The Land of Frozen Suns

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at https://www.gutenberg.org/license.

Title: The Land of Frozen Suns
Author: Bertrand W. Sinclair
Release Date: January 21, 2011 [EBook #35031]
Language: English
Character set encoding: UTF-8

*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE LAND OF FROZEN SUNS ***

Produced by Roger Frank and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at http://www.pgdp.net.

THE LAND OF FROZEN SUNS

A Novel

BY

BERTRAND W. SINCLAIR

Author of “Raw Gold,” Etc.

Copyright 1909, BY
STREET & SMITH.

Copyright, 1910, BY
G. W. DILLINGHAM COMPANY.

The Land of Frozen Suns.

Made in U. S. A.

Contents

CHAPTER I—THE GENESIS OF TROUBLE

CHAPTER II—BY WAY OF THE “NEW MOON”

CHAPTER III—WHICH SHOWS THAT THE WORM DOES NOT ALWAYS TURN

CHAPTER IV—A FORTHRIGHT FIGHTING-MAN

CHAPTER V—THE RELATIVE MERITS OF THE FRYING-PAN AND THE FIRE

CHAPTER VI—SLOWFOOT GEORGE

CHAPTER VII—THE SEAT OF THE SCORNFUL

CHAPTER VIII—BY WAYS THAT WERE DARK

CHAPTER IX—MR. MONTELL

CHAPTER X—"THERE'S MONEY IN IT"

CHAPTER XI—A TRICK OF THE "TRADE."

CHAPTER XII—THE FIRST MOVE

CHAPTER XIII—A FORETASTE OF STRONG MEASURES

CHAPTER XIV—INTEREST ON A DEBT

CHAPTER XV—STRANGERS TWAIN

CHAPTER XVI—CLAWS UNSHEATHED

CHAPTER XVII—NINE POINTS OF THE LAW

CHAPTER XVIII—THE LONG ARM OF THE COMPANY

CHAPTER XIX—THE STRENGTH OF MEN—AND THEIR WEAKNESS

CHAPTER I—THE GENESIS OF TROUBLE

Who was it, I wonder, made that sagacious remark about the road to hell being paved with good intentions? He might have added an amendment to the effect that there's always a plentiful supply of material for that much travelled highway. We all contribute, more or less. I know I have done so. And so did my people before me. My father's intentions were good, but he didn't live long enough to carry them out. If he hadn't fallen a victim to an inborn streak of recklessness, a habit of taking chances,—well, I can't say just how things would have panned out. I'm not fatalist enough to believe that we crawl or run or soar through our allotted span of years according to some prearranged scheme which we are powerless to

modify. Oh, no! It's highly probable, however, that if my father and mother had lived I should have gone into some commercial pursuit or taken up one of the professions. Either way, I should likely have pegged along in an uneventful sort of way to the end of the chapter—lots of men do. Not that I would have taken with enthusiasm to chasing the nimble dollar for the pure love of catching it, but because I was slated for something of the sort, and as the twig is bent so is the tree inclined; a man can't sit down and twiddle his thumbs and refuse to perform any useful act, because there is no glory in it. The heroic age has gone a-glimmering down the corridors of time.

As it happened, my feet were set in other paths by force of circumstances. Only for that the sage-brush country, the very place where I was born might have remained a terra incognita. I should always have felt, though, that I'd missed something, for I was ushered into this vale of tears at the Summer ranch on the Red River of the South. Sumner *here* hadn't developed into a cow monarch those days, but he was on the way. My earliest impressions were all of log and 'dobe buildings, *of long-horned cattle*, of wild, shaggy-maned horses, and of wilder men who rode the one and drove the other in masterly fashion. For landscape there was rolling prairie, and more rolling prairie beyond; and here and there the eternal brown of it was broken by gray sage-grown flats and stretches of greasewood—as if Nature had made a feeble effort to break the monotony. I knew only this until I was big enough to tease for a pony. I cannot remember seeing a town when I was small. The world to me was a place of great plains, very still, and hot, and dry, a huddle of cabins, and corrals, and a little way to the south Red River slinking over its quicksands—except in time of storm; then it raged.

So that when my father bundled mother and myself off to a place called St. Louis, where great squadrons of houses stood in geometrical arrangement over a vast area, I had already begun to look upon things with the eyes of cattleland. I recollect that when we were settled in a roomy, old-fashioned house I cried because my mother would not let me go out to the corral and play.

"There are no corrals in a city, dear," she explained—and I cried the harder. I could conceive of no joy in a place where I could not go out to the corrals and have some brown-faced cowpuncher hoist me up on a gentle horse and let me hold the reins while the pony moved sedately about.

Left to himself, I think my father would have made a cowman of me, but mother had known the range when it was a place to try the nerves of strong men, and she hated it. I didn't know till I was nearly grown that she had made dad promise when I was born that if the cattle made money for us, I should never know the plains. She came of an old Southern family, and her life had been a sheltered one till she met and married Jack Sumner. And she would have had

me walk in pleasant places, as the men of her family had done—doctors, lawyers, planters, and such. The life was too hard, too much of an elemental struggle, she said—and I was to be saved some of the knocks that my dad had taken in the struggling years. Poor mother mine—her son was the son of his father, I'm afraid. But Sumner *pere* made good on his promise when the Sumner herds fattened his bank account sufficiently; and I gyrated through school, with college and a yet-to-be-determined career looming on the horizon.

So my childish memories of the great open, that lies naked to the sun-glare and the chilling breath of the *northers* year on year, grew fainter and more like something of which I had dreamed. Dad would come home occasionally, stay a day or two, perhaps a week, sometimes even a month; but my mother never went west of the Mississippi—nor did I. I often plagued them to let me go to the ranch during vacation, but they evidently considered it best to keep me away from the round-ups and horse-breaking and such, till I was old enough to see that there was another side to the life besides the sunshiny, carefree one that makes an irresistible appeal to a youngster.

And then, just a week after my twentieth birthday, my dad, slow-voiced, easy-going old Jack Sumner rode his horse into the smiling Red and drowned under the eyes of twenty men.

I was sitting on our front steps grouching about the heat when the messenger brushed by me with the telegram in his hand. Mother signed for it, and he ran down the steps whistling, and went about his business. There was no sound within. I had no hint of trouble, till a maid screamed. Then, I rushed in. Mother was drooping over the arm of a Morris chair, and the bit of yellow paper lay on the rug where it had fluttered from her hand. I carried her to a couch, and called a doctor. But he could do nothing. Her heart was weak, he said, and might have stopped any time; the shock had merely hastened her end.

I'm going to pass lightly over the week that followed. I was just a kid, remember, and I took it pretty hard. It was my first speaking acquaintance with death. A few of my mother's people came, and when it was over with I went to Virginia with an uncle, a kindly, absent-minded, middle-aged bachelor. But I couldn't settle down. For a week or ten days I fidgeted about the sleepy Southern village, and then I bade my uncle an abrupt good-bye and started for St. Louis. Little as I knew of business and legal matters I was aware that now the Sumner herds and ranches were mine, and I had a hankering to know where I stood. Except that there was a ranch and cattle in Texas I knew nothing of my father's business. It didn't even occur to me, at first, that I was a minor and consequently devoid of power to transact any business of importance. I knew that certain property was rightfully mine, and that was all.

Once in St. Louis, however, I began to get the proper focus on my material

interests. It occurred to me that Sumner *pere* had done more or less business with a certain bank, a private concern engineered by two ultra-conservative citizens named Bolton and Kerr. I hunted them up, thinking that they would likely be able to tell me just what I needed to know. And it happened that by luck I came in the nick of time. A clerk took in my card, and returned immediately for me. I found the senior member, wrapping the bit of pasteboard around his forefinger when I was ushered in. We shook hands, and he motioned to a chair. I asked for information, and I got it, straight from the shoulder. Bolton was very economical in the use of words.

"Yes, I knew your father well. There is a sum of money to his account in the bank. He died intestate," he told me bluntly. "In view of a communication I have just received, you will have little to do with any property until you are of age. The estate is now in the hands of an administrator—appointed by a Texas court. The court will probably order that you be allowed a certain monthly sum until your majority."

"I see," said I thoughtfully; I hadn't considered that phase of it, although in a hazy way I knew something of the regular procedure. "Will our place here be managed by this administrator?"

"Very likely," Bolton returned. "He has served us with a court order for the estate funds now in our hands. But you are legally entitled to the use and occupancy of the family residence until such time as the estate is appraised and the inventory returned. After that the administrator has discretionary power; he can make any disposition of the property, meanwhile making provision for your support."

"It seems to me," I hazarded, "that some relative should have been appointed."

"Exactly," Bolton nodded. "They made no move, though. And this Texas person acted at once: I dare say it's all right. However, you're a minor. Better have some responsible person appointed your guardian. Then if there's any mismanagement, you can take court action to have it remedied. Frankly, I don't like the look of this haste to administer. May be all right; may be all wrong."

"See here," I burst out impulsively, for I had taken a sudden liking to this short-spoken individual who talked to me with one foot on a desk and a half-smoked cigar tucked in the corner of his mouth, "what's the matter with you becoming my guardian? None of my people seem to have thought of it. I'm sure we'd get along all right. It would be a mere matter of form, anyway."

He smiled. My naive way of saddling myself upon him, along with a lot of possible responsibilities was doubtless amusing to a hard-headed financier like Bolton. I saw nothing out of the way in such an arrangement at the time. It struck me as a splendid idea, in fact. But he made allowance for my juvenile point of

view. Shifting his cigar to the other corner of his mouth he surveyed me critically for a few seconds, crinkling his black brows thoughtfully.

"I'll do it," he finally assented. "The position ought to be a sinecure. Run in to-morrow morning at ten-thirty, and we'll step around to the courthouse and have the thing legally executed. You're staying at the old place, I suppose?"

"I'm going to," I replied. "I haven't been at the house; I came straight here from the train."

"Well, run along, son," he said good-naturedly. "I'd take you home to my family, only I don't happen to possess one. I live at the club—the Arion—mostly."

"Oh, by the way," he called to me as I neared the door. "How are you off for funds?"

"To tell the truth," I owned, rather shamefacedly, "I'm getting in pretty low water. I think I've some change at home, but I'm not sure. Dad never gave me a regular allowance; he'd just send me a check now and then, and let it go at that. I'm afraid I'm a pretty good spender."

"You'll have to reform, young man," he warned, mock-seriously. "Here"—he dug a fifty dollar bill out of his pocket-book—"that'll keep you going for a while. I'll keep you in pocket money till this administrator allows you a monthly sum for maintenance. Don't forget the time, now. Ten-thirty, sharp. Ta ta." And he hustled me out of the office in the midst of my thanks. I was thankful, too, for I'd put it mildly when I told him that I was getting near the rocks. I was on them. I'd paid my last cent for a meal on the train that morning. And while I did feel tolerably sure of finding some loose silver in the pockets of my clothing at home, I knew it would not amount to more than four or five dollars. Oh, I was an improvident youth, all right. The necessity for being careful with money never struck me as being a matter of importance; I'd never had to do stunts in economy, that was the trouble.

From the bank I went straight home. We hadn't kept a very pretentious establishment, even though Sumner *pere* had gone on increasing his pile all through the years since we'd moved to the city. A cook and a house-maid, a colored coachman and a gardener—the four of them had been with us for years, and old Adam was waiting by the steps for me when I came up the walk, his shiny black face beaming welcome. I had to go to the stable and look over the horses, and tell Adam that everything was fine, before the old duffer would rest.

In the house everything was as I'd left it. All that evening I moped around the big, low-ceiled living-room. There was little comfort in the place; it was too lonely. The hours dragged by on leaden feet. I couldn't get over expecting to see mother come trailing quietly down the wide stairway, or dad walk in the front door packing a battered old grip and greeting me with his slow smile. I know it was silly, but the feeling drove me out of the house and down town, where there

was a crush of humans, and the glitter of street lights and the noise of traffic. There I met a chum or two, and subsequent proceedings tore a jagged hole in Bolton's fifty dollar bill before I landed home in the little hours. Even then I couldn't sleep in that still, old house.

The long night came to an end, as nights have a habit of doing, and breakfast time brought with it the postman. The mail was mostly papers and other uninteresting junk, but one missive, postmarked Amarillo, Texas, and addressed to myself I opened eagerly. It was from the administrator, as I had surmised.

Most of the communication was taken up with an explanation of how he came to jump into the breach so quickly. He had been, it seemed, a close friend of my father's. He knew that Jack Sumner had a son who was not yet of age, and who, even if he were, knew little or nothing about stock. Things needed looking after, he said; my father's sudden death had left the business without a responsible head, and the ranch foreman and the range boss were bucking each other. Things were going to the devil generally, so he felt called upon to step into the breach, seeing that none of the Sumner family showed up to protect their interests. I wouldn't be under any obligation to him, he frankly explained, for as administrator he would be paid for what he was doing. He also stated that if I felt that my affairs would be more capably managed in the hands of someone whom I knew better he would cheerfully turn over control of the estate without any tiresome litigation. And he concluded his letter with an urgent invitation to come down to headquarters and see the wheels go round for myself. He signed himself in a big heavy hand, Jake Howey, and the signature gave me an impression of a bluff, hard-riding cowman—picturesque and thoroughly Western. If I had been born a girl I expect my disposition would have been termed romantic. Anyway, Mr. Jake Howey's letter made a hit with me.

When I went to keep my appointment with Bolton later in the forenoon I took the letter with me. He glanced over it, and tucked it back in the envelope.

"I don't much believe in long distance judgment of men," he declared, "but I'd be willing to take a chance on this Texas person. I should say you can expect a square deal from him—if this missive represents his true personality."

"That's the way it struck me, too," I confessed. "I think I'd like to go down there for a while."

"Yes? What about school?" he put in.

"Well, I suppose it's necessary for me to go through college," I admitted. "Dad intended me to. I was to begin this coming school year—September, isn't it? But that's nearly three months away. I would like to see that Red River ranch. I was born there, you know."

"You'll have to cut your eye-teeth in the business sometime," he mused. "You'll be less likely to get into mischief there than you will in town. Yes, I

daresay you might as well take the trip. But no funking school this fall, mind. I've known youngsters to go to the cattle country and stick there. Your father did."

"I won't," I promised, "even if I want to stay, I'll be ready to dig in when September comes."

"You'd better." He laughed at my earnestness. "Or I'll be down there after you. When do you propose to start?"

"As soon as I can." Having paved the way to go, I wanted, boy-fashion, to be on the way at once.

"Any idea how to get there?" he queried; as if he had his doubts about the development of my bump of location.

But I had him there.

"Oh, yes. Dad used to take the train through Little Rock to Fort Worth, and on up into the Panhandle from there. Sometimes he took a steamer from here to Memphis. I think I'd like the river trip best."

"All right," he decided. "You shall go, my boy, just as soon as you can get ready. Now we'll see about this guardianship matter."

We saw about it in such wise that two days later I was the happy possessor of a ticket to Amarillo and a well-lined pocket-book. I had dinner with Bolton, and bade him good-bye quite cheerfully, for I felt a good deal as Columbus must have done when he turned the prow of his caravel away from Spanish shores. After leaving Bolton I went home after a grip I'd forgotten. The river boat on which I'd taken passage was due to leave at midnight.

And that midnight departure was what started one Bob Sumner up the Trouble Trail. It isn't known by that name; it doesn't show on any map that ever I saw; but the man who doesn't have to travel it some time in his career—well, he's in luck. Or perhaps one should reason by the reverse process. I daresay it all depends on the point of view.

CHAPTER II—BY WAY OF THE "NEW MOON"

Lights by the thousand speckled the night-enshrouded water-front when I

reached the slip where my boat lay. On the huge roofed-in wharf freight-handlers swarmed like bees. The rumble of hand trucks and the tramp of feet rose to the great beams overhead and echoed back in a steady drone. Lamps fluttered on vibrating walls. Men moved in haste, throwing long shadows ahead and behind them. Boxes, bales, barrels, sacked stuff vanished swiftly down three separate inclines to the lower deck of the *Memphis Girl*, and from the depths of this freight-swallowing monster came the raucous gabble, freely garnished with profanity, of the toiling stevedores.

Out from under that vast sounding board of a roof the noise at once diminished in volume, and I passed through the heart of the dust and babel and gained the cabin deck of the *Memphis*. A steward looked over my ticket and guided me to the berth I had reserved. It was then half past nine; still two hours and a half to the time of departure. I took a look around the upper deck. Quite a number of passengers were already aboard. Some were gone to bed; others were grouped in the aft saloon. One or two poker games had started, and little groups were looking on. But of them all I knew not a soul. Youth hungers for companionship, and I was no exception to my kind. It may be a truism to say that nowhere can one be so completely alone as in a crowd; but the singularity of it never came home to me until that night. But we are always learning the old things and esteeming them new. I roamed about the *Memphis*, wishing I had stayed up town till the last minute. It had been my plan to go down and turn in; the ceremony of casting off was not one that interested me greatly. But now the whim was gone; a spirit of unrest, an impatience to be off, drove sleep from my mind. If you have ever known the dreary monotony of waiting for train or steamer to start when your whole being craves the restfulness of motion you will not wonder that I made one more round of the deck and saloons and then left the *Memphis* to roam aimlessly past the serried wharves that faced the stream.

I don't recollect just how far I wandered. If the place had been strange to me I should likely have been more circumspect in my prowling. As it was, my only concern was to be at the S.S. Company's wharf by midnight, and midnight was yet afar. So I poked along, stopping now and then to hang over a railing and peer across the dark sweep of the Mississippi toward the Illinois shore. Between, the lights of divers craft twinkled like fireflies, and tootings of major and minor keys with varying volume of sound went wailing through the night.

A big passenger packet, hailing from up-river, swept into view. Ablaze from her bow to the churning stern wheel she bore down like a floating villa strung with yellow gems. A band blared "Dixie" from somewhere amidships. I was young enough to have some degree of enthusiasm for such spectacles, and I turned onto a long half-lighted wharf and walked to its outermost tip to get a better view of the puffing river monster with its thousand gleaming eyes.

Until she came abreast and passed, I stood there watching. In a careless way I became aware of two men strolling out on the wharf; in fact, I had passed them near the entrance gate. I remember that the swell from the big packet was beginning to slap against the wharf wall when one of them edged over and asked me the time.

Like a simpleton I hauled out my watch to tell him. It did not occur to me that there might be any purpose behind the question. The river-front in St. Louis was not a place where one could safely exhibit signs of affluence in the way of cash or jewelry—and I knew it. I hadn't grown up in a city without knowing some of its ways. No doubt it looked like an easy game, out there on the end of a deserted wharf.

