed no sign, except perhaps an added sullenness. Nevertheless he had received a hurt that would never altogether heal while he lived.

No matter how swift rehabilitation might follow, after an experience like this a man could never have the same frank confidence in the power of truth.

It was a point of pride with him to be a model prisoner. He gave as little trouble as possible, and during the whole journey made but one request.

That was at the last spell before reaching the fort. He asked for a razor. Colina might scorn him like the others, but she should not see him looking like a tramp.

Immediately upon their arrival at Fort Enterprise, John Gaviller in his capacity as Justice of the Peace held a hearing in the police room in the quarters.

Gaviller's health was largely restored, but the old assurance was lacking, perhaps he would never be quite the same man again. He was prompted by Gordon Strange. Colina was not present. Ambrose had not seen her upon landing.

The hearing was merely a perfunctory affair. All the prisoners were remanded to Prince George for trial.

Ambrose gathered from the talk that reached his ears that it was intended to send everybody, prisoners, and witnesses, including Gordon Strange, Gaviller and Colina up the river next day in the launch and a scow.

To travel seven days in her sight, a prisoner—he wondered if there were any dregs of bitterness remaining in the cup after this!



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They gave Ambrose the jail to himself. This was a little log-shack behind the quarters with iron-bound door and barred window.

To him in the course of the afternoon came Inspector Egerton moved by his sense of duty. He officially informed Ambrose that he was to be taken up the river next morning.

"Is there anything you want?" he asked stiffly.

"I left a friend here," Ambrose said with a bitter smile. "I'd like to see him if he's willing to come."

"Whom do you mean?"

"Simon Grampierre."

The inspector looked grave. "He's under arrest," he said. "I can't let you communicate."

"Can I see his son then, Germain Grampierre?"

"Sorry. He's on parole."

Ambrose had been counting on this more than he knew, to talk with some man, even a breed, who believed in him. It is a necessity of our natures under trial. To deny it was like robbing him of his last hope. Some power of endurance suddenly snapped within him.

"What do you come here for?" he cried in a breaking voice. "To torture me? Must I be surrounded day and night only by those who think me a murderer! For God's sake get the thing over with! Take me to town and hang me if that's what you want! A month of this and I'd be a gibbering idiot anyway!"

The ring of honest pain in this aroused dim compunctions in the admirable little colonel. He twisted his big mustache uncomfortably. "I'm sure I've done what I could for you," he said.

"Everything except let me alone," cried Ambrose. "For God's sake go away and let me be!" He flung himself face downward on his cot.

Inspector Egerton withdrew stiffly.

Ambrose lay with his head in his arms, and let his shaking nerves quiet down. A fit of the blackest despair succeeded. To his other troubles he now added hot shame—that he had broken down before his enemy.

It seemed to him in the retrospect that he had raved like a guilty man. He foresaw weeks and weeks of this yet to come with fresh humiliations daily and added pain; if he gave way already what would become of him in the end? How could he hope to keep his manhood? A blank terror faced him.

The sound of the key in the lock brought him springing to his feet. None of them should see him weaken again! With trembling hands he put his pipe in his mouth, and lighted it nonchalantly.

It was Emslie with his supper.

"Playing waiter, eh?" drawled Ambrose. "You fellows have to be everything from grooms to chambermaids, don't you?"

Young Emslie stared, and grew red. "What's the matter with you?" he demanded.

"A man must have a little entertainment," said Ambrose. "I'm forced to get it out of you. You don't know how funny you are, Emslie."

"You'd best be civil!" growled the policeman.

"Why?" drawled out Ambrose. "You've got to keep a hold on yourself whatever I say to you. It's regulations. Man to man I could lick you with ease!"

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"By gad!" began Emslie. Very red in the face, he turned on his heel, and went out slamming the door.

Ambrose laughed, and felt a little better. Only by allowing his bitter pain some such outlet was he able to endure it.

Disregarding the supper, he strode up and down his prison, planning in his despair how he would harden himself to steel. No longer would he suffer in silence. To the last hour he'd swagger and jeer.

These red-coats were stiff-necked and dull-witted; he could have rare fun with them.

He saw himself in the court-room keeping the crowd in a roar with his outrageous gibes. And if at the last he swung—he'd step off with a jest that would live in history!

The key turned in the lock again. He swung around ready with an insult for his jailer.

Colina stood in the doorway.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### THE JAIL VISITOR.

The light was behind Colina, and Ambrose could not at first read her expression. There was something changed in her aspect; her chin was not carried so high.

She was wearing a plain blue linen dress, and her hair was done low over her ears. Colina was one of the women who unconsciously dress to suit their moods.

She looked different now, but she was indisputably Colina.

The sight of her dear shape caused him the same old shock of astonishment. All the blood seemed to forsake his heart; he put a hand against the wall behind him for support.

He presently distinguished changes in her face also. It bore the marks of sleeplessness and suffering. Pride still made her eyes reticent and cold, but the old outrageous arrogance was gone.

In the wave of tenderness for her that engulfed him he clean forgot the self-pleasing defiance he had imagined for himself, forgot his desperate situation, forgot everything but her.

He was unable to speak, and Colina did not immediately offer to. She stood a step inside the door, with her hand on the back of the one chair the room contained. Her eyes were cast down. It was Emslie who broke the silence.

“Do you wish me to stay?” he respectfully asked Colina.

She raised grave eyes to Ambrose. “Is there anything I can do for you?” she asked evenly.

“Yes,” said Ambrose breathlessly.

After a moment’s hesitation she said to Emslie: “Please wait outside.”

Ambrose’s heart leaped up. No sooner had the door closed behind Emslie than, forgetting everything, it burst its bonds. “Colina! How good of you to come! It makes me so happy to see you! If you knew how I had hungered and thirsted for a sight of you! How charming you look in that dress! Your hair is done differently, too. I swear it is like the sun shining in here. You look tired. Sit down. Have some tea. What a fool I am! You don’t want to eat in a jail, do you?”

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Her eyes widened with amazement at his outburst.

She shrank from him.

“Don’t be afraid,” he said. “I’m not going to touch you—a jailbird! I’m not fooling myself. I know how you feel toward me. I can’t help it. If you knew how I had been bottled up! I must speak to some one or go clean off my head. It makes me forget just to see you. Ah, it was good of you to come!”

“I am visiting all the prisoners,” Colina was careful to explain. “And getting them what they need for the journey to-morrow.”

It pulled him up short. He glanced at her with an odd smile, tender, bitter, and grim. “Charity!” he murmured. “Thanks, I have plenty of warm clothes, and so forth.”

Colina bit her lip. There was a silence. He gazed at her hungrily. She was so dear to him it was impossible for him to be otherwise than tender.

“Just the same, it was mighty good of you to come,” he said.

“You said there was something I could do for you,” she murmured.

“Please sit down.”

She did so.

“I don’t want to beg any personal favors,” he said. “There is something you might do for the sake of justice.”

“Never mind that,” she said. “What is it?”

“Let me have a little pride, too,” he said. “It isn’t easy to ask favors of your enemies. I am surrounded by those who hate me and believe me guilty. Naturally, I stand as much chance of a fair trial as a spy in wartime. I’m just beginning to understand that. At first I thought as long as one’s conscience was clear nothing could happen.”

“What is it I can do?” she asked again.

“I am taking for granted you would like to see me get off,” Ambrose went on. “Admitting that—that the old feeling is dead and all that—still it can’t be exactly pleasant for you to feel that you once felt that way toward a murderer and a traitor—”

“Please, please—” murmured Colina.

“You see you have a motive for helping me,” Ambrose insisted. “I thought first of Simon Grampierre. He’s under arrest. Then I asked to be allowed to see Germain, his son. The inspector wouldn’t have it. I gave up hope after that. But the sight of you makes me want to defend myself still. I thought maybe you would have a note carried to Germain for me.”

“Certainly,” she said.

“You shall read it,” he said eagerly, “so you can satisfy yourself there’s nothing treasonable.”

She made a deprecating gesture.

“I’ll write it at once,” he said. He carried the tray to the bed. Colina gave him the chair.

“They let me have writing materials,” Ambrose went on with a rueful smile. “I think they hope I may write out a confession some night.”

To Germain Grampierre he wrote a plain, brief account of Nesis, and made clear what a desperate need he had of finding her.

“Will you read it?” he asked Colina.

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She shook her head. He handed it to her unsealed, and she thrust it in her dress.

"I'm ever so much obliged to you," he said, trying to keep up the reasonable air. "How pretty your hair looks that way!" he added inconsequentially. The words were surprised out of him.

She turned abruptly. It was beginning to be dark in the shack, and he could no longer see into her face.

Her movement was too much for his self-control. "Ah, must you go?" he cried sharply. "Another minute or two! It will be dreadful here after you've gone!"

"What's the use?" she whispered.

"True," he said harshly. "What's the use?" He turned his back on her. "Good night, and thank you."

She lingered, hand upon the doorlatch. "Isn't there— isn't there something else I can do?" she asked.

"No, thank you."

Still she stayed. "You haven't touched your supper," she said in a small voice. "Mayn't I—send you something from the house?"

"No!" he cried swiftly. "Not your pity—nor your charity, neither!"

Colina fumbled weakly with the latch—and her hand dropped from it.

"Why don't you go?" he cried sharply. "I can't stand it. I know you hate me. I tell myself that every minute. Be honest and show you hate me, not act sorry!"

"I do not hate you," she whispered.

He faced her with a kind of terror in his eyes. "For God's sake, go!" he cried. "You're building up a hope in me—it will kill me if it comes to nothing! I can't stand any more. Go!"

His amazed eyes beheld her come falteringly toward him, reaching out her hands.

"Ambrose—I—I can't!" she whispered.

He caught her in his arms.

Colina broke into a little tempest of weeping, and clung to him like a child. He held her close, stroking her hair and murmuring clumsy, broken phrases of comfort.

“Don’t! My dear love, don’t grieve so! It’s all right now. I can’t bear to have you hurt.”