My watch was a plain hunting-case affair, with a fob. Without an inkling of what was to come I turned toward the dim light as I sprung the case open. In that instant the fellow struck the watch out of my grasp with one hand, and smashed me full on the jaw with the other—a vicious, pugilistic punch. I went down. Curiously, I didn't lose consciousness; and the blow gave little pain. But it paralyzed my motor nerves for a few seconds, gave me a queer, helpless feeling in my legs and arms, such as one has in a nightmare. It passed though, and the pair of them were just going through my pockets with a celerity that bespoke much practice when I recovered sufficiently to jab my fist into a face that was bent close to mine—at the same time driving both heels against the shins of the other fellow with what force I could muster.

This instinctive outbreak rather surprised them, I think. Anyway, they gave ground. Only for a moment, however. I made one valiant effort to gain my feet, and they were on me like twin wolves. Kicking, striking, struggling like primal beasts we three lurched this way and that on the brink of the wharf. A hundred yards away people were hurrying by, and if I'd had sense enough to realize that a shout was my best weapon I could easily have routed the thugs. But I was too frightened to think.

And in a very short time sheer weight of numbers decided the issue. One of them got a strangle hold about my neck. The other clasped me fervently around the waist. Thus they dragged me down. For one brief instant I rested on the hard planking, my head in a whirl, their weight like a mountain on my heaving chest. Then, with a quick shove they thrust me over the edge of the wharf.

Undertaken voluntarily, a twenty-foot dive is no great matter, but it is a horse of quite another color to be chucked into space and fall that distance like a bag of meal. I struck the water feet first, as it happened, and came to the top spluttering, half-strangled, but otherwise none the worse. Right quickly I found that I'd merely exchanged one antagonist for another. The current set strongly out from the wharf, and it cost me many a stroke to get back to it, and then I

saw that I was no better off. Contrary to the usual thing the piles offered no avenue of escape, for they were planked up, a smooth wooden wall that I could not possibly climb. I felt my way toward shore, but the out-sweeping current was too strong. So I hooked my fingers in a tiny crack and proceeded to shed what clothing still burdened me. Of my coat only a fragmentary portion remained. It had been ripped up the back in the fracas above, and the side containing my ticket and most of my money had been torn clear off me. There was little left save the sleeves. My shoes and shirt and trousers I cast upon the waters with little thought of their return; and then, clad in a suit of thin underclothes I struck out for the next pier below, thanking my stars that I was a fair swimmer.

But I could not make it. The channel of the Mississippi threw the full head of a powerful current against the St. Louis side at that particular point; it struck the wharf-lined bank and swerved out again with the strength of an ocean tide, and I was in the out-going curve of it. The next wharf was not for me nor yet its fellow beyond. Steadily I was carried into mid-stream. Shouting for help across the black space that lay between me and the wharves soon exhausted what wind and strength I did not use up in a footless attempt to swim against the current. I stopped yelling then; it seemed to be sink or swim, and I began to conserve my energies a bit. Slipping along in plain view of myriad lights, hearing the fiendish screaming of steamer whistles, seeing the moving bulk of them dimly in the night, I felt in no immediate danger—not half as much alarm disturbed the soul of me as when the fingers of those night-hawks were clawing at my throat. I knew I could keep afloat an indefinite length of time, and some craft or other, I reasoned, would pick me up if I failed to make shore.

By and by I rapped my hand smartly against some hard object as I cleft the water, and gripping it I found myself the richer by a four-foot stick of cordwood on its way to the Gulf of Mexico. This served to bear me up without any exertion on my part, and gave me that much better chance to buck the current. I was now well out from the wharves, and straining my eyes for passing boats.

Far down the river the piercing shriek of a siren split a momentary silence that had fallen on the stream. A drumming noise was borne up to me on a fitful night breeze. From behind the black loom of a jutting wharf a steamer appeared, and came throbbing upstream. Now she was almost on me, the heart-like pulse of her engines and the thresh of her great sternwheel deadening all the other sounds which that vast river surface caught up and bandied back and forth.

Remorselessly the current bore me into her path. At first I had strained every nerve to get in her way, but as the black hull with funnels belching smoke and deck-lights riding high drew near I remembered that if I missed a hold on her side I stood a fair chance of being sucked into the flailing paddles. When that filtered into my cranium I backed water in hot haste; but I had gone too far, and

her speed was too great. In another minute I was pawing at the slippery bulge of her water-line, and striving to lift my voice above the chug of the engines as she slid by.

The wash from her swung me away and drew me back again, and just as the nearing thresh of her broad-paddled wheel struck a chill of fear into my quaking heart my hands fouled in a trailing line and I laid hold of it more tightly than ever drowning man clutched the proverbial straw.

It was a small line, and the strain of towing me was great, but it held. In the tiers of cabins above my head lights flicked out one by one. Again and again I called, bellowing upward with the regularity of a fog signal. No answer; no inquiring face peered over the rail. The docks slid by. God only knows how long I dangled at the end of that bit of twisted fiber. The glow-worm lamps of St. Louis twinkled distantly on the left, rapidly falling astern. The thin line wrapped about my wrist numbed it to the elbow; I changed hands from time to time, in peril of being cast adrift. Fervently I wished for my bit of driftwood. The on-rushing demon to which I clung offered less hope of succor.

In a little while longer I should have cast loose from sheer inability to hold on. The strain on my arms was exhausting, and the least shift soused me under water, such was the speed. How I should have fared then, I do not know. But in the nick of time an answering hail came from above and when I had established the fact that a human being was clinging alongside, a cluster of heads and a lantern or two appeared at the rail and a rope ladder came wriggling down.

Cramped and sore and weary as I was I climbed thankfully aboard. A knot of passengers surrounded an officer whom I took to be the mate. A deckhand or two stood by, eyeing me curiously as I heaved myself on deck. The mate held up his lantern and took a good look at me.

"You look some the worse for wear, bucko," he volunteered indifferently. "How long you been hangin' onto us?"

I began to explain, but I daresay my appearance hardly lent an air of truth to my words; he cut me short with an incredulous shrug of his shoulders.

"Tell that t' the captain or the purser," he interrupted sharply. "Bilk, you steer him t' the pilot house. I'll be there in a minute."

He turned on his heel, and Bilk motioned me to follow. As we passed forward I wondered on what sort of craft I had landed, whither bound, and how good my chance was of getting back to St. Louis and making a fresh start. The first of these queries I voiced to Bilk.

"She's the *New Moon*," he growled. "Through freight t' Bismark, Cow Island, and Fort Benton. Stop? Naw, she don't stop fer nothin' only wood."

CHAPTER III—WHICH SHOWS THAT THE WORM DOES NOT ALWAYS TURN

The door of the pilot-house swung open and the captain himself stepped out as Bilk reached for the knob. The eyes of this river autocrat fell inquiringly on me. I daresay I was not a prepossessing figure in the dull glimmer of a deck lamp.

"What the devil's this?" he demanded.

"Feller picked up alongside us, hangin' on by an unstowed line, sir." Bilk explained.

"Huh!" the captain grunted.

"See here, sir," I began. "I'm much obliged for being picked up. And I'll be much more obliged if you'll put me in the way of getting into some clothes and landing as soon as possible. I was to have taken the *Memphis Girl* down-river to-night. Mr. Bolton, of the Bolton and Kerr bank will make it all right with you."

The captain guffawed coarsely in my face. "God bless me, that's all right. Hey, Tupper,"—to the mate, who came up while I was speaking—"here's a lad with a black eye, a skinned nose, and no clothes on, who wants us to put about—and his banker will make it all right. Ha—ha—ha!" And he laughed till my cheeks burned.

"I don't ask anything of you only to get ashore, first stopping-place," I spluttered, trembling with anger; his patent disbelief of my statement was hard to swallow. "I'm not to blame for getting robbed and tumbled into the river, and I don't want my people to think I've been drowned."

"There's the shore," he jerked his thumb backward significantly. "Swim for it, if the deck o' the *Moon* don't suit you."

That silenced me for the time. I knew I could never make shore, weary as I was. The inhospitable atmosphere was better than the unquiet bosom of the Mississippi. I had no stomach for further natatory stunts that night. And I knew that it depended on the good-will of this grouchy individual as to when and where I should set foot on land. He squinted calculatingly at me for a second

or two, then addressed the mate.

"Take 'im below, Tupper," he said. "Dig 'im up some jeans an' a pair o' shoes, an' let 'im roost somewhere forrad. We can use 'im, I reckon."

"Look here," I remonstrated anxiously; he was overlooking my voice in the matter in a way that didn't suit me at all. "I want to know when I'm going to get a chance to go back to St. Louis? You don't seem to understand the fix I'm in."

"Got passage-money about you?" he asked coolly.

"Why, of course not," I replied. "A fellow doesn't usually carry money in his underclothes."

"He don't, hey?" He stepped nearer to me and suddenly thrust a hairy fist under my nose. "Who the hell are you, t' howl about gettin' ashore? You look t' me like a man that's broke jail or somethin' o' the kind. As tough a lookin' citizen as you are ought t' be damn thankful for a chance t' climb aboard. You'll earn your keep while you're on the *Moon*—an' no questions asked. See? Take him along, Tupper. Kick his ribs in, if he makes a roar. Get forrad, there."

That was all the satisfaction I got out of Captain Speer; and truth to tell I followed the mate with proper meekness. I knew enough of the river-boat way to avoid open clashing with sternwheel folk. Deep-water men paint lurid pictures of hell-ships, but I have my doubts, from what I've seen and heard, of any wind-jammer that ever sailed the seven seas being worse that some of the flat-bottomed craft that bucked the Missouri and Mississippi in the year of our Lord eighteen eighty-one.

The mate, a sullen, red-whiskered brute, hustled me down 'tween decks, rummaged in a locker and brought forth a frayed suit of cotton overalls, and a pair of brogans two sizes too large for my feet—and they are not small by any means.

"Get into them, if you feel the need o' clothes," he growled. "You camp on that pile o' sacks an' stay there till you're wanted."

Much as I resented his overbearing speech and manner I didn't think it good policy to row with him just then. My face ached from the punching it had already received; physical weariness, bruises, the strangeness and palpable belligerence that confronted me on the *Moon*, all served to cow me, that had never been a fighting-man, nor thrown among the breed. My knowledge of the genus river-rat was sufficient to tell me that the mate would rather enjoy carrying out the captain's order in regard to my ribs. I wanted none of his game at that time and place. So I donned the overalls and kept my mouth closed.

He wasted no more time on me, and when he was gone I settled myself philosophically on the sack-pile, wondering how long it would be till the Moon would make a landing. The wisest plan seemed to consist of dodging trouble while aboard, and stepping ashore at the first tie-up. Otherwise, I judged myself

slated to enact the role of roustabout at the pleasure of the rude gentleman in command.

The night was warm; my wet underclothing not uncomfortable. Curled in an easy posture on the folded sacks I fell asleep, undisturbed by the monotonous beat of the *Moon's* mechanical heart. The blast of her whistle, long-drawn, a demoniac, ear-splitting cross between a scream and a bellow, wakened me; and while I sat up, rubbing my sleepy eyes and wondering how long I'd slept, the boorish mate yelled from a gangway.

"Here you. Come along—an' be quick about it."

When I sensed the fact that he was directing his remarks at me, my first impulse was to lay hold of something and heave it at his bewhiskered face. But upon second thought I refrained, and ascended resentfully to the upper deck, grinding my teeth at the broad back of him as I went. A half dozen other men, roustabouts I judged from their general unkemptness, were gathered amidships by the rail. Off in the east day was just breaking; from which I gathered that I had slept seven hours or more. The speed of the *Moon* slackened perceptibly. Out of the grayness ahead a slip loomed ghostly in the dawn, tier on tier of cordwood stacked on the rude wharf; upreared on rows of piling, it seems to my juvenile fancy like a monster centipede creeping out to us over the smooth water.

Somewhere in the depths of the *Moon* a bell tinkled. Immediately the great paddle reversed, churning the river surface into dirty foam, and we began to sidle against the pier-end. Fore and aft, lines were run out and made fast by a dim figure that flitted from behind the woodricks. The mate growled an order, and a gangplank joined the *Moon's* deck to the wharf. Down this we filed, his Sorrel Whiskers glanced over one shoulder at me.

At once my grimy companions, Bilk among the number, fell upon the pile of wood. For a moment I stood undecided—then made to walk boldly past the mate. Back of the wharf I saw the land, a sloping rise dotted with farmhouses, take form in the growing light; and I was for St. Louis whether or no. But Tupper forestalled me. I did not get past him. He seemed to be paying little attention, yet when I came abreast of him, heart somewhat a-flutter he lurched and struck out—with marvellous quickness for a stodgy-built man. There was no escaping the swing of his fist. I was knocked down before I knew it, for the second time in twelve hours. Satisfaction gleamed in his small, blue eyes. He stepped back, and when I got to my feet, something dazed and almost desperate, he was facing me with a goodly billet in one hand.

"Dig in there, blast yuh!" he roared. "Grab a stick an' down below with it, or I'll fix yuh good an' plenty, yuh——"

The fierceness of him, the futility of pitting myself against a club, much less his ponderous fists, quelled me once more. I hoisted a length of cordwood

upon my shoulder and passed aboard. Another trip I made, and some of the murderous rage that seethed inside me must have shown upon my countenance; for Bilk lagged, and, edging near as we trod the gangway together, muttered a word of advice.

"Fergit it, kid," he warned. "Don't go agin' him. He's a killer—he's got more'n one man's scalp a'ready. An' it's the calaboose for you if yuh do lay him out. See?"

Bilk was right. I was aware that while falling short of mutiny on the high seas, a good smash at Mr. Tupper would land me in jail right speedily—providing the captain and the other mate left enough of me to lock up—and seeing that St. Louis and my friends were already far astern, I might find myself in a worse pickle than aboard the *Moon*. This, coupled with a keen sense of shame for blows received and not yet returned, was galling. But cowardly or not, just as you choose, I could not cope with sluggers of that heavy calibre, and I knew it. So, temporarily, I subsided, and sullenly became a satellite of the *New Moon*.

The empty space behind the boilers, and a good share of the lower deck space was duly filled with wood; the *Moon* got under way again, and then I had a breathing spell, which I spent turning over in my mind certain plans that suggested a way out of the difficulty. Going to Montana, when my destination was Texas, was not to my liking, and the manner of my going I liked least of all. While I pondered Bilk drew near.

"First trip on a sternwheeler, huh?" he asked, in a not unfriendly tone.

"Yes—like this," I answered, and he grinned understandingly.

"I should have jumped and made a swim for it," I mourned. That had not occurred to me while we were tied up at the wood-wharf; in fact, my thinking was none too coherent about that time—Tupper's fist had jarred me from head to heel.

"He'd likely 'a' plugged yuh quick's yuh hit the water," Bilk observed indifferently. "He's noway backward about usin' a pistol, if he takes a notion."

"Do you mean to say they'd dare shoot a man for quitting the steamer?" I uttered incredulously.

"Sure." Bilk's positive answer was distressingly matter of fact.

With exceeding bitterness I aired my opinion of such a state of affairs. Bilk merely shrugged his shoulders.

"They're short-handed, that's why they froze t' you," he explained. "She'll lose time every wood-loadin' if there ain't men enough to pack it aboard. Then the freight's slow, the passengers kick, an' the owners pry up hell with the captain. Lord, was yuh never rung in like this before? It's nothin' t' bein' shanghaied onto a wind-jammer that's due round the Horn—months of it yuh get then, an' it's tough farin', too. You ain't got no call t'roar on this. We'll be in Benton in

ten days or so. What's that amount to?"

"It amounts to quite a lot with me," I responded. "I'm not going to Benton if I can help it. I'll fool that red-whiskered bully yet."

"Don't let him catch yuh at it, kid," Bilk observed. "He'll give yuh worse'n ten days' steam-boatin' if yuh mix with him."

But I did go to Benton, in spite of my intention to the contrary. The *Moon*, as Bilk had told me, was a through freight, a fast boat, passengers and cargo billed direct to the head of navigation, and carrying mail for but one or two places between. Towns along the Missouri were few and far apart those days, once north of Sioux City, and for none did the *Moon* slow up. Wood-slips were her only landing; since food for the hungry monster that droned in the bowels of the ship was a prime necessity. For the next three days Tupper, and Bailey, the second mate, gave me no chance to quit my involuntary servitude. Their fists I avoided by submission. When we had progressed that far up-river I ceased to look for opportunity to take French leave, reasoning that I would have more trouble retracing my steps through that thinly settled land than if I stuck to the *Moon* and made the round trip; besides this, my anger at the dirty treatment had settled to cold malevolence. I wanted to stay with the *Moon*, to be forced to stay with her—for I had promised to make the captain and the mate dance to sad music once we tied to a St. Louis dock and I could get the ear of my guardian. That prospect was my only joy for many dolorous days.

Meantime I unwillingly carried wood, slushed decks, and performed such other tasks as were gruffly allotted me; always under a protest which I dared not voice. I suppose one would eventually become accustomed to being cursed every time one turned around, but it never failed to set me plotting reprisals; I can easily understand the psychology of a mutineer, I think. Once or twice I had it in mind to make some sort of appeal to one of the passengers—a prosperous-looking individual who, Bilk informed me, was a St. Louis fur merchant, and whom I thought might possibly know my father. But the sleek one transfixed me with such a palpably contemptuous air when I was in the act of approaching him that I hadn't the heart to face a rebuff. A sternwheel deckhand is not an attractive person, as a rule, and I suppose I looked the part, aggravated considerably by my discolored optic and bruised face. My failure to get speech with one of the elect, and being scowled at as if I were a mangy dog into the bargain, didn't tend to make me feel kindly toward the well-fed, well-clothed mortals who lounged on the after deck smoking Havana cigars. Of the hide man I took particular note, hoping to meet him some time in the future, when I'd settled with Tupper, Speer *et al*, and tell him what a damned snob he was. There was a woman or two aboard, but they stuck to their cabins and concerned me not—until a day when I was fool enough to show a trace of the soreness that always bubbled within.

I do not know why I tackled the captain. I did not want wages, for Bilk had made it clear to me that if I signed the steamer's roll I thereby precluded the possibility of hauling the *Moon's* commander over the coals for refusing to set me ashore and keeping me in practical peonage, and I would not have missed making it warm for that coarse ruffian for half the cattle my dad had left me. I dare say it was a flickering up of the smoldering fires of hostility. Neither Tupper nor Speer ever came close to me that I did not have to fight down an impulse to club them with whatever was nearest my hand. And this day I unthinkingly baited Captain Speer, much as I feared the weight of his ready fists. I was coiling a rope just aft of the wheel-house, when the captain paced along the deck, and turned a cold eye upon me. I dropped the rope.

"Say," I asked bluntly, and perhaps more belligerently than was wise, "do I get paid wages for the work I'm doing?"

"Hey? Get paid?" he growled. Then he lifted up his voice and swore: "By God, you pay for the grub you eat and the clothes you got on an' we'll talk about wages. You—you double-dyed, gilt-edged, son-of-a-feather-duster!"

This is not a literal transcription of Captain Speer's expletives, but it will have to serve. His rendering was of the sort frowned upon in polite literature, being altogether unprintable. Never did the captain sacrifice force to elegancy of expression. I have heard it said, and the statement is indubitably true, that he could swear louder and faster and longer than any two men between Benton and New Orleans. With the full tide of his reviling upon me, he lurched forward, his big-knuckled fingers reaching for my throat. I turned to dart around the wheel-house; Tupper, grinning maliciously, showed up from that quarter. And when I swung about to go the other way I tripped and Speer nailed me before I could dodge again. Like a cat pawing a helpless mouse, he slammed me against a deck-house wall, and I should doubtless have had my head well worked over but for a timely interruption.

Aft from the wheel-house a promenade deck ran over the cabin roofs, whereon the passengers lounged when they cared to sun themselves. The captain, the mate, and myself were on the narrow deck below. From just over our heads came the voice of feminine disapproval; at which Captain Speer let go my throat, and Tupper paused with his foot drawn back to kick me.

"You're a pretty pair of brutes, indeed you are!"

The girl, a small serious-faced thing, her brown hair standing out in wind-blown wisps from under a peaked cap, leaned over the rail and flung down the words hotly, stamping one small foot to lend emphasis to her observation.

"You may be typical ship's officers," she went on scornfully, "but you are certainly not *men*."

The two of them stood abashed, like pickpockets taken in the act, and a

man by the girl's side put in a word.

"Miss Montell," he drawled. "You shouldn't interfere with the pastimes of our worthy skipper and mate. Let the good work go on."

"Shame on you, Mr. Barreau!" she flashed, drawing away from him.

The man paid no heed to her quick retort, but himself leaned a bit forward and spoke directly to the captain.

"Go to it, Captain Speer," he said indifferently—that is, his manner of speech was well simulated indifference; but I, staring up at him, saw the storm-clouds gathering in his dark eyes. "Go ahead. Beat the boy's face to a jelly. Kick in a few ribs for good measure. Make a thorough job of it. You see, I know something of the river-boat way. But when you are done with *that*, Messrs. Speer and Tupper, you shall have some little entertainment at my expense, I promise you."

There was a menace in the inflection.

"By the Lord, sir, I'm master on this vessel," Captain Speer at length found his tongue. "If you don't like this, come down and take a hand."

"Now speaks the doughty mariner," Barreau laughed mockingly. "I shall take a hand without troubling to come down, believe me. Colonel Colt shall arbitrate for us. If *that* is to your liking I am at your service, Captain Speer."

"Another cowardly blow," cried the girl, her dainty face flushing, "and my father shall see that you captain no more boats for the Benton and St. Louis Company—you barbarian. I promise you that for penalty, whatever Mr. Barreau sees fit to do."

Whether the threat against his position carried weight, or if he simply had no hankering for an encountering with the cool individual on the upper deck, I do not know; but, at any rate, Captain Speer saw fit to sheath his claws at this juncture.

"Git t' hell out o' here, you," he grunted, under his breath. And I made haste to "git."

Looking back, I saw Tupper and Speer striding aft. Above, the girl stood by the rail, tucking in the flying locks with graceful movements of her hands. Barreau was staring after the retreating pair, smiling sardonically over a cigarette.

Later, I learned from Bilk that Miss Montell was the fur-merchant's daughter, and straightway I forgave the portly one any grievance I held against him. But from none of the crew could I learn aught of Barreau. Nor did I see him again, except at ship-length. Like the girl, he kept close to his cabin and the passengers' saloon—terra incognita to such lowly ones as I. I was grateful, even at a distance, for between them they had saved me a thumping—a thumping which I had reason to believe was merely postponed.

The *Moon* was now well into Dakota. Steadily she forged up the turbid river, thrumming past Pierre, and, farther on, Standing Rock reservation. At Bis-

mark we made a brief stop. Then we turned The Great Bend and plunged into the Bad Lands. Through this gashed and distorted country the *Moon* plowed along an ever-narrowing channel. From her deck I had my first glimpse of the buffalo, already doomed to extinction. Wild cattle and deer scuttled back up the fearful slopes at our approach, or vanished into the yawning canyons. Unaccustomed to that altitude, I marveled at the clarity of the atmosphere, the wonderful stillness of the land. The high banks that shut us in slanted away like paint-daubed walls, what of the vari-colored strata. The ridges back of them were twisted and notched by ancient geologic contortions, washed by countless rains and bleached by unnumbered centuries of sun—a strange jumble of earth and rocks and stunted trees; a place to breed superstitious fears, and warp the soul of a man with loneliness.

In time the *Moon* left this monstrosity of landscape behind, emerging upon a more wholesome land. Grassy bottoms spread on either side the river, and the upper levels ran back in a vast unbroken sweep, the true prairie. And presently we swept around a bend into view of a cluster of houses lining the north shore, and the *Moon's* whistle outdid all previous efforts in the way of ungodly sound. Twenty minutes later she was rubbing softly against a low wharf, her passengers were disembarked, and the back-breaking task of unloading cargo began.

CHAPTER IV—A FORTHRIGHT FIGHTING-MAN

In due time the foodstuffs and other goods were unloaded, and the *Moon* began to take on her return cargo of buffalo hides and sundry bundles of furs, the harvest of the past winter's hunting and the spring trade. Had it been left to our loud-mouthed captain there would have been no cessation of labor until the last pelt was stowed; he would have worked us twenty-four hours to the day. But Benton was not St. Louis, and the men who loaded ship were of a different calibre from the stevedores at the River City. A certain number of hours would they work, and no longer, though the *Moon* rotted at her slip. So we of the regular crew had a breathing spell as sundown approached. And the first spare time at my command I used to write a letter to Bolton, detailing my misadventures. This I

posted, so that in case anything kept me from returning on the *Moon*, he would at least know whither I had gone and how I had fared.

It took two days to unload. The evening of the third day Bilk and I stole away from the boat and went uptown. There was not much of it, to be sure, but what little there was lacked nothing in the way of life and color. One could see any sort of costume, from sober broadcloth and fine linen to the rainbow garb of a blanket Indian. Even the long-haired frontiersman sacred to fiction was represented by a specimen or two. Altogether it was a motley, high-spirited crowd that we mixed with that night. Of the quieter residential portion of Benton I saw nothing, that time. My way, guided thereto by Bilk, was down the main street, where lights shone and glasses clinked merrily; into divers places where ancient pianos tinkled dance music. Drink and dance and gamble, that was the night life of the town. Wherever we went, wherever any man went, up and down the length of that one garish street, he could get a run for his money, if he had money to spend. In every saloon and dance hall the knights of farobank and draw poker held tourney on the field of green cloth. It was all very new and strange and fascinating to me.

Bilk stood treat in one of the saloons, and after we had emptied our glasses we stepped across the room to where a knot of men were watching an unkempt individual buck a roulette wheel with twenty-dollar gold pieces in lieu of chips. He had a dirty felt hat on the table before him, the crown of it half full of gold and silver, and he was scattering the double eagles two and three on a number. It was heavy play, I thought, but the dealer spun the little white ball and called the number and color in a bored sort of manner. The buffalo-runner lost half a dozen bets, and then all at once he caught the double O with three twenty-dollar coins resting on it. I gasped. Twenty-one hundred dollars in fifteen seconds! When the dealer passed over the stacks of gold, the unkempt one opened his mouth for the first time.

"How much'll yuh turn for?" he asked.

The dealer jerked his thumb upward. "We'll take the roof off," he answered carelessly, "if yuh want to play 'em that high."

The buffalo-runner grinned and deliberately set about placing handfuls of coin here and there on the board. And while I stood there wholly engrossed, eagerly watching the ivory ball in its circular race, some one grabbed me by the shoulders and hurled me unceremoniously out the door. Once outside and free of that powerful grip, I turned and beheld Tupper the red-whiskered, very drunk and very angry, flourishing a pistol and shouting vile epithets at me.

"Git back t' the *Moon*, yuh —— son of a sea-cook! I'll jerk an arm off yuh an' beat yuh t' death with the bloody end of it, if yuh show up here again. Scoot!"

Naturally, I "scooted," Mr. Tupper meanwhile emphasizing his threats by

sending a bullet or two skyward. I wondered, at the time, why no peace officer appeared to put a quietus on this manifestation of exuberance, but later in the game I learned that in frontier towns the popping of a pistol was regarded as one of the accessories of a properly joyful mood, men handled their guns to make a noise, a la the small boy with a bunch of holiday firecrackers. One could burn powder with impunity, so long as he had due care for innocent bystanders.

Of Bilk I saw no more, for a while. Thinking that since Tupper's hostility had been directed at me, Bilk might have concluded to keep out of it, and see Benton by himself, I went on to the boat and curled up on a bale of buffalo hides, to sit a while in the moonlight and the pleasant night air before bedding down in the vile hole where we of the roustabout fraternity were permitted to rest o' nights. An hour or so I sat there, and about the time I began to think of turning in, a figure came slouching up the wharf and aboard. The glare of a deck light showed me that it was Bilk. I called to him, and when he came a little nearer I saw further that he, too, had met with rough usage; for his face was bruised and his lips cut and swollen.

"Aw, that dam' mate!" he said, in answer to my questioning. "He gits on a razoo like this every once in a while. Yuh was lucky he just throwed yuh out. The son of a gun nailed me after that an' like t' beat m' head off. He's tearin' drunk an' plumb on the fight. Chances is he'll come down here before mornin' an' want t' lick the captain, the cook, an' the whole blame crew."

"Somebody ought to take an axe to him," I suggested bitterly.

"Yuh betche. That's what he needs," Bilk agreed. "I've heard tell about him gettin' on these fightin' drunks, but this here's the first time he ever got t' me. Yuh wait. I'll git him some uh these times for this." And Bilk went below, muttering dark threats.

I followed shortly, and rolled in. There was no disturbance during the night, and when we stood by for the loading after breakfast Tupper was on hand, a trifle surlier than usual, more or less red about the eyes, but otherwise showing no signs of his carouse. All that day we labored. Again at eventide part of the crew sallied uptown. Before ten o'clock all of them were back, one or two badly damaged about the face, and one and all filled with tales of the mate's pugnacious mood.

"He sez, by the great horn spoon, he'll bust the head of ary hide-slingin' wharf-rat that sticks his nose up the main street. He wants the whole town t' himself, the blamed hog!" one indignantly declared; and from what I'd seen of Tupper I could very well believe that he would have it to himself so far as the crew of the *Moon* was concerned.

The next morning found Mr. Tupper still on deck. Evidently a steady diet of strong whisky and rough-and-tumble fighting agreed with his peculiar consti-

tution. That night we were all but done; two hours' work in the morning would put the *Moon* in shape for the down-river journey. And when evening fell I took a notion to walk up and down the streets of Benton once more. It may have been that the prospect of getting to St. Louis in the near future made me desire to flaunt my independence in the face of the mate. Anyway, without stopping to make a critical analysis of motives, I slipped away from the *Moon* when dark closed in. The engineer came aboard a minute before I left, and I heard him call to his assistant that Tupper was a sheet and a half in the wind, and still wearing his fighting-clothes. But I took no thought of turning back.

Right up the main street I marched, venturing into one saloon after another without mishap. I felt quite elated, like a small boy playing "hookey" from school. And when, in the course of my prowling about, I ran into a half dozen hilarious cowpunchers I clean forgot Mr. Tupper and the unkind things he had promised to do to me.

The camp of these cattlemen, I gathered from their talk, was on the divide that loomed to the north of Benton, and after the manner of their kind they were "taking in the town" for the first time in many weeks. Wherefore, they were thirsty and noisy, and insistent that everybody should drink and be joyful. To one of them, a youngster near my own age, slim, sinewy, picturesque in his hair-faced chaps and high-heeled boots, I talked a little, but it was a hit-and-miss conversation, by reason of the general uproar, and the rapidity with which drinks came. I was all for information, and in his free-and-easy way he shed beams of light upon my black ignorance of range affairs. But alas! a discordant element burst rudely in upon our talk-*fiesta.* Tupper stalked in from the street, and chance decreed that his roving, belligerent eye should single me out of the crowd. I was leaning against a disreputable billiard table, at the time, and straight for me he came, not saying a word, but squinting up his little, pig eyes in a manner that boded ill.

I didn't move. Though my heart flopped like a new-landed trout, I couldn't quite bring myself to slink away. Beaten and bluffed and cowed as I had been for the past two weeks, I hadn't quite lost the power to resent, and though I shrank from the weight of Tupper's ungodly fists I shrank more from absolute flight. Something of the atmosphere of the ranges had crept into me that evening. I did not know what I was about to do, except that I was not going to run away from any red-whiskered brute from St. Louis or any other section of the globe.

He came up close to me, stopped, and regarded me a moment, as if amazed to see me standing there and making no move to go. And then with a quick hunch of his shoulders he swung a dirty fist for my jaw. But that time I fooled Mr. Tupper by sidestepping; I was watching him, and he was a bit oversure. Again he struck out, first with one hand and then the other. This time one of

the blows landed, glancingly. His red, ugly countenance lurching toward me, his whisky-sodden breath in my face was more than I could stand; and when that vicious swing grazed my chin as I backed away, I ducked under his arm and smashed him on his reviling mouth.

It almost paid me for all the abuse I'd taken off him, that one good blow. The backward roll of his head, the quick spurt of blood where my knuckles split his lip, sent a quiver of joy over me. Had he been of the bigness of a house and equipped with two pair of fists I would gladly have fought him after that one punch. It showed me that I could hurt him. It gave me a hungry craving for more. I wanted to beat his ugly little eyes, his squat, round-nostriled nose, and his whisky-guzzling mouth into indistinguishable pulp.

But it was new business to me, and so instead of keeping at him hammer and tongs till he was down and out, I waited for him to rush me again. Wherein I made a sad mistake. If I had battered him down then and there—if—if! At any rate, he did come with a rush, and he came fortified with a wide knowledge of fist tactics to protect him from another such blow as I had dealt him. He fought me halfway across the room, and had me bleeding like a stuck pig before I connected with him again. But eventually one of my wild swings slipped through his guard, and jolted his head backward; the little bloodshot eyes of him blinked with the jar of it. And again I made a mistake. Instead of standing off and hammering him with clean straight punches, I rushed to close quarters. Half crazed with pain and anger I stepped in, swinging short right and left blows for his wabbling head, and so came within the sweep of his great arms.

He clinched, and in his grip I was next thing to helpless. One thing only could I do, and that was to butt him in the face with my head—which kindly office I performed to the best of my ability, until he jammed me hard against the billiard table and bent me backward till I felt my bones crack. And then with his thumb he deliberately set about gouging out one of my eyes.

I can feel it yet, the fierce pain and the horrible fear that overtook me when he jabbed at my eye-ball. I don't know how I broke his hold. I only recollect that, half-blinded, hot searing pangs shooting along my optic nerve, I found myself free of him. And as I backed away from his outstretched paws my hand, sweeping along the billiard table, met and closed upon a hard, round object. With all the strength that was in me I flung it straight at his head. He went to the floor with a neat, circular depression in his forehead, just over the left eye.

There was a hush in the saloon. One of the cattlemen stooped over him.

"*Sangre de Cristo!*" he laughed. "A billiard ball sure beats a six-shooter for quick action. I'll bet he was dead when he hit the floor."

CHAPTER V—THE RELATIVE MERITS OF THE FRYING-PAN AND THE FIRE

They crowded close, a little ring of curious faces, about me and the dead man on the floor, and as a babel of talk uprose a tall, lean man pushed his way into the circle, Captain Speer of the *Moon* at his heels.

"I guess I'll have to take you in just for luck," the stranger said to me. "I'm town marshal. This killin' business has got t' stop."

He took me by the arm, and as he did so the cowpuncher who had looked down at Tupper stepped in between us, breaking the marshal's hold.

"Not this time, Bax," he said softly. "Play fair or keep out uh the game. Yuh stay mighty close in your hole when a gun-fighter hits the town, and I'll be damned if you build up your reputation by arrestin' a kid. This red-muzzler came in huntin' trouble, and he found it. It was on the square, and yuh ain't goin' to put nobody in your stinkin' calaboose—not to-night. You and me don't hitch on *that* proposition."

For a second or two it seemed as if there might be another clash. Behind the two a space cleared at the first words, and I noticed more than one cowpuncher hitch his gun-belt forward. For myself, I was too dazed to realize the exact turn of affairs, and I cared less. Tupper, at least, would trouble me no more, and for that I was truly glad. But there was no mix-up, nor even a harsh word. The marshal weakened. If he had intended to take me he changed his mind after a brief glance at the faces of the men who were watching him with silent intentness.

"If that's the way yuh feel about it, all right," he said—with an indifference that his flushed face belied. He turned on his heel and walked out, Captain Speer following.

"Yuh bet it's all right," the cowpuncher flung after him derisively.

Then to me: "Throw a jolt uh Bourbon into yuh, kid, and you'll feel better. Yuh made a good fight. But let me tell yuh somethin'. Go heeled. And when one uh these rough-necked fist-fighters jumps yuh, ventilate him. Show your claws

a time or two, and these would-be bad actors'll leave yuh strictly alone. Say, Mr. Bar-slave let's have one *pronto*."

Three or four of them picked up the carcass of the *Moon's* mate and lugged it unceremoniously out to a rear room, and then the crowd lined up at the bar, the play at the wheel went on, the men at the faro-table who had turned on their stools to watch the fight again began to place their bets. Life ran too full and strong there to be long disturbed by the passing of any man.

My self-appointed champion—who, I now discovered, was just drunk enough to welcome disturbance in any form whatsoever—and the young fellow with whom I had been speaking before the row, wiped the blood off my face and doctored the eye that Tupper had come near gouging from its socket. And while they were thus ministering to me another stockhand clanked in from the street.

"Say, Matt, yuh sure stirred up somethin'," he announced. "This the kid that got action on the St. Louis jasper? Well, there's goin' to be a healthy ruction round here over that, let me tell yuh. Bax is red-eyed over yuh runnin' a whizzer on him, and he's collectin' a posse to take both of yuh in. Don't yuh reckon we better drift for camp, Matt?"