“I love you!” she sobbed. “I have never stopped loving you! It was something outside of me that persuaded me to hate you. I’ve been living in a hell since that night! And to find you like this! Nothing to eat but bread and salt pork! Every word you said was like a knife in my breast. And not a single word of reproach!”

“There!” he said, trying to laugh. “You didn’t put me here.”

She finally lifted a tear-stained face. Clinging to his shoulders and searching his eyes, she said: “Swear to me that you are innocent, and I’ll never have another doubt.”

He shook his head. “No more swearing!” he said. “If you let yourself be persuaded by the sound of the words, as soon as you left me and heard the others you’d doubt me again. It’s got to come from the inside. Words don’t signify.”

Colina hung her head. “You’re right,” she said in a humbled voice. “I guess I just wanted an excuse to save my pride. I do believe in you—with my whole heart. I never really doubted you—I was ashamed, afraid, I don’t know what. I was a coward. But I suffered for it—every night. Do you despise me?”



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He laughed from a light breast.

“Despise you? That’s funny! It was natural. A damnable combination of circumstances. I never blamed you.”

They were silent for a few moments. She looked up to find him smiling oddly.

“What is it?” she asked.

“Nothing much,” he said. “I was thinking—human beings are sort of elastic, aren’t they? After all I’ve been through the last few days—you don’t know!—and then this—you dear one! It’s a wonder the shock didn’t kill me—but I feel fine! Just peaceful. I don’t care what happens now.”

It was Colina’s turn to lavish her pent-up tenderness upon him then.

After a while she disengaged herself from his arms. “They will wonder what makes me stay so long,” she murmured. “And my eyes are red. Emslie will see when I go out.”

Ambrose poured out water in his basin. “Dabble your eyes in this,” he said. “When you’re ready to go I’ll call Emslie in. Coming in from the light, he won’t notice anything. You can slip out ahead of him.”

Colina bathed her face as he suggested. Catching each other’s eyes, they blushed and laughed.

“We must decide quickly what we’re going to do,” she said hastily.

“First read that letter,” said Ambrose.

She read it, leaning back against his shoulder. “A woman!” she said in a changed voice and straightened up. She read further. “She helped you escape!” Colina turned and faced him. “She believed in you, eh?” she said, her lip curling.

Ambrose’s heart sank. “Now, Colina—” he began. “Why, she never thought anything about it!”

Colina consulted the letter again. “She ran away with you!” she cried accusingly.

“Followed me,” corrected Ambrose.

“She was in love with you!” Colina’s voice rang bitterly.

“Are you beginning to doubt me already?” he cried, aghast. “Be reasonable! You know how it is with these native girls. The sight of a white man hypnotizes them. You can’t have lived here without seeing it. Do you blame me for that?”

She paid no attention to the question. Struggling to command herself, she said: “Answer me one question. It is my right. Did you ever kiss her?”

Ambrose groaned in spirit, and cast round in his mind how to answer.

“You hesitate!” cried Colina, suddenly beside herself. “You did! Ah, horrible!” She violently scrubbed her own lips with the back of her hand. “A brown girl! A teepee-dweller! A savage! Ugh! That’s what men are!”

An honest anger nerved Ambrose. He roughly seized her wrists. “Listen!” he commanded in a tone that silenced her. “As I bade her good-by on the shore she asked me to. She had just risked death to get me out, remember—worse than death perhaps. What should I have done? Answer me that!”

Colina refused to meet the question. Her assumption of indifference was very painful to see. She was not beautiful then. “Don’t ask me,” she said with a sneer. “I suppose men understand such women. I cannot.”

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Ambrose turned away with a helpless gesture. Colina moved haughtily toward the door. Within ten minutes their wonderful happiness had been born and strangled again.

"I don't suppose you will want to send my letter now," Ambrose said with a sinking heart.

Colina blushed with shame, but she would not let him see it. "Certainly," she said coldly. "What has this to do with a question of justice?"

Ambrose, sore and indignant, would not make any more overtures. "There's a postscript I must add," he said coldly, extending his hand for the letter.

"I cannot wait for you to write it," she said. "Tell me. I will add it myself."

"I think it likely," Ambrose said, "that Nesis"—Colina winced at the sound of the name—"has been spirited away from the Kakisa village. There are two other villages, one on Buffalo Lake and one on Kakisa Lake, about sixty miles up the Kakisa River.

"They brought her up the river with me, so it is hardly likely she was sent down again to Buffalo Lake. I think she's at Kakisa Lake, if she's alive."

Colina bowed. "I will tell Germain Grampierre," she said. Her hand rose to the door.

Ambrose's heart failed him. "Ah, Colina!" he cried reproachfully and imploringly.

She slipped out without answering.

Ambrose flung himself on his bed and cursed fate again. He was not experienced enough to realize that this was not necessarily a fatal break.

All night he tried to steel his heart against fate and against Colina. It was harder now. It was an utterly wretched Ambrose that faced the dawn.

While it was still early Emslie passed him a note through the window. Ambrose knew the handwriting, and tore it open with trembling fingers. He read:

### MY DEAR LOVE:

I was hateful. It was the meanest kind of jealousy. I was furious at her because she helped you at the time when I was on the side of your enemies. I have been suffering torments all night. Forgive me. I am going to find Nesis myself. That is the only way I can make up for everything. I love you.

COLINA.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### COLINA'S ENTERPRISE.

Upon leaving Ambrose, Colina despatched his letter across the river by Michel Trudeau. She then dressed for dinner.

To-night was to be an occasion, for beside Inspector Egerton they had Duncan Seton, inspector of Company posts, and his wife.

The Setons had come down with the police. Seton was to run the post at Fort Enterprise while John Gaviller and Gordon Strange were absent at the trials.

Colina, buoyed up with anger, dressed with care. She saw herself self-possessed and queenly at the foot of her own table's favorite picture of herself.

Nevertheless, the reaction was swiftly setting in. She couldn't help having a generous heart, nor could she put away the picture of Ambrose and his miserable, untasted supper.

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At the last moment her courage failed her. She knew the conversation would have to do solely with the coming trials. She knew Inspector Egerton's style in dealing with Ambrose. She could not face it.

She sent down-stairs the time-honored excuse of young ladies and, tearing off her finery, flung herself, like Ambrose, on her bed.

She passed a worse night than he, for while the man accused fate, she had to accuse herself. Colina was nothing if not whole-hearted; coward was the gentlest of the names she called herself.

More than once she was on the point of rushing out of the house and, regardless of consequences, imploring Ambrose's forgiveness.

However, after midnight a way out of her coil suggested itself like a star shining out. She slept for a peaceful hour.

Long before dawn she arose and awakened her maid. This was Cora, a stolid Cree half-breed, doggedly devoted to her mistress and accustomed to receiving her impulsive orders like inscrutable commands from Heaven.

Upon being notified, therefore, that they were about to set off on a long journey overland instead of by the launch, she set to work to get ready without surprise or question.

Colina wrote the letter to Ambrose and another to her father. The latter was a little masterpiece of casualness, designed to prevent pursuit, if that were possible.

She knew that they dared not wait another day, before starting up-stream in the launch.

### DEAR FATHER:

I have heard a rumor of new evidence bearing on the trials. It's not worth while telling Inspector Egerton and delaying everything, because I'm not sure of anything. I'm off to investigate for myself.

I'm taking Cora, and shall have a couple of reliable men with me, so there's no occasion to worry. You must not attempt to wait for me, of course.

If I secure any information worth while Mr. Seton will find a way to send me out with it. If I do not, why I'm not an essential witness at the trials, and of course I'll be all right here with the Setons until you get back.

Affectionately,

COLINA.

She left the letters with the cook, giving precise instructions for their delivery. That to her father was not to be handed over until her absence from the house should be discovered. Nothing was to be said about the other letter.

The two girls saddled Ginger and the next best horse in the stable for Cora to ride, and took a third horse with a pack-saddle for their baggage.

They rowed across the river, making the horses swim in the wake of the boat. On the other side they set off forthwith on the Kakisa trail. Colina had decided that it would be a waste of precious time to turn aside to the Grampierres.

Whether Germain started before or after her, she could find him on the way. That he would start for the Kakisa River this morning she had no doubt.

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When they had ridden a couple of miles Cora pointed out to her where the tracks of four horses struck into the trail. They were just ahead, she said.

They came upon Germain Grampierre and his brother Georges making their first spell by the trail. Great was their astonishment upon hearing Colina announce her intentions.

Germain used all the obvious arguments to turn her back, and Colina smilingly overruled them. He was openly in awe of her, and, of course, in the end she had her way, and they rode together, Germain shaking his head with secret misgivings.

They pushed their horses to the utmost, ever urged on by Colina, who could not know what might be behind them. But she knew they rode the best horses to be had at Enterprise.

They reached the Kakisa River on the third day without any surprise from the rear.

They found that the main body of the Kakisas had been brought back to their village here, where they were pursuing their usual avocations under the eye of the police encamped on the terrace around the shack.

Colina immediately addressed herself to the police headquarters.

She had remarked Sergeant Plaskett on his arrival at Fort Enterprise, a typical mounted policeman, and a fine figure of a man to boot—tall, lean, deep-chested, deep-eyed—a dependable man.

She approached him with confidence. The sight of her astonished, confused, and charmed him, as she meant it should. He was only a man.

But as she told her story he stiffened into the policeman. "Sorry," he said uncomfortably. "I have explicit orders from Inspector Egerton not to allow any communication between these people here and the other branches of the tribe."

"Why not?" asked Colina.

Plaskett shrugged deprecatingly. "Not for me to say. I can guess, perhaps. It's not possible to lock them all up, but these people are under arrest just the same. I must keep the disaffected from mingling with the loyal."

"That's all right," said Colina, "but you can give me a policeman to go up the river with me and make a search."

He shook his head regretfully but firmly. "Inspector Egerton ordered me to leave the up-river people alone," he said. "The coming of a policeman would throw them into excitement. No one can say what they might do. I can't take the responsibility."

Colina shrugged. "Then the Grampierres and I must go by ourselves," she said.

Plaskett became even stiffer and more uncomfortable. "Germain Grampierre and his brother had no business to leave home," he said.