Matt smiled and beckoned to some of the others. "Not by a long shot!" he drawled. "Whenever old Ed Bax runs me out uh town, it'll be in the good-by wagon. I'm goin' to see that this kid gets a square deal. If Bax or anybody else wants me let 'em come and get me. Will the rest uh you fellows stand pat?"

In varying stages of hilarity they crowded about him and profanely assured him that they would turn Benton inside out and shake the pockets if he but said the word. In the midst of their chatter the man who had brought news of the marshal's action drew closer and lowered his voice.

"Look here, Matt," he argued, "you're runnin' the outfit and you're a friend of mine and all that sort of thing, and yuh know that all of us'll back any sort of play yuh make. But it looks to me like we can do better'n to pull off a big fight. I ain't plumb chicken-hearted, but Bax is goin' to come down on us with a bunch uh tin-horn gamblers to help him out, and if this kid's in sight he's goin' to try and take him. Yuh sabe? He's got to make some kind of a bluff at it, or every pilgrim that comes along'll run over him. So it's a cinch that there'll be more or less gun-play, and the Circle'll be shy a man or two when it's over."

"They ain't got the nerve, Dick," Matt declared confidently.

"It don't take much nerve to start anything like that," Dick replied. "Somebody'll reach for his gun, and it'll be off. Now, Bax ain't goin' to jump *you*—he's afraid to. If the kid's with yuh he's got to. I move we stake this kid to a hoss, and let him drift. That lets *him* out. And if Bax wants to have it out with yuh on general principles, why, we'll see it through."

"Dick's right," one of them put in. "The kid's got to hit the trail, anyhow,

and he might as well do it right away quick. That's the main thing, ain't it. We started in to help him out, and if we can do it peaceful, we'll live longer. Bax won't tackle us unless he just has to."

"Yuh got me on the run," Matt frowned. "I'd just as soon dehorn this Bax party to-night as any other time. But I see where the kid better move out, all right. You pilot him, Wall, and catch up one uh them extra hosses, and stake him to that saddle Musky left—I'll fix it with old Musk when he comes back. He can ride my hoss to camp."

It was all arranged offhand in less time than I have taken to tell of it, and I was hustled out to where a row of cow-ponies patiently awaited the pleasure of their hard-riding masters. For aught these sons of the plains knew I was a purely worthless bit of human driftwood. But I don't think they gave a thought to the matter. There was only one thing to be done, in their estimation, and they proceeded to do it without consulting me or doing very much talking about it themselves. So very shortly I found myself straddle of the Circle foreman's horse and jogging out of Benton. Beside me, young Wall rode silently until we reached the top of the long hill that slopes to the town. Then he shook his horse into a lope, and broke into cheerful whistling.

I, however, was far short of the whistling mood. The thing I should have done I was afraid to do. Ordinarily, my instinct would have been to face the music. I was unrepentant for the part I had played in the extinction of Tupper. Nor would I, if I had calmly weighed the chances for and against, have felt any fear of consequences before the law. But my experience with the law, in those days, was a void. That which we do not understand we usually fear, and that night I was stricken with a swift fear of the law. I had killed, and there was a penalty. My spirit revolted at the thought of a jail. Likewise, the quick action of those Circle cowpunchers made a deep impression on me. If incarceration was so to be avoided that they were willing to back their deeds with gunpowder, I wanted no phase of incarceration in my experience. Better the open, an unknown country, and whatever might befall therein, than to lie in Benton "calaboose"—which, to my disturbed mind, was a synonym for a place of vague horrors.

I thought of standing my ground, of taking chances on Bax the marshal and the Benton jail, until the *Moon* could reach St. Louis and apprise Bolton of my need—and then I shuddered at the thought that the thing might be settled beyond interference before he could make the long river journey. I had heard and read more or less of hasty trials in the West; I had killed a man in what seemed to me a barbarous fashion; I did not know what the authorities, self-constituted or otherwise, might do to me—and I hadn't the nerve to stay and find out. If they should hang me, thought I, I shall be a long time dead. Flight, under these circumstances, made the strongest appeal to my excited imagination.

Such was the chaotic state of my ideas when Wall pulled up his horse, and I saw the white glimmer of tents close at hand.

"Night-hawk's got the bunch over here, I think," said he. "Seems like I hear the bells. Anyhow, you stay here and I'll get yuh a *caballo* that can drift."

He trotted off, leaving me standing by the clear-cut outline of a wagon. Away off in the semi-dark—for the moon was now risen—I heard a sudden scurry of hoofs, an accentuated jangling of two or three small bells. Presently Wall came loping back leading a blaze-faced sorrel horse.

From under the forward end of the wagon he dragged a saddle, a bridle and a saddle-blanket.

"There," he said, "there's a good rig, barrin' spurs—which yuh won't need much. And a good hoss to put it on. Go to it."

The stock saddle, with its high horn and deep seat, was not so different from what I'd been used to—except as to weight. The double-cinch apparatus bothered me a little, but when Wall explained the uses of the latigo and the manner of its tying, I got my horse saddled properly—the small imps of uneasy haste spurring me on. Then I swung up to try the stirrups, and found that I had a restive brute under me. He plunged once or twice, but I kept his head in the air, and finally straightened him out. Wall nodded approval.

"I wasn't dead sure yuh could ride him," he owned. "But I see you've got him in your sack, and you'll find him there when it comes to gettin' over the ground."

"I'm all ready now, I think," said I.

"Wait a minute," Wall laughed. "Don't rush off. Bax wouldn't come into the Circle camp after yuh to-night for two farms in Iowa. Chances are he's busy right now figuring a way to get a dead safe whack at Matt Dunn. Come on over to the cook-tent and get some grub to tie on your saddle. You'll need it."

By the light of a candle he ransacked the grub boxes on the tail end of the cook-wagon. A loaf of bread, some fresh-made biscuits, and a big piece of boiled beef, together with a trifle of pepper and salt this light-hearted, capable youngster wrapped in a bit of burlap and tied behind the cantle of my saddle. And while he munched a piece of beef himself, he gave me explicit directions as to my course.

"Once yuh get over into the MacLeod country," he concluded, "you'll be all right. Nobody'll care a cuss who yuh are nor where yuh come from, so long as yuh behave yourself. This red hoss hasn't got the Circle brand, though he belongs to the outfit, so they won't ask no fool questions about him. Yuh ought to pick up a job with some uh them Canadian layouts pretty easy."

"Oh, wait a minute," he exclaimed, when I was again about to mount, and he ran over to an outspread canvas-covered bed. He fumbled among the tumbled quilts a moment and came back to me carrying a broad cartridge-belt, on which

a bone-handled Colt swung in its leathern scabbard.

"I pretty near forgot this," he chuckled. "Yuh ain't heeled, and Lord knows yuh need to be at this stage uh the game. Say, how are yuh off for coin?"

"Man alive!" I cried—and I meant it, "you've done more for me now than I can repay in a thousand years. I don't need money."

"Oh, yes, yuh do," he returned, unruffled. "A dollar or two'll come mighty handy when yuh hit MacLeod, or wherever yuh land. I ain't goin' to make yuh rich. Here, and good luck to yuh."

He pressed a ten-dollar gold piece upon me. Then we shook hands as brothers at parting, and I rode out of the Circle camp on a high-stepping horse, with the Big Dipper and the North Star to guide me to the Canada line.

CHAPTER VI—SLOWFOOT GEORGE

I retain some vivid impressions of that night ride. A mile or two from the Circle tents I crossed the Teton River, then just receding from the June rise, and near swimming deep. After that I came out upon a great spread of bench-land, dotted with silent prairie-dog towns. Here and there a lone butte rose pinnacle-like out of the flatness. In all my short life I had never known what it was to be beyond sound of a human voice, to be utterly alone. That night was my first taste of it, and to my unaccustomed ears the patter of my horse's hoofs seemed to be echoing up from a sounding-board, and the jingle of the bit chains rang like a bell, so profound was the quiet. I know of nothing that compares with the plains for pure loneliness, unless it be the deserted streets of a city at four in the morning—or the hushed, ghostly woods of the North, which I was yet to know. Each hollow into which I dipped reeked of mysterious possibilities. Every moon-bathed rise of land gave me a vague feeling that something sinister, some incomprehensible evil, lay in wait upon the farther side. Whatever of superstition lay dormant in my make-up was all agog that night; my environment was having its will of me. I know now that my nerves were all a-jangle. But what would you? The dark brings its subtle, threatening atmosphere to bear on braver men than I. For aught I knew there might be a price on my head. Certainly I was a fugitive, and flight

breeds groundless, unreasoning fears.

Bearing a little west of the North Star, I kept the red horse at a steady jog, and when the night was far spent and my bones aching from the ride I came to another river—the Marias—which Wall had told me I must cross. Following his directions, a half-hour's journey upstream brought me upon a trail; a few wagon-tracks that I near overlooked. This led to a ford, or what may once have been a ford. It no longer merited the term, for I got well soaked in the deep, swift stream. Red carried me through, however, and when I gained the farther bank of the Marias Valley a faint reddish glow was creeping up in the east. In a little while it was broad day.

Then I halted for the first time. My mettlesome steed I picketed carefully, ate a little of the biscuits and boiled beef, and lay down to sleep in a grassy hollow, too tired to care whether Bax was hard on my trail or not. The sunlight had given me a fresh access of courage, I think—that and the heady air of those crisp morning hours. My difficulties began to take on some of the aspects of an adventure. Once in the Territories, with none to hound me, I could apprise Bolton and he would forward money to get me home. That was all I needed. And if I could not manage to eke out a living in the meantime I was not the son of my father. I fell asleep with a wistful eye on three blue spires that broke the smooth sweep of the skyline to the northward—the Sweet Grass Hills, touching on the Canadian boundary, if I remembered rightly what Wall had said.

The hot noon sun beating on my unprotected face roused me at last. It was near midday. I had no liking for further moonlight travel, so I saddled up and rode on, thinking to get somewhere near the Hills by dusk, and camp there for the night. I was now over my first fear of being followed; but, oh, my hearers, I was stiff and sore! A forty or fifty mile jaunt is not much to a seasoned rider—but I lacked seasoning; however, I was due to get it.

A little before sundown I rode into the long shadow of West Butte, in rare good humor with myself despite the ache in my legs, for by grace of my good red horse I had covered a wonderful stretch that afternoon, and my nag was yet stepping out lightly. On either hand loomed the rugged pyramids of the Sweet Grass—which in truth are not hills at all, but three boulder-strewn, pine-clad mountains rising abruptly out of a rolling plain. The breaks of Milk River, in its over-the-border curve, showed plainly in the distance. I was nearing the City of Refuge.

There in that shadow-darkened notch between the lofty pinnacles I came to a new fork in the Trouble Trail. I did not know it then, but later I could not gainsay the fact. And the mile-post that directed my uncertain steps was merely a strain of the devil in the blaze-faced sorrel I bestrode. Had he been of a less turbulent spirit I doubt much if I should ever have fallen in with Slowfoot George.

It happened very simply. Ambling along with eyes for little but the wild land that surrounded, with reins held carelessly in lax fingers, I was an easy victim. As before remarked, I can put forward no better explanation than a streak of "cussedness" in my red mount. Suffice it to relate, that all at once I found my steed performing a series of diabolic evolutions, and in some mysterious manner he and I parted company in a final burst of rapid-fire contortions. I have since heard and read much of the Western horse and his unique method of unseating a rider, but never yet have I seen justice done the subject. Nor shall I descant long on such an unpleasant theme. Let me simply record the fact that I came to earth ungracefully, with a jarring shock, much as an importunate suitor might be presumed to descend the front steps of his inamorata's home, when assisted therefrom by the paternal toe. And when I sat up, a freshly-bruised and crestfallen youth, it was to behold Red clattering over a little hillock, head up, stirrups swinging wide. He seemed in hot haste. Like a fool I had knotted the reins together for easier holding; with them looped upon his neck he felt as much at liberty as though stripped clean of riding-gear.

It looked like a dubious prospect. Upon second thought I decided that it could easily have been worse. A broken leg, say, would have been a choice complication. My bones, however, remained intact. So I sought about in the grass for the pistol that had been jolted from its place during the upheaval, and when I found it betook myself upon the way my erratic nag had gone.

It was no difficult matter for me to arrive at the conclusion that I was in a fair way to go into the Northwest afoot—should I be lucky enough to arrive at all. Red seemed to have gone into hiding. At least, he remained unseen, though I ascended divers little eminences and stared my hardest, realizing something of the hopelessness of my quest even while I stared. That Sweet Grass country is monstrously deceptive to the unsophisticated. Overlooking it from a little height one thinks he sees immense areas of gently undulating plain; and he sees truly. But when he comes to traverse this smooth sea of land that ripples away to a far skyline, it is a horse of another color, I assure you. He has not taken thought of what tricks the clear air and the great spaces have played with his perspective. The difference between looking over fifty miles of grassland and crossing the same is the difference between viewing a stretch of salt water from a convenient point ashore and being out in a two-oared skiff bucking the sway-backed rollers that heave up from the sea.

So with the plains: that portion of which I speak. Distance smoothed its native ruggedness, glossed over its facial wrinkles, so to say. The illusion became at once apparent when one moved toward any given point. The negligible creases developed into deep coulees, the gentle undulations proved long sharp-pitched divides. Creeks, flood-worn serpentine water-courses, surprised one in

unexpected places.

I had not noticed these things particularly while I rode. Now, as I tramped across country, persuading myself that over each succeeding hill I should find my light-footed sorrel horse meekly awaiting me, it seemed that I was always either climbing up or sliding down. I found myself deep in an abstract problem as I plodded—trying to strike a balance between the illusory level effect and stern topographical realities. Presently I gave that up, and came back to concrete facts. Whereupon, being very tired and stiff from a longer ride than I had ever taken before, and correspondingly ill-tempered, I damned the red horse for bucking me off and myself for permitting any beast of the field to serve me so, and then sat down upon the peak of a low hill to reflect where and how I should come by my supper.

A smart breeze frolicked up from that quarter where the disappearing sun cast a bloodshot haze over a few tumbled clouds. This, I daresay, muffled sounds behind me to some extent. At any rate, I was startled out of my cogitations by a voice close by—a drawly utterance which evoked a sudden vision of a girl with wind-raveled hair, and a lean, dark-faced man leaning over a deck railing on the *Moon*.

"Magnificent outlook, isn't it?"

Notwithstanding the surprise of finding him at my elbow in such unexpected fashion, I faced about with tolerable calmness. That intuitive flash had been no false harbinger, for it was Barreau sure enough. The angular visage of him was not to be confounded with that of any casual stranger, even though his habiliments were no longer broadcloth and its concomitants of linen and polished shoes. Instead, a gray Stetson topped his head, and he was gloved and booted like a cowboy. Lest it be thought that his plight was twin to my own, I will say that he looked down upon me from the back of a horse as black as midnight, a long-geared brute with a curved neck and a rolling eye. Best of all, at the end of a lariat Barreau held my own red horse.

"That," said I, "depends on how you look at it. I'll admit that the outlook is fine—since you have brought me back my runaway horse."

"I meant *that*," he nodded to the glowing horizon. "But I daresay a man gets little pleasure out of a red sky when he is set afoot in a horseless land. It will pay you, my friend, to keep your horse between your legs hereafter."

"He threw me," I confessed. "Where did you catch him? And how did you find me?"

"I thought he had slipped his pack, by the tied-up reins," said Barreau. "As for catching him and finding you, that was an easy matter. He ran fairly into me, and I had only to look about for a man walking."

"Well," I returned, taking my sorrel by the rope, "I'm properly grateful for

your help. And I have another matter to thank you for, if I am not badly mistaken."

He made a slight gesture of deprecation. "Never mind that," said he. His attitude was no encouragement to profuse thanks, if I had contemplated such.

I turned then to inspect my saddle, and found fresh cause for perplexity. By some means my supply of bread and beef had been shaken from its fastening. The bit of sack hung slack in the strings, but the food was gone. He looked down inquiringly, at my exclamation.

"More of my luck," said I, and explained.

"Might I ask," said he, after a moment of thoughtful scrutiny, "where you are bound for?"

"It's no secret," I replied. "I'm for the MacLeod country; over the line."

"Then you may as well ride with me this evening," he invited. "It is only a few miles to the Sanders ranch; you will be that much farther on your way. I can vouch for their hospitality."

I hesitated, for obvious reasons. He smiled, as if he read my mind. And all in a breath I yielded to some subtle confidence-compelling quality of the man, and blurted out my story; the killing of Tupper, that is, and how the Circle men had aided me.

"I guessed at something of the sort," he remarked. "You are new at the game, and you bear the ear-marks of a man on the dodge. We are a rowdy lot out here sometimes, and we can't always settle our disputes by word of mouth; so that I think you will find most of us inclined to look lightly on what seems to you a serious affair indeed. Tupper had it in store for him; Speer too, for all of that, and many another brute on those river craft. You haven't much to worry about. Very likely Benton has forgotten the thing by now—unless Bax and Matt Dunn's men locked horns over it. Of course there is the chance that the Benton and St. Louis Company may hound you for killing one of their officers. But there's no fear of their coming to Sanders' after you—not to-night; and to-morrow, and all the other to-morrows, you can take things as they come. That's the best philosophy for the plains."

He swung a half-mile to the east, and picked up a pack-horse he had left when he took after my mount. Thereafter we loped north in the falling dusk, Barreau riding mute after his long speech, and I, perforce, following his example. At length we drew up at the ranch, a vague huddle of low buildings set in the bend of a creek. Barreau appeared to be quite familiar with the place. Even in the gloom he went straight to the bars of a small, round corral. In this we tied our horses, throwing them hay from a new-made stack close by. Then he led the way to a lighted cabin.

Barreau pushed open the door and walked in without ceremony. Two men were in the room; one lying upon a bunk, the other sitting with his spurred heels

on the corner of a table. Each of them looked up at my companion, and both in one breath declared:

"I'll be damned if it ain't Slowfoot!"

After that there was more or less desultory talk, mostly impersonal—no questions pertinent to myself troubled the tongues of either man. One built a fire and cooked us a hot supper. The other made down a bed in one corner of the cabin, and upon this, at the close of the meal Barreau and I lay down to rest.

A jolt in the ribs and the flash of a light in my eyes brought me to a sitting posture later in the night. Sleep-heavy, what of the strenuous events that had gone before, it took me a full half-minute to get my bearings. And then I saw that three men in scarlet jackets held the two Sanders under their guns, while Barreau stood backed against the cabin wall with his hands held above his head. Even so it seemed to me that he was regarding the whole proceeding with a distinct curl to his lip.

"Come alive now, old chap, and don't cut up rusty—it won't do a bit o' good," one of these oddly dressed strangers was admonishing; and it dawned upon me that I, too, was included in the threatening sweep of their firearms. "Get into your clothes, old chap."

It is astonishing—afterward—how much and how quickly one can reflect in a few fleeting seconds. A multitude of ideas swarmed in my brain. Plans to resist, to escape, half formed and were as instantaneously discarded. Among the jumble it occurred to me that I could scarcely be wanted for that Benton affair—my capture could scarcely be the cause of such a display. No, thought I, there must be more to it than that. Otherwise, Barreau and the two Sanders would not have been meddled with. Of course, I did not come to this conclusion of deliberate thought; it was more of an impression, perhaps I should say intuition, and yet I seemed to have viewed the odd circumstance from every angle in the brief time it took me to lay hold of my clothes. The queer sardonic expression lingered about Barreau's lips all the while I dressed.

Presently I was clothed. Then the red-coated men mustered the four of us outside, by the light of a lantern. And two of them stood by the doorway and snapped a pair of handcuffs about the wrists of each of us as we passed out.

"Now," said one of them, "you Sanders chaps know what horses you'd care to ride, and what stock Slowfoot George has here. So one of you can come to the stable wi' me and saddle up."

He took the youngest man, and went trailing him up in the uncertain light till both of them were utterly gone. After something of a wait they appeared, leading Barreau's horse and mine and two others. In the interim I had had time to count noses. There was a man apiece for the four of us, and one off behind the cabin holding the raiders' saddlestock. We stood there like so many pieces

of uncouth statuary, no one seeming to have any inclination for talk, until the saddled horses came up. Then both the Sanders found their tongues in behalf of me.

"Look a-here, sergeant," said the one, "yuh ain't got any business over here, and yuh know it. Even if yuh did, this kid don't belong in the crowd. You're after us and yuh got us, but you've no call to meddle with him."

"That's right," his brother put in. "I don't know him from Adam. He just drifted in and camped overnight at the ranch."

"I say y'know, that's a bit strong," the sergeant returned. "'Birds of a feather,' y'know. I shan't take any chances. You're too hard a lot, Sanders; you and your friend Slowfoot George."

Thus he left no room for argument; and in a few minutes the four of us were in the saddle and on the move, a Mounted Policeman jogging at the elbow of each man.

At the end of half an hour's progress, as we crossed a fairly level stretch of plain, we came to a little cairn of rocks; and when we had passed it the sergeant pulled up his horse and faced about. The moon was up, and the earth and the cairn and even our features stood out clear in the silvery glow.

"John Sanders, Walter Sanders, George Brown alias Slowfoot George, and one John Doe, in the Queen's name I arrest you," he addressed us perfunctorily.

A trooper snickered, and Barreau laughed out loud.

"Routine—routine and red tape, even in this rotten deal," I heard Slowfoot murmur, when his laugh hushed. And on the other side of me Walt Sanders raised in his stirrups and cried hotly:

"You dirty dogs! Some day I'll make yuh damned sorry yuh didn't keep your own side of the line to-night."

Of this the sergeant took no notice. He shook his horse into a trot, and prisoners and guard elbow to elbow, we moved on.

CHAPTER VII—THE SEAT OF THE SCORNFUL

"Destiny lurks in obscure places and emerges therefrom to seize upon us un-

awares."

Barreau launched this epigrammatic sentence in the profound quiet of a cell in the MacLeod guardhouse. For that is the pass we came to: a six by eight housing of stout planks for the pair of us, food of indifferent quality in none too generous rations, and the keen eye of an armed guard in the background. For two days we had brooded in this cage, like any common felons.

Of the intervening time there is nothing worthy of chronicling. During the time it took Sergeant Hubbel and his troopers to bring us in we rode, ate, slept, and rode again, and little else befell. If Barreau and the two Sanders worried over the outcome, if they indulged any thought of escape, or laid plans to that end, they kept these things to themselves. I perforce, did likewise. Altogether, we were a company of few words. And one evening, when dusk was closing in, the journey ended, and we lay down to sleep with barred doors and windows between us and other men.

Little as we spoke I gathered stray odds and ends of the affair, and pieced them as best I could. Most of it came from the troopers. After all, the thing was simple enough. At that time the sale of liquor was strictly prohibited in the Canadian Territories, and naturally whisky was at a premium. Thus the Sanders ranch, lying just across the American line, furnished an ideal base of operations for men inclined to gather in the shekels of the thirsty. Proof of the traffic in contraband whisky lay ready for use, at least so the Policemen had it—but they could never catch the wily Sanders brothers on the right side of the boundary. So with a fine disregard for all but the object to be gained, they violated an international technicality. The result justified the raid; that is, from the Mounted Police point of view. My arrest followed logically, from the company I was in. Barreau's connection, however, was a little beyond me. "Slowfoot George," as they called him, came in for cautious handling. Not once were his wrists free of the steel bands till the guardhouse door closed upon him. From this, and certain pointed remarks that I failed to catch in their entirety, I conceived the idea that he was wanted for worse than whisky-running. But like the other two, Barreau neither denied nor affirmed. Once the sergeant tried to draw him out and the curl of his lip and a caustic word or two cut short the Policeman's effort.

Our "apartment" was singularly free from furniture. A wide plank ranged on either side, and a few not overclean quilts served for a bed. There was no room for more in that vile box. I had managed to get paper and a pen from the guard, and was curled up on my plank setting forth in a letter to Bolton all the unbelievable things that had occurred, when Barreau uttered his observation anent the workings of Destiny. Something in the way he spoke caused me to look up, and I saw that he was looking fixedly out into the guard-room through the grated opening in our cell door. There was none too much light, but with what

there was I made out a paleness of face and a compression of his lips that were strangely at odds with his general bearing.

"What now?" I asked, wondering at the sudden change in him.

"Something I had hoped to be spared," he said under his breath; more to himself than to me. Then he turned his eyes from the little window, drew up his knees till his fingers locked before them, and so sat hunched against the wall. Wholly absorbed in my letter-writing I had heard nothing out of the common. Now I distinguished voices, the deep tones of a man and following that the clear treble of a woman. During a brief interval of quiet she laughed, and after that I heard footsteps coming toward the row, out of which our cell faced.

Presently the shadow of them darkened the little window in our door. The red coat of the guard passed. Barreau shifted uneasily. I, too, leaned forward listening to the light footfall drawing near, for I had a vivid recollection of that voice—or one that was its twin. It did not seem strange that she should be there; Benton is not so far from MacLeod in that land of great distances. And my recollection was not at fault. An instant later her small, elfish face bent to the opening and she peered in on us—as one who views caged beasts of the jungle.

But there was none of the human fear of wild things in her attitude.

"So," she said coolly, tucking a lock of hair under the same ridiculous little cap she had worn on the *Moon*, "this is how the Northwest would have you, is it, Mr. Bar—Mr. Brown. Alas! 'To what base uses we do return.' I cannot say you have my sympathy."

"If that is the least cruel thing you can say," Barreau flung back at her, putting his feet on the floor and resting his hands on the edge of his seat, "I thank you. But my trail is my own, and I have never yet asked you to follow in my stumbling footsteps."

She colored at that, and from where I sat I could see the Police guard lift his eyebrows inquiringly. But she had other shafts at hand.

"I grant you that," she replied quickly. "But it is a shock, when one conceives a man to be something of a *gentleman*; to have some remnant of the code honorable—then, pah! to find his name a by-word on the frontier. A murderer! Even descended to common theft and dealings in contraband whisky. You have a savory record in these parts, I find. How nicely this chamber fits you, Mr.—ah—what is the euphonious title? Slowfoot George. Ah, yes. Why the Slowfoot? By the tale of your successful elusion of the law I should imagine you exceeding fleet of foot."

It seemed to me unwomanly and uncalled for, that bitter, scornful speech; even granting the truth of it, which had not been established in my mind. But it had a tonic effect on Barreau. The hurt look faded from his face. His lips parted in the odd, half-scornful, half-amused smile that was always lurking about his

mouth. He did not at once reply. When he did it was only a crisp sentence or two.

"Let us be done with this," he said. "There is neither pleasure nor profit in exchanging insults."

"Indeed," she thrust back, "there can be no exchange of insults between us. Could aught *you* say insult any honest man or woman? But so be it. I came merely to convince my eyes that my ears heard truly. It may tickle your depraved vanity to know that MacLeod is buzzing with your exploits and capture."

"That concerns me little," Barreau returned indifferently.

"Ditto," she averred, "except that I am right glad to find you stripped of your sheep's clothing, little as I expected such a revelation concerning one who passed for a gentleman. And to think that I might never have found you out, if my father had permitted me to return from Benton."

"Permitted?" Barreau laid inquiring inflection on the word.

"What is it to——" she cut in sharply.

"Your father," he interrupted deliberately, "is a despicable scoundrel; a liar and a cheat of the first water."

"Oh—oh!" she gasped. "This—from *you*."

"I said, 'let us be done with this,' a moment ago," he reminded her.

She drew back as if he had struck at her, flushing, her under lip quivering—more from anger than any other emotion, I think. Almost at once she leaned forward again, glaring straight at Barreau.

"It would be of a piece with your past deeds," she cried, "if you should break this flimsy jail and butcher my father and myself while we slept. Oh, one could expect anything from such as you!" And then she was gone, the guard striding heavy-footed after her. A puzzled expression crept over Barreau's face, blotting out the ironic smile.

"It was a dirty trick of me to speak so," he muttered, after a little. "But my God, a man can't always play the Stoic under the lash. However—I daresay——" He went off into a profound study, resting his chin in the palms of his hands. I kept my peace, making aimless marks with my pen. It was an odd turn of affairs.

"Bob, what did I say about Destiny awhile ago?" he raised his head and addressed me suddenly. "I will take it back. I am going to take Destiny by the nape of the neck. Being grilled on the seat of the scornful is little to my liking. It was a bit of ill-luck that you fell in with me. I seem to be in a bad boat."

"Ill-luck for which of us?" I asked. It was the first time he had sounded the personal note—aside from the evening we were landed in MacLeod, when he comforted me with the assurance that at the worst I would spend no more than a few days in the guardhouse.

"For you, of course," he replied seriously. "My sins are upon my own head.

But it was unfortunate that I should have led you to Sanders' place the very night picked for a raid. They can have nothing against you, though; and they'll let you out fast enough when it comes to a hearing. Nor, for that matter, are they likely to hang me, notwithstanding the ugly things folk say. However, I have work to do which I cannot do lying here. Hence I perceive that I must get out of here. And I may need your help."

"How are you going to manage that?" I inquired, gazing with some astonishment at this man who spoke so coolly and confidently of getting out of prison. "These walls seem pretty solid, and you can hardly dig through them with a lone pen-nib. That's the only implement I see at hand. And I expect the guard will be after that before I get my letter done."

"I don't know how the thing will be done," he declared, "but I am surely going to get out of here pretty *pronto*, as the cowmen have it."

He settled back and took to staring at the ceiling. I, presently, became immersed in my letter to Bolton. When it was done I thrust a hand through the bars of my cell and wig-wagged the Policeman—they were good-natured souls for the most part, tolerant of their prisoners, and it broke the grinding monotony to exchange a few words with one under almost any pretext. Barreau was chary of speech, and the Sanders brothers were penned beyond my sight. Sheer monotonous silence, I imagine, would drive even peace-loving men to revolt and commit desperate deeds when they are cooped within four walls with nothing but their thoughts for company.

When he came I observed that the guard had been changed since Miss Montell's visit. The new man was a lean, sour-faced trooper. To my surprise he took my letter and then stood peeping in past me to where Barreau lay on his bunk. After a few seconds he walked away, smiling queerly. In a minute or so he was back again, taking another squint. This time Barreau turned over facing the door, and when the trooper continued his promenade past our cell he got up and stood before the barred window, completely shutting off my outlook. I could not see, but I could hear. And by the sound of his booted feet the guard passed and repassed several times.

After a little he tired of this, it seemed, for I heard him stalking away to the front of the guardhouse, and immediately thereafter the creak of a chair as he sat down. Then Barreau sat down on his bunk again.

"Try this, kid," he said, and tossed a package of tobacco and cigarette papers to me. I fell upon the forbidden luxury like a starving man upon food. He rolled himself one out of material in his hand, and in the midst of my puffing changed to my side of the cell—it was but a scant three feet to move—and sat down between me and the door.

"Fate smiles at last," he whispered. "Blackie passed me in a little tobacco.

And—see, here in my hand."

I glanced down at what he was snuggling down out of sight between us, a heavy-bladed knife, a tiny saw, not more than six inches in length, and a piece of notepaper marked with what my reason told me must be a ground plan of the very place we were in.

"The tools of my deliverance," said Barreau in an undertone. "I am for the blue sky and the sun and the clean, wide prairies once more."

CHAPTER VIII—BY WAYS THAT WERE DARK

Looking back I marvel at the ridiculous ease with which the thing was accomplished. Still more do I marvel at my own part in it. Brought up as I had been, shielded from the ill winds of existence, taught the perfunctory, conventional standards of behavior that suffice for those whose lives are lived according to a little-varying plan, I should have shrunk from further infraction of the law. Indeed it is no more than could have been expected had I refused absolutely to lend myself to Barreau's desperate plan. Conscious that I had done no wrong I might have been moved to veto an enterprise that imperiled me, to protest against his drawing me further into his own troublous coil. But I did nothing of the sort. It did not occur to me. My point of view was no longer that of the son of a St. Louis gentleman. And the transition was so complete, so radical, and withal, so much the growth of the past three weeks, that I was unaware of the change.

I know of no clearer illustration of the power of environment. Indubitably I should have looked askance at a man who tacitly admitted himself more or less of a criminal, making no defense, no denial. The traditions of my class should have kept me aloof, conscious of my own clean hands. This, I repeat, was what might have been expected of me: Put to me as an abstract proposition, I would have been very positive of where I should stand.

But without being conscious of any deviation from my previous concepts of right and wrong, I found myself all agog to help Slowfoot George escape. For myself, there was no question of flight. That, we agreed upon, at the outset. I could gain nothing by putting myself at odds with Canadian law, for the law

itself would free me in its meteing out of justice. But with him it was different; he admitted the fact. And even so I found myself making nothing of the admission. He conformed to none of my vague ideas of the criminal type. In aiding him to be free I seemed to be freeing myself by proxy, as it were; and how badly I desired to be quit of the strange tangle that enmeshed me, none but myself can quite appreciate.

After all, so far as my help was concerned it consisted largely of what Barreau dryly termed, "moral support." I acquiesced in the necessity. I stood on the lookout for interruptions. He did the work.

While he cut with his knife a hole in the floor, so that the point of the little saw could enter, I stood by the window listening for the footsteps that would herald a guard's approach. He worked rapidly, yet in no apparent haste. He had that faculty of straining every nerve at what he was about, without seeming to do so; there was no waste energy, no fluster. And the cutting and sawing speedily bore fruit. So noiselessly and deftly did he work that in less than half an hour he had sawn a hole in the floor large enough to admit his body; and the dank smell of earth long hidden from sunlight struck me when I bent down to look. Then with a caution that I should watch closely and tap on the floor with my heel if any of the guard came poking around the cells, he wriggled through the opening and disappeared.

I leaned against the wall, breathing a bit faster. The hole was cut in a corner, to the right of the cell door. From the outside it could scarcely be noticed. But I had wit enough to know that if a trooper glanced in and missed Barreau the hole would be discovered fast enough. Which would involve me in the attempt; and I was aware that jail-breakers fare ill if they are caught. But no one moved in the guardhouse, save now and then a prisoner shuffling about in his cell. Occasionally I could hear the low murmur of their voices—it was a small place and filled to its capacity—else Barreau and I would not have been penned together.

After an interminable period he came quietly out from under the floor, and carefully fitted in their places the planks he had cut. One had to look closely to see a mark, after he had brushed into the cracks some dust from the floor. Barreau's eyes twinkled when he sat down on his bunk and rolled himself a cigarette.

"Everything just as it should be," he told me. "Nothing to do but root away a little dirt from the bottom log of the outside wall. I could walk out, a free man, in five minutes. There will be a fine fuss and feathers to-night. They have never had a jail delivery here, you know. Lord, it's easy though, when one has the tools."

"There'll be a hot chase," I suggested. "Will you stand much chance."

"That depends on how much of a start I get," he said grimly. "I think I can fool them. If not—well——"

He relapsed into silence. Someone clanked into the guard-room, and Barreau snuffed out his cigarette with one swift movement. In a second or two the trooper went out again. We could see him by flattening our faces against the bars, and when he was gone Blackie sat alone, his feet cocked up on a chair.

"That reminds me," Barreau spoke so that his words were audible to me alone. "Blackie's a good fellow, and I must keep his skirts clear. He will be on guard till about eight this evening. Eight—nine—ten o'clock. At ten it should be as dark as it will get. I'll drift then. Some other fellow will be on guard when you give the alarm."

It was then mid-afternoon. At half-past five two prisoners were set to arranging a long table by the palings that separated the cells from the guard-room proper. With a trooper at their heels they lugged from the Police kitchen two great pots, one of weak soup, the other containing a liquid that passed for tea. A platter of sliced bread and another of meat scraps completed the meal. Then the rest of us were turned out to eat; sixteen men who had fallen afoul of the law munching and drinking, with furtive glances at each other.

And while we ate a trooper made the round of the cells, giving each tumbled heap of quilts a tentative shake, peering into the half-dark corners. That also was part of the routine, perfunctory, as a general thing, but occasionally developing into keen-eyed search. It was the rule to confiscate tobacco or any small articles a prisoner might manage to smuggle in, if he failed of its concealment.

But the faint traces of Barreau's floor-cutting escaped his eye, and the tobacco was in our pockets. The knife and saw Barreau had slipped within his boot-leg. Personal search was the one thing we had to fear. And it passed us by. The guards—four of them during the meal hour—contented themselves with routine inspection, and when the table was swept clean of food we were herded back to our cells. For once I was glad to be locked up; knowing that though dark would bring a trooper past our cell every half hour, to peer in on us through the barred opening, there was little chance of his unlocking the door.

We lay on our bunks, silent, smoking a cigarette when the guard was safe in front. The smell of tobacco smoke could not betray our possession of it, for the guardhouse reeked with the troopers' pipes. We had only to conceal the actual material.