"By their own confessions they are implicated in the raid on the Company's flour-mill. They were told that if they remained at home they would not be molested. But if they attempted to escape they would immediately be arrested."

"They're not trying to escape!" cried Colina.

"I don't believe they are," said Plaskett. "But I've got to send them home. Orders are orders."



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But this was not the kind of argument to use with a young woman whose blood is up.

"Don't you recognize anything but orders?" she cried. "Inspector Egerton is hundreds of miles away by this time. Are you going to wait for his orders before you act?"

Plaskett's position was not an enviable one. "When anything new comes up I have to act for myself," he explained stiffly. "The story about this girl is not new. During the past week I have examined every principal man in the tribe and many of the women.

"I have not found any clue to the existence of such a person. Moreover, every man has testified in unmistakable signs that Ambrose Doane was not only at large while he was with them, but that he directed all their movements."

"They have been told that by saying this they can save themselves," said Colina.

"Possibly," said Plaskett, "but I cannot believe that among so many there is not one who would betray himself."

For half an hour they had it out, back and forth, without making any progress. Plaskett used all of a man's arguments to persuade her to return to Enterprise.

Colina, seeing that she was getting nowhere, finally feigned to submit. She obtained his permission to go among the Indians by herself in the hope that they might tell her something they were afraid to tell the police.

Accompanied by Cora she went from teepee to teepee. The Kakisas showed themselves awed by her condescension, but still they were uncommunicative.

She was Gaviller's daughter. The place of honor by the fire was made for her, tea hastily warmed up, and doubtful Indian delicacies produced. But she learned nothing.

At any mention of the names Ambrose Doane or Nesis a subtle, walled look crept into their eyes, and they became unaccountably stupid.

She was about to give up this line of inquiry when, at a little distance from the nearest teepee, she came upon a girl engaged in dressing a moose-hide stretched upon a great frame. There were no other Indians near. Colina resolved upon a last attempt.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

MARYA.

Colina drew near the girl, pausing as if casually interested in her work. She was a fat girl, with a peculiarly good-humored expression, and evinced no awe at Colina's approach, but unaffected delight.

Colina obeyed an inward suggestion, sent Cora back to the Grampierres, and sat down beside Marya, determined to take plenty of time to establish friendly relations.

This was not difficult. The plump, copper-skinned maiden was overjoyed by the opportunity to examine anything so wonderful as a white girl at close range.

No part of Colina's person or attire escaped her scrutiny. Marya stroked her with a soft crooning. The fastidious Colina bore it, smiling. At the throat of her waist Colina was wearing a topaz-pin, to which the Indian girl's eyes ever returned, dazzled.

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Colina finally took it off, and pinned it in Marya's cotton dress. Marya gave way to an extravagant pantomime of joy. Bowing her head, she seized Colina's hand, and pressed it to her forehead.

Meanwhile they exchanged such simple remarks as lent themselves to the medium of signs. Colina finally ventured to pronounce the name "Nesis" at the same time asking by a sign which included the teepees if she was there.

Marya looked startled. She hesitated, but Colina's hold was now strong upon her. She shook her head. First glancing cautiously around to make sure they were not observed, she nodded in the direction of up river.

By simple signs she told Colina that Nesis was in a village (crossed fingers for teepees) beside a lake (a wide sweep, and an agitated, flattened hand for shimmering water), and that it could be reached by a journey with one sleep upon the way. (Here she paddled an imaginary canoe, stopped, closed her eyes, inclined her head on her shoulder and held up one finger.)

Colina, overjoyed, proceeded to further question. In the same graphic, simple way she learned the story of Ambrose's imprisonment and how Nesis got him out.

"Come!" she cried, extending her hand. "We'll see what Sergeant Plaskett has to say to this!"

But when Marya understood that she was expected to repeat her story to the policeman, a frantic, stubborn terror took possession of her. She gave Colina to understand in no uncertain signs that the Indians would kill her if she told the secret.

Colina, taking into account the pains they had gone to to keep it, could not deny the danger. She finally asked Marya if she would take her, Colina, to the place where Nesis was.

Marya, terrified, positively refused.

Pulling off her gauntlet, Colina displayed to Marya a ring set with a gleaming opal. It was Marya's she let her understand, if she would serve her.

Marya's eyes sickened with desire. She wavered—but finally refused with a little moan. Terror was stronger than cupidity.

Colina debated with herself. She asked Marya if the way to go was by paddling.

Marya shook her head. She gave Colina to understand that the canoes were all tied up together and watched by the police. She signed that the Kakisas had a few horses up the river a little way that the police did not know about.

They stole out of camp at dawn, caught a horse and rode up the river. Evidently there was regular travel between the two villages. Colina, thinking of the policeman's confident belief that he had intercepted all communications, smiled.

Colina finally asked if Marya would put her on the trail to the other village—in exchange for the ring. Marya, after a struggle with her fears, consented, stipulating that they must start before dark.

Colina understood from her signs that the biggest opal ever mined would not tempt Marya to wander in the bush after dark.

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Colina did some rapid thinking. She doubted whether Germain Grampierre after having been warned by the police would go with her to the other village.

She quickly decided that she didn't want him with her anyway, worthy, stupid fellow that he was. Yet he had constituted himself her protector, and he would hardly let her go without him. It did not promise to be easy to hoodwink both Plaskett and Grampierre.

What she was going to do when she found Nesis, Colina did not stop to consider. The thing to do was to find the girl, and trust to pluck and mother wit for the rest.

Colina finally thought she saw her way clear. She asked Marya if she would meet her in an hour on the Enterprise trail outside of camp. It was now three o'clock.

Marya, with her eyes upon the opal, nodded. She gave Colina to understand that she would be waiting at a place where the trail crossed a stream, and climbed to a little prairie with thick bushes around it.

Leaving Marya, Colina returned to the police tents. Climbing the hill, she had the satisfaction upon looking back to see that the Indian girl had foresaken her moose-hide.

The edge of the bush was near her: it would not be hard for her to lose herself. Simulating an air of discouragement, Colina told Sergeant Plaskett she had learned nothing and signified her willingness to return to Enterprise.

"I'd start at once," she said suggestively, "but my horses are tired."

Plaskett was greatly relieved. "I'll furnish you with fresh horses," he said instantly. "Let your horses stay here and rest up. I'll send them in with the first patrol, and you can then return mine."

This was what Colina desired. She smiled on the policeman dazzlingly.

Plaskett sent a trooper for the horses, and himself escorted Colina back to the spot at the foot of the hill where she had ordered the Grampierres and Cora to wait for her.

She told Germain the same story. The half-breed who had been interviewed by Plaskett in the meantime, was delighted by her resolve to return. He instantly set to work to pack up.

In less than half an hour they started for home. As they mounted the hill, Plaskett gallantly waved his cap from below. The bush swallowed them. Colina was thinking: "What shall I do if she is afraid, and doesn't come?"

However, less than a mile from the river, they forded a little brook, climbed a shallow hill, and there, true to her agreement, waited Marya, standing like a statue beside the trail.



Colina, making believe to be greatly astonished, dismounted, and drew her apart. Marya, understanding from her glance of intelligence that the others were not in the secret, gesticulated vividly for their benefit.

“She tells me she knows where Nesis is hidden,” Colina said to Germain. “She says she will take me there.”

“We will go back,” said Germain.

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Colina shook her head. "No need for you to come back," she said. "It will only anger the policeman. You and Georges go on home. I will get a policeman to go with me."

Germain protested, but his secret desire was to obey the sergeant's orders, and Colina had no difficulty in persuading him.

A division of the baggage was made on the spot, and they parted. The Grampierres continued toward Enterprise, and the three girls turned back.

Colina breathed more freely. Plaskett now believed that she had gone home with Germain, and Germain believed she had gone back to Plaskett.

Marya had mounted on their pack-horse. They had not gone far in the trail, when she signified that they were to strike off to the left.

Colina pulled up. "Cora," she said, "it's not true that I am going to get help from the police. I mean to go myself to the other Indian village to get the girl I want. You don't have to come. You can ride after Germain, and tell him I decided I didn't need you."

"I go wit' you," Cora said stolidly.

Colina beamed on her handmaiden, and offered her her hand. She was willing to face the thing alone, but it was a comfort to have the stolid dependable Cora at her side. Moreover, Cora was an admirable cook and packer. Colina was not enamored of the drudgery of camp.

Marya led the way slowly through the trackless bush in the general direction of the afternoon sun, or southwest. Colina guessed that they were making a wide detour around the Indian village.

The going was not too difficult, for it was only second growth timber, poplar and birch, with spruce in the hollows. The original monarchs had been consumed by fire many years before.

They had covered, Colina guessed, about five miles when the sky showed ahead through the tree trunks, and Marya signed that they were to dismount and tie the horses. Leading them to the edge of the trees, she made them lie down.

They found themselves overlooking a grassy bottom similar to that upon which the Kakisa village stood. The outer edge of the meadow was skirted by the brown flood of the river, and trees hemmed it in on either side. A score of Indian ponies were feeding in the grass.

Marya made Colina understand that the trail to Kakisa Lake traversed the little plain below alongside the river. She signified that some men were expected from the upper

village that day, and that Colina must wait where she was until she saw them pass below. Finally Marya pointed avidly to the opal ring.

Colina handed it over. The Indian girl slipped it on her own finger, gazing at the effect with a kind of incredulous delight. The stolid Cora looked on disapprovingly.

Suddenly Marya, without so much as a look at her companions, scrambled to her feet, and hastened silently away through the trees. She was clutching the ring finger with the other hand as if she feared to lose it, finger and all. That was the last of Marya.





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Sure enough before the sun went down, they saw a party of four Indians issue out on the little plain from the direction of up river. Crossing the grass and dismounting, they turned their horses out and cached their saddles under the willows.

Then they proceeded afoot. Colina waited until she was sure there were no more to follow; then mounting, she and Cora rode down to the trail.