Thus eight o'clock came, and brought with it a change of guard. Blackie no longer sat in front with his feet cocked up on a chair, or taking turns with his fellows at peering through cell doors. Nine passed—by the guardhouse clock—and ten dragged by at last. On the stroke of the hour a guard tramped past our cell, on to the others, and back to his seat in front. When he was settled Barreau slid lightly from his bunk. The short pieces of flooring he pried from the hole in the floor. Then he reached a hand to me and shook mine in a grip that almost

bruised.

"Good-bye, Bob," he whispered. "I'll meet you in St. Louis next year, unless my star sets. And I will have a pretty story for your ears, then. Give me an hour, if you can. So-long."

His feet were in the opening as he spoke, and a second later the black square of it was yawning emptily. I put the planks over the hole, and got me back to my bunk. I was glad to see him go, and yet, knowing that he would come back no more save in irons, I missed him. I felt utterly alone and forsaken, lying there simulating sleep—with every nerve in my body on tip-toe.

It was a rule of the guardhouse that a prisoner must lie with his feet to the door, so that his head could be seen by the passing guard. Just opposite our door a lamp was bracketed on the wall. What light it gave shone through the bars directly on our faces while we slept. Rules or no rules, a man would shade his face with his arm or a corner of the quilt, when the lamp-glare struck in his eyes. And Barreau, perhaps with that very emergency in mind, had slept with his hat pulled over his face. None of the guards had voiced objection. They could see him easily enough. Now, this very practice made it possible for him to fool them with a trick that is as old as prison-breaking itself. Skillfully he had arranged the covers to give the outline of a body, and his hat he left tilted over the place where his head had rested. The simplicity of the thing, I dare say, is what made it a success. At least it fulfilled its purpose that night.

Here a prisoner snored, and there another turned on his bunk with faint scrapings against the wall. Out in front the Policemen conversed in lowered tones. I could hear every sound in the building, it seemed; the movements of sleeping men, the scurrying of a rat, the crackle of a match when one of the guards lit his pipe. But I did not hear that for which my ears were strained, and I was thankful.

Twice a trooper made the round, seeing nothing amiss—although I imagined the thump of my heart echoed into the corridor when he looked in on me and let his glance travel over the place where Slowfoot George should have been—but was not.

It was nearing the time for his return, and I sat up, nerving myself to give the alarm. For to clear me of complicity and the penalty thereof, Barreau had instructed me to apprise them after an hour. I was to tell them that he was armed, and so compelled me to keep silent while he worked. And I was to say that he had but gone. There would be nothing but his foot-prints, and by those they could not reckon the time of his flight.

As I sat there waiting for the guard and steeling myself to lie boldly, shamelessly, for Barreau's sake and my own, my gaze rested speculatively on the pieces of flooring I had laid over the hole. I intended to kick them aside as I rushed to

the window and gabbled my tale to the guard. But I did not rush to the window nor did I gabble to the guard, for I saw the pieces of plank slide softly apart and a hand came through the opening thus made—a hand that waved imperative warning for me to lie down. The guard passed as I drew the cover over me. He barely glanced in. Before the squeak of his chair out in front told of his settling down, I was up on elbow, staring.

Again the planks slid apart, this time clear of the hole. In the same moment something took shape in the black square, something that rose quickly till I could see that it was the head and shoulders of a man. I sat mute, startled, filled with wonder and some dismay. The dull light touching his features showed me Barreau, dirt-stained, sweatdrops on his forehead, beckoning to me. I leaned to catch his whisper.

"I came back for you, kid," he breathed. "You're slated for trouble. The cabin of the *Moon's* purser was robbed the night you left, and it's laid to you. There's a deputy from Benton here after you. You'll get a hard deal. Better chance it with me."

"Robbery," I muttered. "Good God, what next?"

"Extradition—and a hard fight to clear yourself. Weeks, maybe months, in the calaboose. Come on with me. You'll get home sooner, I'll promise you that."

"I've a mind to go you," I declared bitterly. "I seem doomed to be an Ishmael."

"Hurry, then," he admonished, "or we'll be nabbed in the act. Slip in here quietly and crawl after me. Just as you are. Bring your shoes in your hand."

Thus, willy-nilly, I found myself in the black, dank space between the floor and the ground. The blackness and musty smell endured no more than a few seconds. The passage to the outer wall was shorter than I had thought. Presently I followed Barreau through a tight hole, and stood erect in the gloom of a cloudy night—a night well fitted for desperate deeds.

"Give me your hand," said Barreau, when I had put on my brogans.

The dark might have been made to order for our purpose. I could barely see Barreau at my elbow. His hand was a needed aid. Together we moved softly away from the guardhouse, and, once clear of it, ran like hunted things. Looking back over my shoulder once, I saw the guardhouse lights, pale yellow squares set in solid ebony. The rest of the post lay unlighted, hidden away in the dark.

I do not know whither Barreau led me, but at length, almost winded from the long run, he brought up against some sort of deserted building. A vague blur resolved into two horses, when we laid hands upon it. Barreau jerked loose the fastening ropes. And as my fingers closed on the reins of one, a carbine popped away in our rear, then another, and a third. Hard on that came the shrilling of a bugle.

"Up with you," Barreau commanded. "They've found our hole. Stick close to me. If they do run us down, we must take our medicine; we cannot fight the men in red with such odds against us. But I think they'll look long and sorrowfully ere they come upon us, a night like this," he finished with a short laugh.

Side by side, two dim figures in the murk, we loped away. Barreau kept a steady unhurried gait. We passed a building or two, dipped into a hollow, splashed through what may have been a river or a pond, for all I could tell, and presently came out upon level plain. Behind us MacLeod's few lights twinkled like the scattered embers of a campfire. Soon these also dwindled to nothing, and the shadowless gloom of the prairies surrounded us. Keenly as I listened, I caught no sound of following hoofs. And Barreau seemed to think himself tolerably safe, for he began to talk in his natural tone as we galloped into the night.

"If the Police overhaul us now," he asserted confidently, "it will be only because of a lucky guess at the direction we have taken. They are more than likely to think we have gone south. And if they don't beat us to the Red Flats we can snap our fingers at them for many a moon. Are you itching with curiosity, Bob?"

"Not altogether itching," I replied truthfully enough. "I'm too glad to be out of that iron-barred box, to be worrying much over the why of things. Just so the program doesn't call for another spell in some guardhouse, I'll be satisfied. I'm putting a good deal of faith in what you said about eventually getting to St. Louis."

"Cultivating the philosophical attitude already, eh?" he returned. "You're progressing. To be perfectly frank, there is little chance of our seeing either the inside or outside of a guardhouse again. The redcoats fight shy of the country we are bound for."

"Where is that?" I asked quickly.

"I knew you were wondering," he laughed. "Unconsciously you are bristling with question marks. Natural enough, too. But all in good time, Bob. To-night we have food and clothing, another horse or two and arms to get. If previous calculations haven't been upset, these things will be forthcoming and we shall go on our way—if not rejoicing, at least well-provided against the wilderness. And then if you still choose to paddle in my canoe, I'll go into details."

"That's fair enough," I answered. "There's just one thing—that *Moon* robbery business. How came you to know a deputy sheriff was after me?"

"Simply enough," he returned. "When I got out I had to sneak around and find a man from whom I could get a horse—I have a friend or two there, luckily. And he told me. The Circle men gave you away when they were told you had stolen money from the boat. The deputy had just ridden in. He was a mouthy brute, and noised his business about."

"It beats the devil," I declared. "Ever since those two thugs tackled me on the St. Louis water front I seem to have been going from bad to worse; stepping from one hot stone to another still hotter."

"I've done it myself," he said laconically. "But they will have to catch their hare before they can cook it; and it takes more than accusation to make a man a thief."

With this he relapsed into silence. There was a sort of finality in his way of speaking that headed me off from asking more questions. I busied myself digesting what he had told me. Occasionally, as we rode, he drawled a remark; a few words about the country we traversed, or our mounts, or a bull-train he hoped to overtake. Between whiles I speculated on what mysterious link connected him with the girl who had come to the guardhouse in MacLeod. The rancor of her speech had fixed itself irrevocably on my memory. What lay behind their bitter stabbing at each other I could not say. Nor was it anything that should have concerned me. I had my own besetments. I knew not whither I was going, nor why—except to escape trial for a crime I had not committed. There were many points upon which I desired light, things that puzzled me. All in all, as I put aside the disturbing influences of flight I did, as Barreau had said, fairly bristle with interrogations.

Once in the night we halted on a small creek for the best part of an hour, letting our horses graze. Only then did I become aware that Barreau rode without a saddle.

"No man ever quitted a Mounted Police guardhouse without help from the outside," he replied, when I spoke of this. "And the man who took a chance on letting me have two horses had only one saddle to spare. I can ride easier on a blanket than you. It is only for another hour or two at most. See—we are just come to the trail."

I could distinguish no trail at first. He followed it easily, and after a time I began to get glimpses of deep-worn ruts. Barreau struck a faster pace. Two hours of silent riding brought us into the bed of a fair-sized creek, and when he had turned a bend or two of its course, a light blinked ahead. In another minute we brought up against a group of wagons. Barreau rode straight to the tent, through the canvas walls of which glowed the light. There he dismounted and tied his horse, whispering to me to follow suit. Then I followed him into the tent.

A man lay stretched on a camp-cot at one end, the blankets drawn over his head. Him Barreau shook rudely out of his slumber, and when he sat up with a growl of protest I found myself face to face with Montell, the portly fur merchant who had come up-river on the *Moon*.

CHAPTER IX—MR. MONTELL

"Oho, it's you George," Montell purred—that sounds exaggerated, but I cannot otherwise describe his manner of speaking. He made an odd figure sitting up in bed, with his fat, purple face surmounting a flannel shirt, and a red, knitted cap on his head.

"So you made it, eh? Who's this with you, George?"

"None of your damned business!" Barreau snapped. He stood back a little from the bed, looking down at Montell. By the glint in his eyes he was angry. "You needn't concern yourself about any man who travels with me."

"Tut, tut, George," the other pacified, "that's all right; that's all right. You're mighty touchy to-night. I did the best I could for you, I'm sure."

"The best you could! You did that—though not in the way you would have me believe." Barreau's voice stung like a whip-lash. "You double-faced Mammon-worshipper, if it would mend matters I would gladly jerk you out of your bunk and stamp your swinish features into the earth. Do you think you can pull the wool over my eyes? For two pins I'd break with you right now."

Montell did not at once reply. He sat a few seconds, softly rubbing the palm of one pudgy hand over the back of its fellow.

"Now, what's the use of that sort of talk, George?" he finally said, quite unperturbed. "We can't afford to quarrel. We got too——"

"I can," Barreau interrupted.

"No, no, George, you're mistaken there. We got to stick together," he declared. "Hang it! you had bad luck. But you shouldn't blame me for them misfortunes."

"I don't—altogether," Barreau cut in again. "But you took advantage of my mischance, to help along a little scheme that you've been nursing some time. I had a glimpse of your hand in MacLeod. You have done the mischief. Why should I trouble myself further in your affairs, unless it be to call you to account for the dirty trick you have played?"

"Oho, I see now," Montell nodded understandingly. "I didn't catch what you were driving at. But you're wrong, dead wrong, George. Why, I tried every

way to send Jessie back from Benton. Yes, sir, tried every way. You've no idea how wilful that girl is." He spread his fat hands deprecatingly. "She'd come to MacLeod, spite of hell 'n' high water. *I* couldn't stop her. And with every Tom, Dick 'n' Harry talkin' about you, and them dodgers stuck up every place, and you really in the guardhouse—why, you see how it was. No way to keep it dark. But it's not as bad as you think. Of course she's kinda excited—but, pshaw! When you see her again she won't think of it. You're dead wrong, George, when you blame me. Yes, sir. Wouldn't I have kept it quiet if I could? You know it, George. I got somethin' at stake, too."

"You have that," Barreau returned grimly, "and you had better keep that fact in mind. But don't ask me to believe such rot as your not being able to prevent her from making such a radical change of plan. However, the milk is spilt; the crying part will come later. I'll keep to my part of the bargain. Does everything stand as originally laid out?"

Montell nodded. "There's no call to change," he said, and again the purring, satisfied note crept into his voice.

"I want another good horse, a saddle, a pack layout, and grub for a month," Barreau enumerated. "Rout Steve up—you know where he sleeps—and have him get those things. We need guns, too. Where is my box?"

"It's on the tail end of the first wagon outside. Steve's sleepin' just beyond. Couldn't you just as well wake him, George?"

"No, I've other things to do," Barreau refused bluntly. "Bestir your fat carcass, and set him to work. The night air won't hurt you. We have no time to waste. For all I know a troop of Police may be on us before we can get started again."

Montell grunted some unintelligible protest, but nevertheless, heaved his flesh-burdened body up from the cot. He gathered about him a much-worn dressing gown, and, thrusting his feet into a pair of slippers, left the tent.

"Now, let us see about clothes," Barreau said to me, and I followed him to the wagon-end.

He climbed up on the hind wheel. After a second or two of fumbling he upended a flat steamer trunk. I held it while he leaped to the ground, and between us we carried it into the tent.

"The Police have my key—much good may it do them," he remarked, and pried open the lid with a hatchet that lay near by. He threw a few articles carelessly aside.

"Peel off those roustabout garments," he said to me. "Here is something better. Lucky we're about of a size."

He gave me a blue flannel shirt to begin with, and when I had discarded the soiled rags I wore and put on the clean one, he held out to me a coat and trousers

of some dark cloth, a pair of riding boots similar to those on his own feet, and clean socks. Other clothing he hauled from the trunk and laid in a pile by itself. Lastly he brought forth a new felt hat.

"Does this fit you?" He stood up and set it on my head. "Fine. No, I'll get a hat from Steve before we start," he silenced my protest. We had both ridden bareheaded.

Montell returned while I was getting into the welcome change of apparel.

"Steve's gettin' you what you need, George," he informed. "There's a new tarpaulin by the bed you can use for your pack. Steve'll get you blankets. Go softly. I'm none too sure of all these bull-whackers I got."

Barreau went on spreading his clothes in a flat heap as if he had not heard. Presently he closed the trunk. Getting to his feet he glanced about.

"Oh, yes," he said curtly, as if he had but recollected something. "I want some of that port you've been guzzling. Dig it up."

"Certainly, George, certainly," Montell's face broadened in an ingratiating smile, though Barreau's tone was as contemptuously insulting as it could well be. He reached under the box upon which the candle stood and brought out a bottle. Barreau took it, held it up to the light, then laid it by his clothing without a word; Montell watching him with a speculative air, meanwhile.

"That's fine stuff, George," he said tentatively. "Fine stuff. I ain't got but a little."

"Damn you, don't talk to me!" Barreau whirled on him. "I'm sick of the whole business, and I want none of your smooth palaver, nor whining about what I do."

The older man's florid face took on a deeper tint. One of his fat hands suddenly drew into a fist. Barreau had penetrated his hide, in some way that I could not quite understand. And I imagine there would have been some sort of explosion on the spot, but for the timely diversion of a man's head parting the door-flaps.

"Them hosses is ready," he briefly announced. And Barreau turned his back on Mr. Montell forthwith. I did likewise.

For all I did I might as well have stayed in the tent. Barreau and Steve went silently about saddling one horse and lashing a pack-tree on another. In the dull light from the tent I could barely make shift to see, but they seemed to know every strap and tying-place, and the thing was quickly done. Last of all, they folded Barreau's clothing and two or three pairs of heavy blankets in the tarpaulin, and bound the roll on top of the food-supply. Then Barreau stepped once more within the tent.

What he said to Montell did not reach my ears. At any rate, it was brief. Watching his shadow on the canvas wall I saw him turn to come out, saw him

stop and bend over something near the flaps. He straightened up with a sharp exclamation, and this time I heard distinctly what he said.

"By the Lord, you have been fool enough to let her come farther even! Oh, you miserable——" His words ran into a blur of sound.

Montell raised in his cot again. I could see the bulk of him outlined against the farther side.

"Now, see here, George," he burst out irritably. "This is goin' too far. Between you and Jessie I've had a heap of trouble this trip. And my patience has got limits. Yes, sir. It's got limits! I'm doin' the best I can, and you got to do the same. You go to backin' old man Montell into a corner, and the fur'll fly. You act like you was a schoolboy, and I'd took your cap away."

I don't think that Barreau made any reply to this. If he did the words were softly spoken, and he was not the man to speak softly, considering the mood he was in just then. He was out of the tent almost before Montell had finished.

"Steve," he said, in a matter-of-fact way as he laid hold of his stirrup (I was already mounted), "let me have your hat. I lost mine in the shuffle."

Without comment Steve took the hat from his head and handed it up to him. "So-long," he grunted laconically.

"So-long, Steve," said Barreau.

The candle in Montell's tent blinked out with the words. Barreau caught up the lead-rope of our pack-pony, and then, as silently as we had come, we rode away.

CHAPTER X—"THERE'S MONEY IN IT"

A brisk wind sprang up ere we were well clear of the Montell camp. In half an hour it was blowing a gale. Overhead the clouds ripped apart in the lash of the wind, and a belated moon peered tentatively through the torn places. It lighted the way, so that we could see sudden dips in the prairie, buffalo-wallows and such abrupt depressions, before we reached them. With the lifting of the solid black that had walled us in Barreau set a faster pace.

"It will soon be day," he broke a long silence, "and though I am loth to

overtax our mounts, we must reach the Blood Flats. If we are being followed, they will scarcely think to look for us there. And I know of no other place in this bald country where our picketed horses would not stand out like the nose on a man's face. How it blows!"

It did. So that speech was next to impossible, even had we been inclined to talk. The wind struck us quartering and muffled a shout to inconsequent syllables. But beyond those few words Barreau kept mute, leaning forward in his stirrups at a steady lope. We must have covered near twenty miles before the eastern skyline gave a hint of dawn. With that Barreau pulled his horse down to a walk.

"Well," he said lightly, "we made it easily enough. Now for a bit of a climb. It will be awkward if a bunch of unfriendly Stonies have taken possession of the one spot that will serve us. But that's hardly thinkable. Are you tired, Bob?"

I was, and freely owned it. He swung sharply aside while I was speaking, and in a few minutes an odd-shaped butte loomed ahead. It upreared out of the flat country like a huge wart. The bald slope of it lay weather-worn, rain-scarred, naked of vegetation, but on its crest tangled patches of cherry brush and sally-willows made a ragged silhouette against the sky. The east blazed like the forefront of a prairie fire when we reached the top. Then it became plain to me why Barreau had sought the place. The scrub growth stood dense as a giant's beard, but here and there enfolding little meadows of bunchgrass, and winding in and out through these Barreau finally drew up by a rush-fringed pool that proved to be a spring.