### CHAPTER XXXVIII.

#### THE FINDING OF NESIS.

The afternoon was waning, and Colina, knowing she must have covered nearly sixty miles, began to keep a sharp lookout ahead. They had had no adventures by the way, except that of sleeping under the stars without male protectors near, in itself an adventure to Colina. Colina took it like everything else, as a matter of course.

Cora had been raised on the trail. In her impatience to arrive Colina had somewhat scamped her horses' rest, and the grass-fed beasts were tired.

Issuing from among the trees upon one of the now familiar grassy bottoms that bordered the river, they saw grazing horses and knew they were hard upon their destination.

A spur of the hills cut off the view up river. Rounding it, the teepees spread before them. They were contained in a semicircular hollow of the hills like an amphitheater, with the river running close beside.

Colina had decided that in boldness lay her best chance of success. Clapping heels to her horse's ribs, therefore, she rode smartly into the square, appearing in the very midst of the Indians before they were warned. This village differed in no important respect from the others. Some of the teepees were made of tanned hides in the old way. The people were of the same stock, but even less sophisticated. Few of these had even been to Fort Enterprise to trade.

The sudden appearance of Colina's white face affected them something in the way of a miracle.

Every man dropped what he was about and stared with hanging jaw. Others came running out of the teepees and stopped dead at the door. For a moment or two there was no movement whatever in the square.

But they knew Gaviller's daughter by repute, of course, and the word was passed around that it was she. The tension relaxed. They slowly gathered around, looking at her with no friendly eye.

Colina searched rapidly among them for one that might answer to the description of Nesis. There was no girl that by any stretch of the imagination could have been called beautiful. Not wishing to give them time to spirit her away, Colina suddenly raised her voice and cried: "Nesis!"

There was no answer, but several heads in the crowd turned involuntarily toward a certain teepee. Colina, perceiving the movement, wheeled her horse and loped across the square in that direction.

Cora followed, leading the pack-horse. The Indians sidled after. Approaching the teepee she had marked, Colina heard sounds of a muffled struggle inside. Flinging herself off her horse and throwing up the flap, she saw a figure on the ground, held down by several old crones.

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"Hands off!" cried Colina in a voice so sudden and peremptory that the old women, though the words meant nothing to them, obeyed.

Nesis, lithe and swift as a lynx, wriggled out of their grasp, sprang to her feet, and darted outside, all in a single movement, it seemed.

The two girls faced each other, Nesis panting and trembling. The same look of bitter curiosity was in each pair of eyes. Each acknowledged the other's beauty with a jealous twinge. But in the red girl's sad eyes there was no hope of rivalry. She soon cast down her lids.

Colina thought her eyes the saddest she had ever seen in a human face. She saw that there was little resemblance between her and her Kakisa sisters.

Nesis was as slender as a young aspen and her cheeks showed a clear olive pallor. Her lips were like the petals of a Jacqueminot rose. Colina, remembering that Ambrose had kissed them, turned a little hard.

"You are Nesis?" she asked, though she knew it well.

The girl nodded without looking up.

"You know Ambrose Doane?"

Again the mute nod.

"Will you come with me to testify for him?"

Nesis looked up blankly.

"I mean," explained Colina, "will you come and tell his judges that he did not lead the Kakisas into trouble?"

Nesis, by vivid signs, informed Colina that Ambrose had been a prisoner among the Indians.

It occurred to Colina as strange, since she could understand English, that she should use signs. "I know he was a prisoner," she said. "Will you come with me and tell the police that?"

Nesis turned and with a despairing gesture called Colina's attention to the gathering Indians who would prevent her. Not a sound issued from her lips.

"Never mind them," said Colina scornfully. "Are you willing to come?"

Nesis lifted her eyes to Colina's—eyes luminous with eagerness and emotion—and quickly nodded again.

“Why doesn’t she speak!” thought Colina. Aloud she said: “All right. Tell them I am going to take you. Tell them anybody that interferes does so at his peril.” She pointed to her rifle.

To Colina’s astonishment, the girl lowered her head and flung an arm up over her face.

“What’s the matter?” she cried. “I’ll take care of you.” She drew the arm down. “Speak to them!” she said again.

Nesis slowly raised her head. Her eyes crept to Colina’s, humble and unspeakably mournful. She opened her mouth and pointed within.

Colina looked—and sickened. A little cry of utter horror was forced from her, and she fell back a step. She saw why Nesis did not speak. The disclosure was too sudden and dreadful.

For the first and last time during that hazardous enterprise her strong spirit failed. She became as pale as snow and her hands flew to her breast. Cora, watching her, slipped out of the saddle and glided to her aid.

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The weakness was momentary. Before Cora got to her the color came winging back into Colina's cheeks. She thrust the half-breed girl from her and, striding forward, faced the assembled Indians with blazing eyes.

"You cowards!" she cried ringingly. "You pitiful, unmanly brutes! I don't know which one of you did it. It doesn't matter. You all permitted it. You shall all suffer for it. I promise you that!"

Under the whips of her eyes and voice they cringed and scowled.

Colina thrust her riding-crop into the hands of Nesis. "Get on that horse," she commanded, pointing to the pack-animal. "Mount!" she cried to Cora.

Meanwhile, from her own saddle she was hastily unfastening her rifle. She resolutely threw the lever over and back. At the ominous sound the Indians edged behind each other or sought cover behind convenient teepees.

Nesis and Cora were mounted. Colina, keeping her eyes on the Indians, said to them: "Go ahead. Walk your horses. I'll follow." She swung herself into her own saddle.

Cora and Nesis started slowly out of the square. Colina followed, swinging sidewise in her saddle and watching the Indians behind.

None offered to follow directly, but Colina observed that those who had disappeared around the teepees were catching horses beyond. Others running out of the square on the other side had disappeared around the spur of the hill.

Plainly they did not mean to let her take Nesis unopposed.

The girls finally issued from among the teepees and extended their horses into a trot. Cora rode first, her stolid face unchanged; from moment to moment she looked over her shoulder to make sure that Colina was safe. Nesis, blinded with tears, let her horse follow unguided, and Colina brought up the rear.

Colina's face showed the fighting look, intent and resolute. Her brain was too busy to dwell on tragedy then.

Rounding the hill, she saw that those who had gone ahead had disappeared. The horses that had been grazing here were likewise gone.

It was not pleasant to consider the possibility of an ambush waiting in the woods ahead. Other Indians began to appear in pursuit around the hill.

Seeing the girls, they pulled in their horses and came on more slowly. Colina, wishing to see what they would do, drew her horse to a walk, whereupon the Indians likewise walked their horses.

Evidently they meant to stalk the girls at their leisure.

Colina, like a brave and hard-pressed general, considered the situation from every angle without minimizing the danger. She had really nothing but a moral weapon to use against the Indians. If that failed her, then what?

Night was drawing on, and it would be difficult to intimidate them with eyes and voice after dark. Moreover, her horses were fatigued to the point of exhaustion. How could she turn them loose to rest and graze with enemies both in the front and the rear?

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She knew that a favorite Indian stratagem is to stampede the adversaries' horses after dark. Colina carried the only gun in their little party.

Striking into the woods out of sight of their pursuers, they urged their horses to the best that was in them. Colina bethought herself of profiting by Nesis's experience.

"Nesis," she called, "you know these people! What should we do?"

Nesis, rousing herself and turning her dreadfully eloquent eyes upon Colina, signified that they must ride on for the present. When the sun went down she would tell what to do.

For an hour thereafter they rode without speaking.

While it was still light they came out on another meadow. Nesis signed to Colina that they should halt at the edge of the trees on the other side, and, picketing the horses, let them graze for a little while.

It was done. The horses had to feed and rest, and this looked like as good a place as any. Meanwhile Cora built a fire and cooked their supper as unconcerned as if it were a picnic party an hour's ride from home.

They had no sooner dismounted than the Indians appeared out of the woods at the other side of the meadow. Seeing the girls, they likewise dismounted without coming any closer, and built a great fire.

About a quarter of a mile separated the two fires. It grew dark. Colina sat out of range of the firelight, watching the other fire.

Nesis took the gun and went on up the trail to guard against the surprise from that side. Cora kept an eye upon the dim shapes of the tethered horses, and watched her mistress with sullen, doglike devotion.

After an hour and a half Nesis returned, and signing to Cora to saddle the horses, made a reconnaissance across the meadow.

Coming back to the fire presently, she indicated to Colina that they were not watched from that side, and that they should now ride on.

Evidently the Indians thinking they had them trapped in the trail were careless. Indians are not fond of scout duty in the dark in any case.

They softly made ready, taking care not to let the firelight betray their activities. Nesis's last act was to heap fresh wood on the fire. Colina, approving all she did was glad to let her run things. She could not guess how she purposed evading the Indians in front.

They mounted, and proceeded into the woods, walking their horses slowly. Colina could not make out the trail, but her horse could.

Nesis led the way. They climbed a little hill and descended the other side. At the bottom the trail was bisected by a shallow stream making its way over a stony bed to the river.

Halting her horse in the middle of it, Nesis allowed Colina to approach, and pointed out to her that they must turn to the right here, and let their horses walk in the water to avoid leaving tracks.

For more than an hour they made a painfully slow journey among the stones. The intelligent horses picked their way with noses close to the ground.



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They were now between the steep high banks of a coulee. The trees gradually thinned out, and a wide swath of the starry sky showed overhead. Colina's heart rose steadily.

The Indians could not possibly find the place where they had left the trail until daylight.

They would instantly understand their own stratagem, of course, but they must lose still more time, searching the bed of the creek for tracks leaving it. If only the horses had been fresher!

Finally Nesis left the bed of the creek, and urged her horse obliquely up the steep side of the coulee on the left.

This was the side farther from the lower village, and the Enterprise trail, and Colina wondered if she had not made a mistake.

Mounting over the rim of the coulee a superb night-view was open to them. Before them rolled the bald prairie wide as the sea, with all the stars of heaven piercing the black dome overhead.

It was still and frosty; the horses breathed smoke. To Colina's nostrils rose the delicate smell of the rich buffalo grass, which cures itself as it grows. The tired horses, excited by it, pawed the earth, and pulled at the lines.

They halted, and Nesis turned her face up, fixing their position by the stars. She finally pointed to the southeast. Colina knew it was southeast because when she faced in that direction the north star, friend of every traveler by night, was over her left shoulder.

"But the Kakisa village, the trail back to Enterprise is there," she objected, pointing northeast.

Nesis nodded. With her graceful and speaking gestures she informed Colina that all the country that way was covered with almost impenetrable woods through which they could not ride without a trail.

Southeast, the prairie rolled smoothly all the way to the great river that came from the distant high mountains.

"The spirit river?" asked Colina.

Nesis nodded, adding in dumb-show that when they reached its banks they would make a raft and float down to Fort Enterprise.

"Good!" said Colina. "Let's ride on. The moon will be up later. We'll camp by the first water that we come to."

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### THE TRIAL.

Mr. Wilfred Pascoe, K.C., arose and cleared his throat musically. He drew out his handkerchief, polished his glasses, returned the handkerchief, and paused suggestively.

Mr. Pascoe was assured that he was the leading attraction at the trial of Ambrose Doane, and that the humming crowd which filled every corner of the court-room had come for the express purpose of hearing him, the famous advocate from the East, sum up for the crown.

Indeed, in his opinion, there was no one else in the case. Denholm for the defense was a sharp and clever lad, but a mere lad! As for the judge—well one knows these judges in the outlying provinces!

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The people of Prince George did not often get a chance to listen to a man like him, therefore he wished to give them the worth of their money.

He was a dignified, ruddy little gentleman, clad in a well turned cutaway that fell from his highly convex middle like the wings of a pouter pigeon.

“My lord and gentlemen of the jury,” he began in a voice of insinuating modesty and sweetness, “in this room during the past four days we have witnessed the unfolding of an extraordinary drama.

“Through all the criminal annals of this country we may search in vain for a precedent to this case. In the past we have had to try Indians and half-breeds for rebelling against the government.

“In such cases punishment was always tempered with mercy; we were in the position of a parent chastising his child.

“Here we are faced by a different situation. Here we have a white man, one of our own race charged with inciting and leading the natives to rebel against authority. By tongue and deed he strove to unloosen the passions of hell to his own profit!

“Every man of middle age in this Western country knows what Indian warfare means. The flesh crawls at the picture of shrieking, painted demons that is called up, the flames, the tortures, the dishonored homes—gentlemen, it—it is difficult for me to speak of this matter with a becoming restraint.

“When we come to examine the evidence we are faced by a well-nigh inextricable confusion. But, gentlemen, the main issue is clear.

“We see the prisoner having made his first false step drawn by inevitable succession deeper and deeper into the quicksands of passion and violence. Out of the mass of details I ask you to choose three facts which in themselves constitute a strong presumptive case.

“First, the trouble at Fort Enterprise—that pleasant little Eden of the far north, invaded, alas! by the serpent—the beginning of the trouble I say was exactly coincident with the arrival of Ambrose Doane.

“Second, in every scene of violence that followed we find him a leading figure. Third, all trouble ceased upon his arrest.

“Let us glance in passing at the first act of lawlessness, the seizing of the Company’s mill. The prisoner admits that he forcibly broke into the mill, hoping, no doubt, that by confessing the minor offense he may persuade you to believe him when he denies the greater. This is a very ancient expedient of accused persons.



“He ground his grain and carried it back to the Indians, and they stored it in an empty shack across the river. This is conceded by both sides.

“On the following night during the progress of a barbaric dance among the Kakisas, at which the prisoner was a guest—an honored guest, remember—an alarm of fire was given.

“Upon running to the scene they found the shack in flames. It was completely destroyed, together with its contents.



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"Now, gentlemen, this is one of the mysteries of the case. No evidence has been adduced to show who set that fire. Its suddenness and violence precludes the possibility of its having caught by accident. It was set, but who set it?"

"We are reduced to mere speculation here. Was it any one connected with the Company? No! They had thousands of dollars' worth of unprotected goods across the river; they were a mere handful, and the Indians three hundred. It isn't reasonable.

"Well, then, did any of the Indians set it? Why should they? It was their flour; they had receipted for it. Lastly, did Ambrose Doane do it, or have it done? Ah! Let us look for possible motives.

"He was a trader, remember. It had been so easy for him to secure the first lot; perhaps he wanted to sell them another lot. The simple Indians, of course, would be persuaded that the incendiary came from across the river—"

Mr. Denholm rose. "I object," he said. "My eminent friend has no right to suggest such ideas to the jury. There is no evidence—"

Mr. Pascoe beamed upon his young opponent. "Counsel overlooks the fact," he said gently, "that I expressly stated this was mere speculation on my part."

"Overruled," murmured the judge.

Mr. Pascoe resumed: "As to what followed there are several versions. The prisoner says that he pleaded with the Indians, and tried to keep them from crossing the river. Simon Grampierre corroborates this; but Grampierre, you must remember, is the prisoner's self-confessed accomplice in the seizure of the flour-mill.

"Still, he may be telling the truth. Grampierre was not with Doane all the time. It is highly probable that the prisoner, seeking to impress Grampierre, pleaded with the Indians in his hearing. The Indians couldn't understand English, anyway.

"Watusk testified that he had a conversation with the prisoner during the fire, but the confusion was so great he cannot remember what was said. This is very natural.

"Myengeen, Tatateecha, and the other Indians who testified said that the prisoner did harangue them, and that they understood from his gestures that he was urging them to cross the river and revenge themselves.

"All say it was from him that they first heard Gaviller's name. I don't think we need look any further.

"Anyhow, the prisoner led the mob down to the beach where his yolk-boat was lying, and they all embarked in his boat. He says he tried to keep them out, but he does not

deny crossing with them. Hardly likely they would take him as a passenger, is it, if he had fought them so strenuously?

“On what took place in John Gaviller’s house that night I will touch very briefly. It was a ghastly night for the little company of defenders! We have no eye-witness to the prisoner’s dastardly attack on Mr. Gaviller. Mr. Strange, through the most praiseworthy motives, has refused to testify against him.

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“Mr. Strange takes the ground that since he is obliged to act as interpreter in this case, no other being obtainable, it would be improper for him to give evidence.

“In the light of the prisoner’s impudent charge against Mr. Strange, the latter’s conduct is truly magnanimous. The charge that Strange tried to murder his employer is simply laughable. Twenty-nine years of faithful service give it the lie.

“A great point has been made by the defense that the prisoner had no motive in attempting to kill Mr. Gaviller. Gentlemen, he had the same motive that has inspired every murder in history—hate!

“There is any amount of testimony to show with what hatred the prisoner always spoke of Mr. Gaviller. Gaviller was his business rival, his rich and successful rival. Gaviller was the head and front of the powers that opposed his headstrong will. I repeat, it is hate and opportunity that make a murder.

“Mr. Gaviller was prostrated with weakness. How simple to creep up-stairs in the dark and finish what the other coward’s bullet had almost accomplished! And how impossible to prove that it was a murder! Mr. Gaviller’s vitality was so low that night, the doctor has testified, that he himself would not have suspected foul play if he had found him dead in the morning.

“When they arrested Doane in the house the gun they took from him was one that had been stolen from the Company store earlier in the night. Remember that.

“At daylight the Indians came and made a demand on the defenders of the house for their leader, Ambrose Doane. They threatened to burn the house down if he was not given up to them. They welcomed him with extravagant expressions of joy.

“This is positive evidence, gentlemen. Those in the house saw the prisoner give an order to bear away the dead bodies, and the order was obeyed. Such little facts are highly significant.

“Watusk’s evidence makes the next link. I do not attempt to justify this unfortunate man, gentlemen. At least he is contrite, and throws himself on the mercy of the court. Watusk says when they came back across the river the Indians were sorry for what they had done and terrified of punishment.

“Watusk urged them to return what they had stolen. He had taken no part in the looting of the store. But Ambrose Doane would have none of it. He persuaded Watusk to give the order to break camp and fly back to the Kakisa River. Doane promised the bewildered Indian that he would make good terms for the offenders with the police when they came.

“Doane’s contention that he was a prisoner among the Kakisas is unsupported. Watusk and five other Indians have sworn that not only was he free to come and go as he chose, but that he directed their movements.

“As to the prisoner’s story of the Indian girl, ah—a touching story, gentlemen!” Mr. Pascoe paused for a comfortable, silent little laugh. He wiped his eyes. “Almost worthy of one of our popular romancers!



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“Not very original perhaps, the beautiful Indian maid falling a victim to the charms of the pale-faced prisoner, whispering to him at night through a chink in his prison wall, and smuggling a knife to assist his escape!

“Not very original, I say; is it possible he could have read it somewhere, adding a few little touches of his own? Unfortunately, our story-teller in his desire for artistic verisimilitude has overreached himself.

“That touch about Nesis—if that is what he called her, being the fourth wife of Watusk. Why fourth? one wonders. You have heard Lona testify that she was Watusk’s one and only wife. She ought to know. I fancy I need say no more about that.

“Next comes Inspector Egerton. The inspector testifies that the trap set for his men in the hills north of the Kakisa River was of an ingenuity far beyond the compass of the Indian imagination. You have seen a plan of it. You have heard these simple, ignorant red men testify here. Could they have made such a plan? Impossible!

“Gentlemen, I ask you to consider the situation on that fair morning in September when the gallant little band of redcoats rode into that hellishly planned trap. The heart quails at the imminence of their peril!

“That a horrible tragedy was by a miracle averted is no credit to this prisoner. That, instead of being the most execrated murderer in the history of our land, he is only on trial for a felony he has not himself to thank. He has to thank the Merciful Providence on High who caused the red man’s heart to relent at the critical moment!

“Watusk could not give the order to shoot. You have heard the policemen testify that the prisoner was furious at the Indian’s pusillanimity. I say it was a God-sent pusillanimity!

“Our merciful law makes a distinction between successful and unsuccessful crimes, though there is no difference in the criminal. He is lucky! Gentlemen, all that justice demands of you is that you should find him guilty of treason-felony!”