"Water, wood, and grass," said he as his heels struck the earth, "and all securely screened from passers-by. Now we can eat and rest in peace. Let us get a fire built and boil a pot of coffee before it gets so light that the smoke will betray us."

The horses we picketed in one of the little glades. Shut in by the brush, they could graze unseen. Then we cooked and ate breakfast, hurrying to blot out the fire, for dawn came winging swiftly across the plains.

"Come over and take a look from the brow of the hill," Barreau proposed, when we were done.

Wearily I followed him. I could have stretched myself in the soft grass and slept with a will; every bone and muscle in my body protested against further movement, and I was sluggish with a full stomach. But Barreau showed no sign of fatigue, and a measure of pride in my powers of endurance kept me from open complaint.

It was worth a pang or two, after all. He led the way to the southern tip of the plateau; no great distance—from edge to edge the tableland was no more than three hundred yards across. But it overlooked the Blood Flats from a great

height, four hundred feet or more, I judged. Barreau sat down beside a choke-cherry clump, and rolled himself a cigarette. Ten paces beyond, the butte fell away sheer to the waste levels below.

"There is nothing that I have ever seen just like this," he murmured. "And it is never twice alike. Watch that rise take fire from the sun. And the mountains over yonder; square-shouldered giants, tricked out in royal purple."

The sun slid clear of the skyline, and a long shaft of light brushed over the unreckoned miles of grassland till it fell caressingly on our butte. Hollows and tiny threads of creeks nursed deep, black shadows that shrank and vanished as the sun-rays sought them out. Away beyond, to the west, the snow-tipped Rockies stood boldly out in their robe of misty blue. And as the yellow glare bathed the sea of land that ringed the lone pinnacle I saw why the Flats were so named.

Impassive, desolate, vast in its sweep, the plain took on a weird look at the sun's kiss. Barren of tree or shrub so far as the eye could reach, naked even of shriveled blades of grass, when the last, least shadow was gone it spread before us like a painted floor; red to its outermost edges, a sullen dried-blood red. A strange colored soil, as if it were a huge bed of dull-glowing coals.

"Blood Flats! There is no incongruity in the name," Barreau vouchsafed. "This is almost beautiful. Yet I have seen the sun strike it of a morning—and felt a foolish, oppressive dread. Just after a rain, I remember, once. Then it lay like a lake of blood. The light played on pools here and there, pools that glowed like great rubies. Fancy it! Ninety miles square of that blood-stained earth. A monster shambles, it has often seemed to me. It breeds strange thoughts when one faces it alone. Or take it on a day of lowering clouds. Then it almost voices a threat of evil. It is so void of life, so malevolent in its stillness. The psychology of environment is a curious thing. How is it that mere inanimate earth, a great magnitude of space, a certain color scheme, can affect a man so? Sometimes I wonder if we inherit past experiences from our primitive ancestors along with the color of our eyes or the cast of our features. Our surroundings work upon our emotions as the temperature affects a thermometer, and we cannot tell why. Even the hard-headed bull-whackers hate this stretch of country."

He made himself another cigarette, and sat quiet for a time, staring off across the red waste.

"We may as well go back to camp," he said, rising abruptly. "There is no sign of men, mounted, afoot, or otherwise, that I can see."

Back by our saddles and pack layout, Barreau divided the blankets and showed me how to fold mine to make the most of them. Thankfully I bedded myself in a shaded place, but he, before following my example, unslung from his saddle the rifle he had procured of Montell. He looked it over, snapped the lever

forward and back, slid another cartridge or two into the magazine. This done, he laid it by his blankets.

"I grudge the Police my two good nags, and my Winchester," he remarked, as he drew off his boots. "What extra weapons Montell had were stowed in a wagon, and I had no time to hunt for them. So we will have to make shift with one rifle—for a while, at least. For that matter, unless we run foul of some young bucks prowling for a scalp, one gun will serve as well as two. If you elect to take a different trail, the best I can give you will be an ancient derringer and a scant number of cartridges. But I am inclined to think we will not part company, yet a while."

He sat upon his blankets, regarding me with a measuring air; and I, from my comfortable position, answered drowsily:

"I have a full stomach, a clear conscience, and a tired body; and I am going to sleep right now, if I never travel another trail."

He laughed softly. Whether he said anything further, I do not know. I was too near worn out to care. My last, faint impression was of him sitting cross-legged on his blankets, emitting sporadic puffs of smoke, and looking at me with his black brows drawn together. And the next thing I remember was a tang of wood-smoke in my nostrils. I sat up and stared about, puzzled at first, for I had slept like a dead man. Twilight wrapped the butte. Barreau was bent over a small fire, cooking supper.

"Oh," he said, looking around, "you've come alive, at last. I was about to wake you. The chuck's ready."

I washed in the trickle of water that ran away from the spring, and felt like a new man. As to eating, I was little short of ravenous. Never had food made such an appeal to my senses. When the meal was over Barreau settled back against his saddle.

"There will be a moon somewhere near midnight," he declared. "We'll move then. After to-night we can travel without cover of the dark. Meantime, lend me your ears, Robertus. Let us see where we stand."

"Fire away," I replied. "I am pretty much in the dark—in more ways than one."

"Exactly," he responded. "And I imagine you have little taste for walking blindfolded. So we will spread our hands on the board. First, let us look a few facts cold-bloodedly in the eye. Here are two of us practically outlawed. I—well, it should be obvious to you that I am a very much-wanted man in these parts. My capture—especially now—would be the biggest feather any Policeman could stick in his cap. There are others who would cheerfully shoot me in the back for what it would bring them. Hence, the sooner I get out of this part of the country, the better I will be suited. You have killed a man for a starter. That——"

"But I had to," I broke in. "It was forced on me. You know it was. There's a limit to what a man can stand."

"I know all that," he replied quietly. "I'm not sitting in judgment on you, Bob. I'm merely setting forth what has happened, and how we are affected thereby. Tupper got no more than he deserved, and he did not get it soon enough—from my point of view. But, as I said, you killed a man, and the killing has taken on a different color in the minds of others, since you are also accused of theft."

"Do you believe that infernal lie?" I interrupted again. It galled me to hear him enumerate those ugly details in that calm, deliberate manner.

"It makes little difference what *I* believe," he answered patiently. "If it is any comfort to you, I can hardly conceive of you plundering the *Moon's* cabin. But voicing our individual beliefs is beside the point. Certain things are laid to us. Certain penalties are sure as the rising and setting of the sun, if either of us is caught and convicted. And"—he pinched his eyebrows together until little creases ran up and down his forehead, but his voice was cold, matter of fact—"if we were clean-handed as a babe unborn, we have forever damned ourselves before Canadian courts, by breaking jail. You see where we are? Forgetting these other things that we may or may not have done, of this one crime we are guilty. We can't dodge it, if we are taken. It is a felony in itself."

"If I were a free agent," he went on, after a momentary pause, "I would have made no attempt to escape; or having escaped, I would quit this damned country by the shortest route. But I can't. I have got into a game that I must play to a finish. Further, I have given my word to do certain work, and in the doing of it I am bucking elements that I cannot always cope with alone. I need help. I want some one whom I can trust absolutely if he gives his word; a man I can depend upon to stick by me in a pinch. That," he turned his gaze squarely on me, "is principally why I took long chances to get you out of the guardhouse, last night. It seemed to me I could help myself best by helping you. I will be frank. My motive was not purely altruistic. Men's motives seldom are."

"You flatter me," I commented bitterly. "Considering that I have shown myself more or less weak-kneed every time I've got in a tight place, your remark about some one who would stick by you in a pinch savors of irony. I hardly see how you could put absolute faith in me, when I have so little faith in myself. Besides, I do not know what your program calls for. I don't seem to have the faculty of holding my own in a rough game; nor the right sort of nerve—if I have any. My instinct seems to be to give ground until I'm cornered. I'd rather be at peace with the world. I don't like war of the personal sort."

"Nor does any man, any normal man," he responded soberly. "But there are times, as you have seen, when we cannot escape it. So far as your capacity

for holding your own is concerned, let me be judge of that. I know men more or less well—by bitter experience. Under certain conditions I could probably guess what you would do, better than yourself. You may be sure I wouldn't ask you to accept certain risks and hardships with me if I thought a yellow streak tinged your make-up. So we will not argue along that line.

"What I need your help in is a legitimate enterprise; clean enough of itself—though I have acquired a dirty reputation in the way of it. I'll give you a few details, and you can judge for yourself. Four years ago chance sent me north to a Hudson's Bay post on the Saskatchewan. From there I drifted farther—to the Great Slave Lake country, almost. I've known more or less of the fur trade all my life. My father was in it. And so I was quick to see how the Hudson's Bay Company holds the North trade in the hollow of its hand. It was a revelation to me, Bob. Fortunes gravitate to their posts by the simplest process in the world. They barter a worthless muzzle-loading gun and a handful of powder and ball for a hundredfold its worth in pelts. From one year's end to another, yes, from generation to generation, the tribes have been kept in debt to the Company. They make a scanty living from the Company, and the Company builds colossal fortunes out of them. You and I would call it robbery. To the Company it is merely 'trade.'

"Ever since the granting of its charter, close on two centuries ago, the Company has lorded it over the North, barring out the free trader, guarding jealously against competition. Only the Northwest Fur Company ever held its own with the Hudson's Bay, and the two combined when the Northwest established itself. The others, lone traders, partnerships, the Company fought and intimidated till they withdrew. Technically, it is a free country, has been since '69, but north of the Saskatchewan the Company still holds forth in the ancient manner, making its own law, recognizing no higher authority than itself. It is a big country, the North, and the Canadian government has its hands full in the east and south. A white man takes his own risks north of latitude 54.

"All this I knew very well. But like many another purse-broken man, I wanted a fling at the trade. I saw that a man could get in touch with the tribes, give them fair exchange for their furs—give them treble the Hudson's Bay rate of barter—and still make a fortune. I needed the fortune, Bob; I am still on the trail of it. But I had too little capital to play a lone hand. So I hied me to St. Louis and broached the scheme to Montell. I have known him all my life. He also is an old hand in the trade. He had the capital I lacked."

Barreau stopped for a minute, digging at the earth with his heel. The fire had dwindled to a few coals. I could not see his face. But his voice had changed, a note of resentment had crept into it, when he began again.

"Montell jumped at the plan. Later I learned things that led me to believe

he was near the end of his rope, financially, at the time. So my scheme was in the nature of a Godsend to him. I had a little money, and every dollar I could raise I put in. It was to be an equal partnership: my knowledge of the country and the conditions to offset his extra capital.

"The first year we made expenses, and a little over. But we were getting known among the Indian hunters, convincing them that we would treat them better than the Hudson's Bay. Secure in their established grip on the tribes, the Company passed us up. The second year we made money. Then the Company woke up and fought us tooth and nail. Not openly; that is not their way. They fought us, nevertheless. There were reprisals. The brunt of it fell on me. They seemed to guess that with my teeth drawn their fight was won. So they carried the war systematically into the open country. Our jail-breaking last night took its inception in that struggle for and against a monopoly.

"This year, if things do not go awry, we stand to clear more than a hundred thousand dollars. And it will be the last. No individual trader can break lances with the Company on its own ground. They are lords of the North beyond gainsaying. At the best we can but take a slice and leave the loaf to them. Next spring sees the last of our trading. This fall there will be fierce work to do, tramping here and there, issuing guns and powder and foodstuffs, bargaining with the hunters for the winter's take of pelts. A hundred lodges have promised to trade with us this season, and an Indian rarely breaks his word, once given in good faith. We will get others, in spite of the Company runners. But we must be on the alert; we cannot sit in our posts and wait for these things to come about of themselves. And that brings me to the point.

"If I had only the Hudson's Bay Company to contend with, I would have little fear for the outcome. With them it is largely a question of strategy. If there is any violence it will come from some zealot in their service, and we can hold our own against such. But Montell is an eel. He looms more threatening than the Company. In these three years I have had no accounting with him. I have done the dirty work, while he holed up at the post, or looked after the St. Louis end. I have more than once come near tripping him up in petty tricks. Secretly he hates me, for at bottom he is an arrogant old freebooter. And for all his grovelling last night, he is a dangerous man. By one means and another I know that he has made up his mind to put me in the lurch once this winter's trade is turned. Without me, he can do little in the way of getting furs. Otherwise, I would be cooling my heels in MacLeod guardhouse yet. You may have guessed that he was the spirit which moved Blackie to pass in the knife and saw.

"But once full arrangements are made, and the pelts begin to come in with spring, why, then—I don't know what he will do, how he will engineer his plan to eliminate my interest in the profits. He has some card up his sleeve. Half of

everything is mine, but I have nothing to show it. There is nothing between us but his word! and that, I have learned at last, is a thing he can twist to suit the occasion. He has begun shaping things to suit himself on this trip. He cut a bit of the ground from under my feet back there in MacLeod. I'll pay him for that, though; and he knows it. The finishing touch will come this winter, or in the spring. He hates me, just as he hates any man whom he cannot lead by the nose, and he will move like the old fox he is. There's money in it—for him. And money and power are Simon Montell's twin gods.

"Between these cross-fires, I will have my hands more than full. I can only be in one place at a time. There is not a man with the bull-train, or among the few that remain in the North, but is under Montell's thumb. Most of them could not understand if I told them. The thing is too subtle for their simple, direct minds. For that reason, I sought for some one I could trust to keep a clear eye open, and his ears cocked; for whatever Montell does he will do by stealth. That evening we fell in together at the foot of the Sweet Grass I was headed for the Sanders ranch, thinking to get Walt to come North with me. He would have enjoyed this sort of thing. You know how we fared that night. And you can see why, when the Police raid put him beyond my helping, I turned to you. I had you in mind all the while we lay in the guardhouse, but I hesitated to drag you into it, until I learned of the robbery charged to you. Then I went back for you, judging that of the two evils you would choose the one I offered.

"That is the way of it, Bob. If you help me play the game this winter, you accomplish two things with tolerable certitude. You will be safe from the Police and those Benton idiots; and you will get to St. Louis in the spring. Montell himself will see to that, when he learns who you are. He knew your father slightly, and he has all of a guttersnipe's snobbish adulation of wealth and family. So you are doubly safe. On the other hand, if you are minded to work out your own salvation I will share with you what I have, set you in the right direction, and wish you good luck. Don't be hasty about deciding. Think the thing over."

But I had already made up my mind. How much the lure of a strange land and stirring things to be done bore upon my decision I cannot say. How much, at the moment, George Barreau's personality dominated me I cannot quite compute. Individual psychology has never been a study of mine, but I know that there is no course of reasoning, no mental action, no emotion, that has not its psychic factors. Whatever these were in my case, I lost sight of them. I think that what influenced me most was his way of putting it man to man, so to speak. Unconsciously that restored to me, in a measure, the self-respect I had nearly lost in those brutal days on the *Moon*, and the skulking and imprisonment which followed. Here was a man before whom I had seen other strong men cringe asking me in a straightforward way for help. I had no wish to refuse; I felt a thrill at the

opportunity. For the time I forgot that Montell's daughter had called him a thief and a murderer, and he had not denied. I took him at his face value, as he took me, and we shook hands on the bargain, and cemented it further with the bottle of port so unwillingly relinquished by Montell.

"I'm with you," said I, "till the last dog is hung. But if I weaken in a pinch, don't say you weren't forewarned."

He laughed.

"Don't underestimate yourself. A man doesn't need to be overloaded with nerve to play a man's part in this world. In fact, the fellow who hunts trouble for the sake of showing off his nerve, is generally some damned fool with a yellow streak in him that he's deadly afraid some one may uncover. After all," he reflected, "there may be nothing more to cope with than the dreary monotony of snowbound days, and nights when the frost bites to the bone. Your part will merely be to keep tab on Mr. Simon Montell when I am not about. He's afraid of me. If he can't attain his purpose by underhand methods, he may consider the risk of open hostility too great. But that we cannot foresee. Our problem, now, is to reach the Sicannie River as soon as we can. There we need never fear meeting a scarlet jacket. It stands us in hand to be shy of those gentlemen, for some time to come."

"Amen to that," I responded sincerely.

We lay back in the shadows, smoking, speaking a few words now and then, till the moon came peeping up from below the horizon, shedding its pale light on the strange, red sweep of the Blood Flats. Then we saddled and packed and bore away from the lone butte, holding a course slightly west of the North Star.

CHAPTER XI—A TRICK OF THE "TRADE."

A certain consecutive number of days—weeks, to be more exact—ensued, of which there is little to relate, save that we travelled steadily northward, seeing no human except from afar. Once or twice we came in sight of Hudson's Bay posts, but these Barreau was careful to avoid. It was not the season when Indians were abroad in the forests, he told me when I wondered that in all that vast land not

a single lodge appeared. They were gathered in summer villages by the trading posts. Hence we crossed few fresh trails, and bespoke no man, white or red, in the four weeks of our journey.

Before the end of it I was hardened to the saddle; and to many other things. Twice we swam great rivers, the North Saskatchewan, and farther on the Peace—to say nothing of lesser streams that were both deep and swift. Our food supply dwindled to flour and tea. But with game on every hand we suffered no hardship in that respect. The getting of meat Barreau left to me. Strangely enough, after one or two virulent attacks of "buck fever," when the rifle barrel wabbled in a most unseemly manner and the bullet therefrom flew disgracefully wide of the mark, I got into the way of bringing down whatever I shot at. Between my eye and the rifle sights and the shoulder of a deer some mysterious, rapid process of alignment seemed invariably to take place.

"Why not?" Barreau contended, when I remarked upon this sudden attaining to marksmanship. "There are the sights. Your eyes are clear and your arm steady as a rock. That's all there is to good shooting; that and a little experience in judging distance. Some men handle guns all their lives, and never make a decent shot other than by accident. Whenever you run across such an individual you can be sure there is some defect in his vision, or he lacks muscular control over his weapon."

That trip taught me many things besides holding a rifle true; how to build a campfire in wet weather and dry; little labor-saving tricks of the axe; the name and nature of this timber and that; the cooking of plain food; a subtle sense of direction—fundamental trail-wisdom that I was wholly ignorant of, but which a man must know if he would cope with the wilderness of wood and plain. I profited as much by noting how he did these things, as by direct instruction. Nor does a man forget easily the lessons he is taught in the school of necessity.