Mr. Pascoe sat down and blew his nose with loud, conscious modesty. The jury looked pleased and flattered. An excited murmur traveled about the courtroom, and the judge picked up his gavel to suppress threatened applause.

There could be no doubt as to the way popular opinion tended in this trial. Though the applause was stopped before it began, one could feel the crowd’s animus against the prisoner no less than if they had shouted “Hang him!” with one voice.

They believed that he had plotted against the popular idols, the mounted police; that was enough.

The prisoner sat at a table beside his counsel with his chin in his palm. He was well dressed and groomed—Denholm saw to that—and his face composed, though very pale; the eyes lusterless.

Throughout Mr. Pascoe's arraignment he scarcely moved, nor appeared to pay more than cursory attention.

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It is the characteristic picture of a prisoner on trial; guilty or innocent makes little difference on the surface. Nature, when we have reached the limit of endurance, lends us apathy.

Ambrose had suffered so much he was dulled to suffering. He had not a friend in the court-room except Arthur Denholm. Peter Minot, after making a deposition in his favor, had been obliged to hasten north to look after their endangered business.

There were others who would have been glad to support him, but he would not call on them. Indeed what he most dreaded were the occasional testimonials of sympathy which reached him. Friendliness unmanned him.

The other way in which his ordeal made itself felt was in his great longing to have it over with. He looked forward to the cell which he believed awaited him as to relief. There at least he would be safe from the hard, inquisitive eyes which empaled him.

Meanwhile, as they argued back and forth and his fate hung in the balance, he found himself staring at the patch of pale winter sky which showed in the tall window. The air was clean up there. The sky was a noble, empty place unpolluted by foul breath and villainy and lies!

When Denholm arose to speak for the prisoner, the jury regarded him with curiosity tempered by pity. They liked Denholm, liked his resourcefulness, his unassailable good-humor, his gallant struggle on behalf of a bad cause. Plainly they were wondering what he could say for his client now.

If Denholm felt that his case was hopeless, he gave no sign of it. He was frank, unassuming, friendly with the jury. His style of delivery was conversational.

"I will be brief," he said. "I do not mean to take you over the evidence again. Every detail must be more than familiar to you.

"What my learned friend has just said to you, what I say to you now, and what his lordship will presently say to you from the bench all amounts to the same thing—choose for yourselves what you are to believe. Somewhere in this jungle of contradictions lurks the truth. It is for you to track it down.

"The prisoner's case stands or falls by his own testimony. We have an instinct that warns us to disregard what a man says in his own defense. In this case we cannot disregard it. I ask you not to consider it as evidence against the prisoner that he has no witnesses.

"If we go over the story in our minds, we will see that under the conditions of these happenings he could not have witnesses. Therefore, if we wish to do justice, we must weigh his own story.

“Never mind the details now, but consider his attitude in telling it. For an entire session of the court he sat in the witness chair telling us with the most painstaking detail everything that happened from the time of his first arrival at Fort Enterprise up to his arrest.

“During the whole of the following day he was on the stand under a perfect fusillade of questions from my learned friend, admittedly the most brilliant cross-examiner at the bar. He did not succeed in shaking the prisoner’s story in any important particular.

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“How, I ask you, could the prisoner have foreseen and prepared for all those ingenious traps formulated in the resourceful brain of my learned friend, unless he was telling the simple truth?”

“Moreover, the gaps, the inconsistencies, the improbabilities in the story which my friend has pointed out, to my mind these are the strongest evidences of its truth. For if he had made it all up he would be logical. Man’s brain works that way.

“Suppose for the sake of argument that the prisoner did accomplish that miracle; that in his brain he formulated a story so complete in every ramification that nine hours’ cross-examination could batter no holes in it.

“If that is true, it is a wonderful brain, isn’t it? The prisoner, in short, is an amazingly clever young man. Now, can you imagine a man with even the rudiments of good sense persuading himself that he could make a successful Indian uprising at this date? There is a serious—”

Denholm was stopped by a commotion that arose outside the door of the court-room. There was a great throng in the corridor as well. He looked to the bench for aid.

His lordship rapped smartly with his gavel. “Silence!” he cried, “or I will have the room cleared!”

But the noise came nearer.

“Officer, what is the trouble outside?” demanded the bench.

The two doorkeepers with great hands were pressing back a threatened irruption from the corridor. One spoke over his shoulder.

“If you please, sir, there’s a young woman here says she has evidence to give in this case.”

## CHAPTER XL.

### AN UNEXPECTED WITNESS.

Those in the court-room jumped up and looked toward the door, and the confusion was redoubled. Several policemen hurried to the assistance of the doorkeepers. The judge rapped in vain.

Finally one of the doorkeepers made his voice heard above the scuffling:

“She says her name is Colina Gaviller.”

A profound sensation was created within the court. The confusion was stilled as by magic. All those inside turned back to look at the young prisoner.

He had leaped to his feet, and stood gazing toward the door with a wild, white, awakened face. Denholm had a restraining hand on his shoulder. John Gaviller, Gordon Strange, Inspector Egerton; there was no man connected with the case but betrayed something of the same agitation.

“Admit Miss Gaviller,” commanded the judge.

The two policemen, with herculean exertions, made an opening in the crowd for Colina and two companions to enter and kept every one else out. The doors were then closed.

At Colina’s appearance an odd murmur rippled over the crowd. Her beauty astonished them. She walked down the aisle of the court-room, pale, erect, and self-controlled. Captain Stinson and Cora followed her.

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The crowd observed her movements with breathless attention.

All three were admitted within the rail. John Gaviller sat near the gate. He looked somewhat dazed. They saw her offer him her hand with a swift smile, charged with meaning.

The gentlemanly half-breed, Gordon Strange, leaned forward, seeking to attract her attention with an eager smile. Him she ignored. She turned to the prisoner. This was what the crowd was waiting for.

The pale youth and the pale girl had all the look of the principal actors in a drama. What was between them? They saw her smile at him, too—an extraordinary smile, sorrowful, solicitous, cheery. None could interpret it.

Ambrose was engaged in a desperate struggle to command himself. At the announcement of her coming hope had sprung up, only to receive a deadlier wound at the first glimpse of her.

She had not found Nesis; very well, it was all up with him. What matter how dearly Colina loved him if he had to go to jail? He saw the cheer she offered him in her smile, but he rejected it.

“Nothing can help me now,” he stubbornly insisted. “If I let myself hope, the disappointment will drive me insane.” He fought to recover his apathy.

Pascoe and Denholm each sprang up to greet the new witness as if by the warmth of his welcome she would be attracted to his side.

“One moment, gentlemen,” said the judge. He addressed Colina, “You have evidence to give in this case?”

Colina gravely inclined her head.

His lordship frowned. “This is very irregular. I must ask you why you have delayed until this moment?”

“I have just arrived in town,” said Colina.

“Couldn’t you have communicated with counsel?”

“I have come from the north. There was no way of sending out a message ahead. I am the first one out since the freeze-up.”

The judge nodded to show himself satisfied. “Is the evidence you have to give favorable to the prisoner or unfavorable?”

The court-room held its breath for her answer.

“Favorable,” she murmured.

John Gaviller looked up astonished.

The judge gave her over to Denholm. “Will you examine?” he asked.

Denholm consulted with his client. Ambrose, up to this moment so indifferent to the lawyers, could be seen giving him positive instructions. Denholm expostulated with him. The bench showed symptoms of impatience. Finally Denholm rose.

“My lord,” he said. “I have never seen Miss Gaviller before this moment. I have no inkling of the nature of her evidence. Left to myself, I should ask for an adjournment; surely we are entitled to it. But my client insists on going ahead. My lord”—his voice shook a little—“none but an innocent man could be so rash!”

“Never mind that,” rebuked the judge. He was distinctly nettled by the upset of court decorum.



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"I will therefore respectfully ask the indulgence of the court," Denholm went on, "and move to reopen the taking of testimony."

"Proceed," said the judge.

A court attendant led Colina to the witness stand. She was sworn. Judge, lawyers, and spectators alike searched her grave, composed face for some suggestion of what she had to say. Nothing was to be read there.

"Miss Gaviller," said Denholm, "I can only ask you to tell in your own words all that you know bearing on the offenses with which Ambrose Doane is charged."

"My father, Mr. Macfarlane, Dr. Giddings have all testified, I suppose," said Colina. "They can tell you as much or more than I can. I have come to tell you of things that happened after his arrest, after all the others went out of the country."

Every one connected with the case sat up. Denholm's eye brightened.

"Please go on," he said and sat down.

Colina, in a low, steady voice, commenced her story at the point where Ambrose had asked her to find some one to go in search of Nesis.

While she spoke her grave eyes were brooding over the prisoner's bent, dark head below. He dared not look at her. The court-room was so still that when she paused for a word one could hear the clock on the wall tick.

She told of her journey to the Kakisa River; her interview with Sergeant Plaskett (which provoked a smile); her search among the teepees; her encounter with Marya, and all that followed on that.

Without a trace of self-consciousness she told how she and Cora had set off at night on the unknown trail, and how she had ridden into the middle of the hostile village next day and demanded Nesis.

"Two girls to defy a whole tribe of redskins!"—the thought could be read in the jurymen's startled eyes.

The twelve men hung out of the box, listening with parted lips. All that had gone before in this startling trial was nothing to Colina's story.

When Colina came to her meeting with Nesis her brave port was shaken. Her voice began to tremble. She could not bring herself to name the dreadful thing. The judge, perceiving a stoppage in her story, interrupted her.



“Miss Gaviller, if the girl could understand you, why did she answer by signs?”

Colina lowered her head. Those near saw her struggling to control a shaken breast, saw two tears steal down her pale cheeks.

“Do you wish to be excused?” asked the judge solicitously.

She shook her head. “One moment,” she was understood to whisper.

An attendant handed up a glass of water.

She finally managed to produce her voice again. “She could not speak,” she said very low.

“Why?” asked the judge. One would have said the whole room breathed the question.

“They—had mutilated her,” whispered Colina. “Her—her tongue—was cut off.”

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A single low sound of horror was forced from the crowd. The prisoner half rose with a choking cry and collapsed with his head in his arms on the table.

Denholm, as pale as a sheet, flung an arm around his shoulders. Every man connected with the case stared before him as if he beheld the horror with his physical eyes. Colina's self-control escaped her entirely.

She covered her face with her hands and wept like any girl.

### CHAPTER XLI.

FROM DUMB LIPS.

The judge proposed an adjournment. The witness, the prisoner, the prisoner's counsel were all against it. It was decided to continue. A breath of relief escaped the spectators. Another day they might not be able to secure seats in the court-room.

Colina described how they gave their pursuers the slip and gained the prairie.

"We decided to make for the nearest point on the Spirit River," she went on, "and headed southeast. After we had ridden for two hours we came to a slough of fresh water, and camped for the rest of the night to let the horses feed and rest. Nesis and I could not sleep. We talked until morning.

"I asked her questions, and she would answer yes or no, or let me know by signs when I was on the wrong track. She was wonderfully clever in making up signs.

"As she made signs to me I interpreted them aloud, and she would nod or shake her head according to whether I was right or wrong. I had to try one question after another until I hit on the one she could answer. In this way little by little I built up her story.

"The next day we continued on the prairie. The sky was heavily overclouded, and there were flurries of snow. We were lost for several hours, until the sun came out again. Our food was almost gone, but I managed to shoot a rabbit.

"The horses were very tired. Whenever we stopped I talked to Nesis. We stayed up most of that night. It was too cold to sleep. By the end of the second day I knew everything she had to tell me."

Colina drank some water and went on. "Nesis's story begins a year ago. In the middle of the winter my father was accustomed to send Gordon Strange with an outfit to the Kakisa River to trade with the tribe and bring back the fur.

“While there he lived in a little log shack overlooking the Indian village. Nesis said it was Watusk’s custom to go up to the shack every night and the two men would talk. She knew that they talked English together, and she used to steal up after Watusk and listen outside through a chink between the logs.”

Every eye in the court-room was turned on Gordon Strange. The half-breed made marks with a pencil on a pad and tried to call up the old modest, deprecating smile. But an extraordinary ashy tint crept under his swarthy skin.

In spite of himself, his eyes darted furtively to measure the distance to the door. There were half a thousand people between; moreover, the doors were closed and guarded by six policemen.

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Colina carefully avoided glancing in Strange's direction.

"At that time Nesis had no idea of using what she learned from their talk," she went on. "She merely wished to hear English spoken, so that she would not forget what her father had taught her. Nesis attached a mysterious virtue to the ability to speak English. It was a kind of fetish with her.

"She believed that her father's ability to speak English had threatened Watusk's power in the tribe, and that Watusk, on that account, had had her father put out of the way. Therefore she kept it a secret that she could speak it, too.

"Nesis said that all of Mr. Strange's and Watusk's talk was against the white people. She said they used to discuss how the whites could be driven out of the country. She said that Mr. Strange used to tell Watusk about how Louis Riel fought the whites.

"He said that Louis Riel would be the king of this country to-day if he had not gone crazy. He used to ask Watusk how he would like to be a king. He used to flatter Watusk and tell him he was a great chief.

"He explained to Watusk how he could kill a whole army of the whites if he could lead them into the little valley beyond the Kakisa."

A gasp of astonishment escaped the court. In almost every sentence of Colina's there was the material of a fresh sensation.

Ambrose lifted his head, and a little color came back to his cheeks. Whether or not it saved him in the end, it was sweet to hear himself justified.

Colina continued: "Nesis said that Watusk often complained to Mr. Strange that my father was always making the goods dearer and the fur cheaper. Mr. Strange told him to wait a little while and he would see great changes.

"Pretty soon things would get so bad, he explained, that the Company would take John Gaviller away and make him the trader. He told Watusk to wait until the grain was thrashed next year, meaning last summer, and there would be great trouble.

"He said if Watusk did everything he told him he would make Watusk a great man. At different times he gave Watusk presents—silk handkerchiefs, finger rings, pistols, a sword. By and by he said he would make Watusk great presents.

"Nesis's story then jumped to the time, last summer, when Watusk and many of the people rode into Fort Enterprise to get flour," Colina went on. "In the mean time Ambrose Doane had been to Enterprise, and had gone away again to get an outfit.

“My father refused to give the Indians any flour because they had been trading with his competitor. The Indians were angry, Nesis said, and Watusk was scared. One night Gordon Strange came to see Watusk, and Nesis listened outside the teepee.

“She said Strange said to Watusk to let the Indians get mad. Strange said he wanted to have trouble. There was talk of burning the store then. Strange said that would fix John Gaviller, all right. He told Watusk that the police would let the people off easily because, as he said, my father had treated them so badly.”

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Colina drew a long breath to steady herself. "They talked about the chances of my father's dying," she went on. "He was very sick at that time. Mr. Strange suggested to Watusk that it wouldn't take much to finish him. They both laughed at that.

"He told Watusk that if John Gaviller died he, Strange, would settle all the trouble, and then the Company would make him the trader for good. He told Watusk that when he got to be trader he would soon fix Ambrose Doane, too.

"Mr. Strange was always telling Watusk to tell the Kakisas that my father hated them, but that he, Strange, was their friend.

"Nesis said that a couple of days after this Ambrose Doane came down the river, and after him his outfit on a raft. When Ambrose Doane heard that the Indians were hungry he took men and crossed the river and broke into the flour-mill and ground flour for them.

"This took two nights and a day. On the second night Gordon Strange came across to see Watusk again. Nesis said he was so angry that he started in talking without sending her out of the teepee. He had no idea, of course, that she could understand English. She made herself look stupid, she said.

"Mr. Strange was angry because, if the Indians got their flour and went back to the Kakisa River satisfied, all his plans would be spoiled. His attempt to create a rebellion among the half-breed farmers had already failed.

"Nesis said that Strange cursed Ambrose Doane for spoiling his plans. She said he told Watusk he must burn the flour, and then the Indians would surely make trouble. They talked about how to do it.

"It was arranged that Strange was to bring Watusk a big can of coal-oil: Watusk was to hide it under the floor of Gaston Trudeau's empty shack, and afterward store the flour there. Then Watusk was to give a big tea-dance to get all the people out of the way.

"Before going to the dance he was to pour oil over the bags, and leave the window open so Strange could fire it after he had gone."

Colina paused to take a drink of water. The judge whispered to a court attendant, who in turn whispered to a policeman. Thereafter the blue-coat's eyes never left Gordon Strange. The half-breed had lost all pretense of smiling.

He looked like a trapped animal. The court-room scarcely regarded him. They hung upon Colina's lips.

Every time she paused her listeners' pent-up breath escaped.



Colina went on: "At the tea-dance Nesis saw Ambrose Doane for the first time. She said she—" Colina lowered her eyes and sought for a word—"she liked him. After that she wanted to help him. When the alarm of fire was raised, and all ran to the burning building, Nesis kept near to Ambrose Doane and watched all that he did.

"She said she saw him go after Watusk, and heard him make Watusk tell the Indians not to be foolish, but go back to the teepees until morning. But Watusk spoke to them half-heartedly and they did not listen. It was Myengeen, Nesis said, who urged them to go across the river, and break into the store.





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"Nesis did not see what happened at the boat. The crowd was too great for her to get near. But next morning when they came back she heard Myengeen say to Watusk that Gordon Strange had sent word that they must tie Ambrose Doane up and carry him away.

"She said it was soon known throughout the tribe that if the police came everybody was to say that Ambrose Doane made all the trouble. She said he was tied up and carried away on a horse.

"When they all got to the Kakisa River a week later she found that he was imprisoned in Gordon Strange's house, and watched day and night."

So far the power of Colina's story had carried her hearers along breathlessly with her. Not until she reached this point did a very obvious question occur to the judge.

"One moment, Miss Gaviller," he said. "I presume you understand that this story would have more weight as evidence if the girl Nesis was produced in court. Can she be brought here?"

Once more Colina faltered—and steeled herself. Her eyes became misty, but she looked directly at the judge. "My Lord," she said simply, "she is dead."

## CHAPTER XLII.

### THE AVENGING OF NESIS.

His lordship started back thoroughly discomposed. "Really! Really!" he murmured helplessly. The prisoner hid his face in his arms again. An audible wave of compassion traveled over the room.

"Should I tell about that?" Colina asked quietly. The judge signified his assent.

"On the third morning on the prairie," Colina continued, "the Indians found us again. They had tracked us all the way from the Kakisa. They did not attack us, but followed about a quarter of a mile behind.

"There were about fifty of them. Whenever we stopped to rest or eat, they rode around us in a big circle yelling and firing their guns in the air—trying to break our nerve."

A gasp escaped her hearers at the picture she evoked—three women on the wide prairie, and a horde of yelling savages!

"I did not mind them so much," Colina went on simply, "for I was sure they were too cowardly to attack us. But our food was all gone by this time, and I could not leave the others to hunt for game. The horses were completely played out.

"At night we suffered from the cold. We could not make a fire because the light of it blinded us and showed us to the Indians. On the fourth night as we were trying to push on in the hope of losing them in the dark, the horse that Nesis was riding fell down and died in his tracks. After that we took turns walking.

"Next day they easily found us again. It was very cold, and we could scarcely keep going. In the afternoon we came to the edge of the bench of the Spirit River. It was a long way down to the bank.

"When we got there we saw that heavy ice was running in the river. We had to travel another mile along the bank before we saw enough dead timber in one place to make a raft. I was afraid we wouldn't have strength enough to move it. We hadn't eaten for two days.

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"It was still daylight, and we made a fire there. The Indians came and watched us from a little knoll, less than a quarter of a mile back.

"Cora took one of the remaining horses away and killed it, and brought back meat to the fire and we ate a little. I thought if we slept a little while we would be better able to start the raft. So Cora and I lay down while Nesis kept watch."

Colina's voice was shaking. She paused to steady it. "I was careful to choose a place out in the open," she went on. "We were in a grassy bottom beside the river.

"The nearest cover was a poplar bluff about three hundred yards back. He—he must have crawled down to that. I was awakened by a shot. They had got her!"

Colina's clenched hands were pressed close together, her head was down. The quiet voice broke out a little wildly.

"Ah! I have never, never ceased to blame myself! I should not have slept! I ought not to have let her watch! But I never thought they would dare shoot!"

Colina went on in a schooled voice more affecting than an outcry.

"Nesis was shot through the breast. I had nothing to give her. I stanchd the wound the best way I could.

"I saw at once that she could not live. Indeed, I prayed that she would not linger—in such pain. She lived throughout the night. She was conscious most of the time—and smiling. She died at daybreak.

"I do not know what happened after that. I gave out. It was Cora who saw the launch coming down the river, and signaled it with her petticoat. They landed and carried us aboard. I remember that.

"I wanted them to turn back and take us up to the crossing. But it was impossible to go against the current on account of the ice. They took us down to Fort Enterprise. We took Nesis. She is buried there.

"At Fort Enterprise we had to wait until the ice packed in the river, and enough snow fell to make a winter trail. Then we started with dog teams. I brought Captain Stinson and my servant, Cora Thomas, for additional witnesses. It is seven hundred miles. That is why we were so long."

Mr. Pascoe rose. His erstwhile ruddy cheeks showed an odd pallor under the purple veins, and he looked thoroughly disconcerted. "My Lord," he said, "this is a very affecting tale. It is, however, my painful duty to protest against its admission as evidence."

Colina interrupted him. “I beg your pardon,” she said quickly. She produced a little book from inside her dress. “May I explain further?” she asked the judge eagerly.

“One moment, please, Mr. Pascoe,” said his lordship. He signed to Colina to proceed.

“I meant, of course, to bring Nesis here,” Colina continued. “When I saw that—that I never would, while I didn’t know anything about courts or evidence, I felt that it would be safer to have a written statement.



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"This book is my diary that I always carry with me. That night I wrote in the blank pages what Nesis had told me, and later when she was conscious I read it to her, and she affirmed it sentence by sentence. She understood how important it was.

"You may know that she comprehended what she was doing because she made me make changes—you will find them here. At the end I wrote her name and she made a cross. Cora Thomas heard me read it to her, and saw her make her mark."

The judge held out his hand for the book.

Once more Mr. Pascoe rose. "My Lord," he said, "it must be clear to you that the ends of justice have been defeated by the dramatic power of this tale. It would be farcical to ask this jury to deliver an impartial verdict now. This new evidence must be weighed and sifted with calm minds. I request that you declare a mistrial, and that—"

A still more dramatic surprise awaited Mr. Pascoe and the court. Toward the end of the telling of Colina's painful tale Gordon Strange had been forgotten by all in the room except the policeman detailed to watch him. This man suddenly made a spring toward the half-breed, where he sat huddled beside his table. He was too late. The court was electrified by the muffled sound of a shot. Strange fell forward on the table. A revolver clattered to the floor from under his coat.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

### NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS.

The following is taken from the *Prince George Star*, January 19, 19—. Extra.

#### NOT GUILTY!

At 7.53 P.M. the jury in the trial of Ambrose Doane for treason-felony returned a verdict of not guilty without leaving their seats. This was a foregone conclusion. Upon issuing from the courthouse the acquitted man received an immense ovation from the waiting crowd.

From the *Prince George Star*, January 24, 19—: Editorial.

#### THE REAL CRIMINAL!

Now that the trial of Ambrose Doane is a thing of the past, a tragic miscarriage of justice happily averted, and the excitement abated, it is time for the thoughtful to examine into the underlying causes of the trouble at Fort Enterprise.

That there was serious trouble no one denies; but the general disposition is, since the innocent man is free and the guilty one dead by his own hand, to forget the whole matter. Now is the time to take measures to make it impossible for anything of the kind to occur again.

Granting that Gordon Strange, that extraordinary character, played for high stakes, lost and paid—was he the sole criminal? What sort of conditions were they up there that made it possible for him to engineer his unique schemes of villainy?

For years the arrogant policy and the unscrupulous methods of the great corporation that holds the north of our province in thrall have been matters of common gossip in the streets. But no man has dared to raise his voice.

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"They say" that the mighty corporation rides over the helpless redskins roughshod. "They say" that the Indians are charged exorbitant prices for the necessities of life, while a mere pittance is given them for their valuable furs.

Is it true? Who knows? No news comes out of that sealed country save by the pleasure of the great Company. Certain aspects of the testimony given in the Ambrose Doane trial leads us to suspect that these charges are not without foundation.

Parliament should investigate. The question is, does the Province of Athabasca control the Northwest Fur Company, or does the Company run the province?

From the Prince George *Star*, January 27, 19—.

### GAVILLER IS OUT!

At the head offices of the Northwest Fur Company it was given out this morning that the resignation of John Gaviller, the Company's trader at Fort Enterprise, had been accepted to take effect immediately.

Duncan MacDonald, general manager of the Company, said, when asked for a further statement: "Mr. Gaviller's resignation was requested for the good of the service. Owing to the conditions of our business the traders have to be given the widest latitude in the command of their posts, and we do not always know what is going on.

"Mr. Gaviller was very successful at Enterprise, but the disclosures at the Doane trial showed that his acts have not always been in accord with the policy of this company in dealing with the Indians. To our mind the welfare of the Indians is more important than profits."

Mr. Gaviller was later found at the Royal George Hotel. Upon being shown the foregoing he did not hesitate to express an opinion of it.

"Put not your trust in corporations!" he said. "I have given them thirty years of my life, my best years, and here I am turned out over night! It is the threat of a parliamentary investigation that has led them to their present panic and attempt to make a scapegoat of me.

"If they think I'll take it lying down they are much mistaken. The Indians' welfare more important than profits, eh? Excuse me if I laugh." Mr. Gaviller added somewhat stronger expression.

"You can say from me," he went on, "that not only have I always followed instructions to the letter, but that twice a year I laid my books open to the Company inspector, who was informed of the minutest details of my transactions.

“I accept my share in the blame for what happened. I have learned my lesson. But let me tell you this, that the policy pursued at Fort Enterprise was the Company’s policy—letter and spirit.

“Moreover, in my time Fort Enterprise has paid thousands and thousands of dollars to the shareholders of the Company, and I have not profited one cent beyond my salary.”

At this point Mr. Gaviller’s daughter came downstairs and he would say no more. Miss Gaviller declined to speak for publication.



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From the *Prince George Star*, February 3, 19—.

### A BEAUTIFUL ADORNMENT.

Our city has the honor of containing at the present moment the most beautiful set of furs ever exhibited in America. It is to be seen in the window of Messrs. Renfrew & Watkins's establishment on Oliver Avenue.

It consists of three magnificent black fox skins smooth and lustrous as jet, except for the snowy tips of the brushes. Two of the pelts go to the neck-piece, while the third—the most beautiful skin that ever came out of the north in the opinion of these experienced furriers—makes the muff.

Mr. Renfrew refused to set a value on the furs, but we learn on good authority that they are insured for five thousand dollars.

There are romantic and tragic associations with these furs. Two of the pelts have been in the possession of Mr. Renfrew for some time. He held them on speculation until he could obtain a third to complete the set.

This one, the finest of the three, was brought out last August by Ambrose Doane. This was the skin which almost cost John Gaviller his life, and indirectly induced a rebellion among the Kakisa Indians. All those who followed the course of the recent trial will remember it.

Upon obtaining the third pelt, Mr. Renfrew sent the three to London to be dressed and made up. They have just been returned.

A purchaser has already been found for the set. His name is kept secret, but we are assured that the beautiful furs will remain in this province.

From the *Prince George Star*, February 3, 19—.

### GAVILLER GOES WITH MINOT & DOANE.

An interesting fact leaked out yesterday when it became known that Ambrose Doane had made an offer to John Gaviller to take charge of the new trading-post that Minot & Doane purpose establishing on Great Buffalo Lake.

Mr. Doane could not be found by the *Star* reporter. Since the trial he has spent a good deal of his time dodging reporters. He has a private room at the Athabasca Club which no representative of the press has yet succeeded in locating.

John Gaviller was found at the Royal George Hotel. He admitted the truth of the report, and seemed very pleased by his new prospects.

"It tells its own story, doesn't it?" he said. "I belong to the north. I have traded up there thirty years, and I will not be any worse trader for what has happened."

In answer to further questions he only shook his head. "I talked too much to you fellows the other day," he said. "You caught me at a disadvantage. Nothing more to say. The arrangements between Ambrose Doane and me concern nobody but ourselves. I may say, however, that our relations are of the happiest nature."

From the *Prince George Star*, February 21, 19—.

#### THE CULMINATION OF A ROMANCE.

In another column of this paper will be found a notice of the marriage of Ambrose Doane to Miss Colina Gaviller, which took place a week ago to-day at the Chapel of the Redeemer on Jarvis Street.

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The ceremony was performed by the rector, Rev. Algernon Mitford. The only witnesses were the bride's father, who gave her away, and Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Denholm.

With the traveling costume the bride wore the wonderful set of black-fox furs which have been town talk during the past month. Ambrose Doane was the purchaser.

The news was suppressed until to-day on account of the desire of all parties to avoid further publicity. We learn that Mr. and Mrs. Doane and Mr. Gaviller left for the north by stage on the same day.

They part company at Miwasa landing; the bride and groom continue north to Moultrie on Lake Miwasa, while Mr. Gaviller goes northwest to Fort Enterprise to settle his affairs, thence to his new post on Great Buffalo Lake.

We learn that Mr. Doane is to run the post at Moultrie, while his partner, Mr. Minot, will operate an opposition store to the Company at Fort Enterprise.

A private letter from the landing tells of a wonderful van on runners that Ambrose Doane is building there to house his bride on their long journey north.

It is to contain a stove, bookshelves, side-board, piano, and all the comforts of a city residence, and will be drawn by four horses.

Their way lies over the regular winter road over the ice of the Miwasa River. Job, the little dog who was mentioned so often during the trial, will be a member of the party.

**THE END**