With Peace River behind us we edged nearer to the base of the mountains, passing through a stretch of country alive with caribou and deer. Bear—monsters, by the track they left—frightened our picketed horses of a night. The moist earth bordering every pond and spring was marked with hoof and claw. The shyer fur-bearing animals, Barreau told me, surrounded us unseen. Barring a thickly wooded plateau south of the Peace we passed through no forest oppressively dense. Our way led over ridges and swales, timbered, to be sure, but opening out here and there into pleasant grassy parks. Once or twice forbidding areas of dead and down trees turned us aside. Again, a vast swamp enforced a detour. But I cannot recall any feature of marked unpleasantness—except the one thing that no man who crosses the North Saskatchewan can escape—the flies.

Mosquitoes of all sizes, equipped with the keenest tools for their nefarious business, green-headed bulldog flies that plagued our horses beyond endurance,

black gnats, flying ants, and other winged pests assailed us day and night in hungry swarms. Some day that particular portion of the Northwest will be a rich field for entomologists and manufacturers of mosquito netting.

We held our own with the buzzing hosts, however, and when our flour sack had nearly reached a stage of ultimate limpness, and our tea was reduced to a tiny package in one corner of the shrunken pack, we rode out of a long belt of quivering poplars and drew up on the brow of a sharp pitch that fell away to the Sicannie River.

"What in the name of the devil has been to the fore here?" Barreau exclaimed. He slid over in his saddle, staring at the scene below.

Down on the flat, just back from the river bank, I made out a clutter of small log buildings enclosed within a stockade. In the center of the enclosure a half-dozen men busied themselves about the gaunt walls of a larger building. Logs and poles strewed the ground about its four sides. The ring of axe-blades on timber came floating up to us. I saw nothing amiss.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Nothing that matters greatly," Barreau replied. "Only that ruin you see was a fine upstanding storehouse when I left here in the early spring. It seems to be undergoing a process of regeneration, for which I cannot account. Likewise, I see no trace of a stable which stood at the west end of the stockade. There are no men missing, by my count, so I dare say no great thing has happened. Anyway, this is the end of our trail for a while. We may as well get down there. I am a bit curious to know the meaning of this."

Presently we were dismounting within the stockade. And as we greeted the men who stopped their work to hail us, it was plain what form of disaster had overtaken the Montell establishment. The standing walls of sixteen-inch logs were smoke-blackened and scorched by fire. The inside was gutted to the floor-joists; the roof gone. A pile of charred poles and timbers laid to one side testified mutely to cause and effect.

"Well, Ben," Barreau addressed one man who came forward. "How did it happen?"

"She burned, that's all. 'N' the stable, too," Ben made laconic answer. He drew a plug of tobacco from his hip pocket, looked it over with a speculative eye, bit off a piece, and returned it to the pocket. As he masticated the piece contemplatively, Barreau watched him with a whimsical smile. "Yes, sir," he went on, "she took fire in the night, with the boys sleepin' in the doghouse, an' me in the front part uh the store. It started to rain pretty tol'able hard, or I reckon there wouldn't be nothin' left but a pile uh ashes."

"In the night, eh?" Barreau repeated thoughtfully. The three of us walked around the building and peered in through a charred doorway.

"Quite so," Barreau continued. "Save anything? There wasn't much to save, I know."

"Most all the stuff," Ben replied. "Injun name uh Tall Trees drifted in day after yuh all left. He traded out most everythin' we could spare. An' the pelts was easy to get out. Some grub was burned. Not much, though. We got plenty left."

"A very nasty thing, fire," Barreau commented. "How do you think it started, Ben?"

"I ain't thinkin'," said Ben. "I *know*."

"The deuce you do!" Neither Barreau's tone nor face bespoke more than the mildest surprise. "Had a big fire going, I suppose, and a live coal flew out. Eh?"

"Nary coal," Ben declared. "Some feller climbed the stockade, cut open one uh them deer-skin winders, touched a match to a bucket uh oil an' gunpowder, boosted it through the window—an' there yuh are. That there's no dream, let me tell yuh."

"And then went on his way rejoicing," Barreau suggested.

"I reckon he did, all right," Ben owned, looking rather downcast at the thought. "I never got to see nothin' but his tracks. If I'd seen *him* he wouldn't 'a' done much rejoicin'."

"I dare say," Barreau laughed. "Meantime the joke is on the party of the first part, it seems to me. Logs are plenty. You have ample time to put on a roof and lay some sort of floor. It would be a different matter if we should be burned out after our goods arrive; but this is a cheap lesson. I see you have put up a good stock of hay. That's fortunate, for they are bringing more stock than we figured on. Altogether, Ben, you haven't done so badly. Now, hustle us some decent grub—it's near noon, and this boy and I have been living on straight meat for some time."

Thus, we were once more fairly at our ease; the bugaboo of arrest and subsequent lying in jail seemed a remote contingency. The confidence born of successful escape stilled any misgivings I might have had as to the future.

We lay at the post doing naught but eat and sleep and watch the long storehouse creep higher log by log, till the skeleton of a roof took form above the blackened walls. At night the eight of us would sprawl around a fire in the open, talking of everything under the sun, sometimes playing with a soiled and tattered pack of cards that these exiles cherished as their dearest possession. If we were in hostile territory no hint of apprehension cropped out in our intercourse; except as one or another referred casually to incidents past—now a fragmentary sentence which hinted of sharp action, or a joking allusion to the "H. B. C." It was all in the day's work with them. But I noticed that each night one man stood

guard, pacing from corner to corner of the stockade, a rifle slung in the crook of his arm.

Two weeks of this slipped by. Then one morning Barreau sat up on his bed and looked over to where I humped on my blankets, rubbing the sleep from my eyes.

"Bob," he announced, "it is high time we bestirred ourselves once more." After which he got quickly into his clothes, and went rummaging in a box by his bed—we had a little cabin to ourselves. His search bore fruit in the shape of moccasins, a bundle of them.

"Here," he tossed a pair to me. "You'll find these better than riding boots. This time we go afoot."

Later, when breakfast was eaten, he made up a shoulder-pack for himself, and showed me how to prepare its fellow. Only actual necessaries found place therein. Extra moccasins, a few pounds of flour, a little packet of tea, pepper and salt, a tin plate and cup; these were laid upon a pair of heavy blankets, and tightly rolled in a square of thin canvas. A broad band of soft buckskin ran from the upper corners of the pack over one's forehead. A loop slipped over each shoulder, leaving the hands free. I was astonished at the ease with which I could walk under this forty-pound burden. From among the post stores Barreau had long since armed me with a rifle that was twin to his own. Between us we carried a hundred cartridges. A butcher knife and a small hatchet apiece fitted us for all emergencies. Thus equipped we set out, bearing away up the Sicannie toward the grim range of peaks that cut the skyline into ragged notches.

Ten miles upstream Barreau located the cluster of lodges he sought as our first objective point—the summer camp of Two Wolves and his band. There for two nights and a day we lingered, sitting in comical gravity for hours at a time in the lodge of the chief. The upshot of this lengthy council was that Two Wolves' son girded a pack on his broad shoulders and joined us when we left the camp.

Thereafter I lost count of the days. Possibly, if the need arose, I could detail the camps we made, the streams we crossed, the huge circle we swung upon, the crossing and doubling back upon our own trail; but there is no need. Suffice it to say that we did these things. It was no pleasure jaunt that we three went upon. Crow Feathers was a man of iron in the matter of covering ground.

He knew the haunt of every tribe and offshoot of a tribe, every petty chief's following, and every family group in the North, it seemed to me. If he did not lead us to them all, he at least tried. The smoky smell of an Indian lodge became as familiar to my nostrils as the odor of food. And in every camp, over the peace pipe, Barreau talked "trade," with Crow Feathers to vouch for him. Barreau spoke the tongue like a native, but there were lodges wherein neither Cree nor French *patois* was spoken or understood, and, when we encountered such, the

wisdom of Crow Feathers smoothed the way. He used the sign language in all its bewildering variety. I, myself, picked up words and phrases here and there, comprehended a few of the simpler signs, but Crow Feathers lingers with me as a past master in wordless communication with his race. Barreau, even, used to wonder at the astonishing amount of information Crow Feathers could impart with a few languid motions of his hands. He made a right able interpreter.

Insensibly the days shortened. I recollect with what surprise I wakened one morning to find hoar frost thick on my blanket, and a scum of ice fringing the little creek beside which we slept. Hard on that I observed the turning of the leaves, the red and yellow tints of autumn. And about this time Crow Feathers left us; took up his pack one day at noon, shook hands solemnly with each of us, and a moment later was lost in the still, far-spreading woods. Three days after that Barreau and I, in the midst of a thinly timbered belt of land, came suddenly upon a clear-cut trail. Even my limited experience told me that it was made by man-guided animals.

"The chumps," Barreau drawled. "They are ten miles out of their way. I didn't expect to hit their trail till to-morrow. Well, they should be at the post now. We may as well follow them in."

"How is it," I voiced a thing that puzzled me, "that there are no wagon tracks? Are you sure this is Montell's outfit?"

"No other," he answered. "For many reasons. By the mule tracks, for one. You, of course, could not see them in the dark, but there was a mule herd with the bull-train. Loaded wagons are too hard to handle in this woods country. We have always used pack-mules this side of the Peace."

"Oh," said I, and, my mystery solved, I forbore further inquiry. We tramped along the trail in silence. Then, all at once, he flung out an abrupt question. Curiously enough, the thing he spoke of had just drifted into my mind.

"Remember those two Hudson's Bay men, Bob?"

I remembered them very well; two taciturn, buckskin-garbed men, who came to an Indian camp while we were there talking trade. They greeted us civilly enough, slept in the next lodge overnight, and left us a clear field in the morning. But before they took to the trail they drew Barreau aside and the three of them sat upon a fallen tree and conversed thus for an hour.

"Why, yes," I replied. "What of them?"

"I didn't tell you, did I, that they were Company agents with a proposal to buy out *my* interest in the house of Montell," he said. "Now, that amused me at the time. But the confounded thing has stuck in my mind, and lately I've been thinking—in fact, I've wondered if——"

He broke off as abruptly as he had begun. I was walking abreast of him, and I could see that he was engrossed with some problem; the mental groping in

his tone was duplicated in the expression on his face.

"What?" I blurted.

"Oh, just an idea that popped into my mind," he parried carelessly. "I'll tell you by and by."

"To be perfectly honest," I challenged, on the impulse of the moment, "I don't think you trust me very much, after all."

"You're mistaken there," he said slowly. "You are the one man in all this country whom I would trust. But I am not going to burden you with mere theories of possible trouble. Wait till I am sure."

With this I was forced to content myself. In a mild way I resented his secretiveness, even while I recognized his right to tell me as much or as little as he chose. Thus a certain diffidence crept into my attitude, perhaps. If it was obvious, it made no difference to Barreau. In the two days it took us to reach the post, I do not think he spoke a dozen sentences. He followed the trail of the packtrain, wholly absorbed in thought. Only when the stockade-enclosed group of buildings huddled below us, casting long shadows across the flat, did his self-absorption cease. We had halted for a moment on the bank above the river, not far from where I had first seen the Sicannie. The sun rested on the jagged mountain range to the west, and the river caught its slanting beams till it lay below us like cloth of gold, a glittering yellow gash in the somber woods. Barreau's hand fell lightly on my shoulder.

"Lord! I've been a cheerful companion of late," he said, as if it had but occurred to him. And some intangible quality of comradeship in the words, or perhaps his way of saying them, put me at ease once more.

We stood a little longer, and the sun dipped behind the mountains, robbing the Sicannie of its yellow gleam, casting a sudden grayness over the North. Then we hitched our lean packs anew, and went down the hill.

CHAPTER XII—THE FIRST MOVE

Montell himself, burdened with a troubled air, met us at the gate of the stockade.

"Well, you're back, eh?" he greeted Barreau. "I been wishin' you'd show

up. At the same time I'd just as soon you'd stay away. Now, don't get huffy, George. You ain't got any idee what I've had to contend with. Jessie's here."

Barreau looked at him with unchanging expression.

"Well," he observed presently, "what of it?"

"What of it?" Montell echoed. "Jehosophat! Ain't you got no imagination, George? That MacLeod deal has turned her against you somethin' terrible. She heard all that stuff about you, an' wouldn't rest till she made sure 'twas really you. She'd raise old Ned if——"

"She found out that her highly respectable parent was associated in business with a notorious character like Slowfoot George," Barreau cut in sneeringly. "You're rather transparent, Montell. You don't need to beat about the bush with me. I know what you are driving at. I've lost caste with her, which suits you exactly. You are her affectionate father, an honorable, clean-handed man. Hence you will not touch pitch lest she deem you defiled. Very good. But you had better take a hint from me and bestir yourself to get her south of the Peace before winter breaks. This is no place for a woman."

"Sure, sure," Montell seemed no whit taken aback, "that's what I been aimin' to do. I don't know what the mischief got into her to come up here, anyhow. She was supposed to turn back the next day after we left MacLeod—I told you that the night you come to our camp, but you was too blame busy abusin' me to listen, I guess. Then she stood me off another day or two. By that time I couldn't leave the outfit, and she wouldn't go back unless I did. Darn it, Jessie's gettin' to be too many for me. She's stubborn as a mule an' got a temper like—like—well, when she gets on the fight I got to stand from under, that's all. There'll be war if she finds out you're the big chief here. Say, George, can't you play like you just happened in?"

"No," Barreau refused flatly. "I will not lie to her if both our necks depended on it. For that matter, the explanation is simple. Why not tell her the truth yourself?"

Montell looked at him curiously. Of a sudden the set of his heavy, florid face seemed to become a trifle defiant, aggressive.

"There's no use standin' here arguin'," he said shortly. "Come on to the store. Let's get an understandin' of this thing."

He led the way. Within, as well as without, the rebuilt storehouse was transformed. A great clutter of goods in bales and sacks and small boxes filled it nearly to overflowing. Shelves lined the walls. On each side a rude counter ran the length of the building. Here and there a semblance of orderly arrangement was beginning to show. A fire crackled on the open hearth at one end. An upended box, littered with bills of merchandise and a ledger or two, stood against the wall. By this rude desk Montell sat him down on a stool. He turned a look of

inquiry on me, but Barreau forestalled his question.

"This is Bob Sumner," he made known perfunctorily. "The son of that Texas cattleman who owned the Toreante place on Rose Hill. I believe you knew him slightly. Sumner will winter with us. You need not stutter over talking before him."

"I don't stutter over talkin' before anybody, far as I'm concerned. It's *your* funeral," Montell retorted. Then he turned to me.

"So you're John Sumner's boy, eh?" He sized me up with new interest. I dare say he was wondering how I came to be in Barreau's company on the very night of his breaking jail. "Yes, sir, I did know your father. Did business with him a time or two. Mighty fine man. Seems to me I heard he died last spring. Left quite a large estate, didn't he?"

"Yes," I answered briefly to both questions. It was not a subject I cared to discuss just then.

"Too bad, too bad," he commiserated—but whether the sympathy he forced into his tone was for the death of my father, or for me, I did not know—nor care very much. It sounded like one of those convenient platitudes that become a habit with people. He focused his attention on Barreau, however, immediately after this.

"Now, George," he said, "suppose we have a word in private, eh?"

"This suits me; I'm getting hardened to publicity," Barreau drawled. "You want an understanding, you said. I'm agreeable. I remarked that it might be well to try telling the truth if explanations are demanded."

An exasperated expression crossed Montell's face.

"Now, see here, be reasonable," he grunted. "That there guardhouse business settled you. If you'd kept shy of that, there'd be a chance. But there ain't. You could swear to things on a stack of Bibles—and she wouldn't believe a word. You know as well as I do that she's got all them old-fashioned idees about a gentleman's honor that her mother's folks has. You know you *did* kill them two fellers on High River, an' run off them Hudson's Bay work-bulls. You didn't have to do *that.* You can't explain *them* things to *her*; nor bein' in jail. That there's a black mark she can't overlook. You wasn't smooth enough, George."

"You are astonishingly frank, I must say." Barreau leaned forward, smiling sardonically, a sneering, unpleasant smile. "Why? Would you mind explaining why you would refuse to vouch for the truth of my story if I tell her absolute facts? What have you up your sleeve?"

"Nothin'," Montell growled. "Only I ain't goin' to have you force my hand. I ain't goin' to get into no fuss with my own daughter. Besides, as I said, some of them things can't be explained to her—she couldn't understand. Once she found out what a hell of a time's been goin' on in this fur business, and that this winter's

liable to breed more trouble, why she'd be sure to take a notion to stick here by me. An' I won't expose *her* to whatever might come up, for nobody's reputation."

"Wise old owl!" Barreau sneered. "What need for this sudden access of caution? Do you think I can't——"

He broke off short at the slam of a door on the farther side of the storehouse. A feminine voice called, "Oh, papa!"

Montell sprang to his feet, muttering an expletive to himself, but he did not at once reply. In the stillness the sound of light footfalls threading the maze of piled goods echoed softly among the heavy beams above. It was dusk outside by then, and within that scantily windowed place it was quite dark, beyond a red circle cast from the open fireplace. And as the girl stepped into the edge of its glow Montell struck a match and touched it to a three-pronged candlestick on the box by his seat. She stifled an exclamation at sight of us. Then, with a scornful twist to her dainty mouth, she bowed in mock courtesy.

"Gentlemen," she murmured, an ironic emphasis on the term, "your presence is unexpected. I cannot say I esteem it an honor."

Then she turned to her father.

"Papa," she observed interrogatively, "I have always known you were a hospitable soul, but I never dreamed a house of yours would ever prove shelter for an outlawed cutthroat. Upon my word, if I were a man I should be tempted to collect the bounty on this human wolf. There is a bounty. See?"

She fumbled in a pocket of the short, fur-edged jacket she wore, and presently drew forth a folded paper.

"Yes, surely there is a bounty," she went on maliciously, holding the paper broadside to the sputtering candles. "Not a great one, to be sure, but more than he is worth. Five hundred dollars for the body, dead or alive, of George Brown, alias Slowfoot George. Height, weight, color of eyes, certain marks and scars—to a dot. Also an appalling list of crimes. Have you no shred or atom of a decent impulse left"—she addressed Barreau directly, her tone level, stingingly contemptuous—"that you persist in thrusting yourself upon people after they have seen the sheep's clothing stripped from your degenerate shoulders?"

Barreau met her gaze squarely and answered her in her own tone.

"I am here," he said, "because I choose to be here. Montell *pere* can tell you why."

"Now, now Jessie," Montell cut in pacifically. "This ain't St. Louis. If George is in trouble, I don't know as any one has a better right to help him than me. You don't want to be always ridin' that high hoss of yours. This country ain't peopled with little tin gods, as I've told you many a time. You'd better go back to the house. I'll be there pretty quick."

"Indeed, I imagine I could hardly be in worse company," she declared. "So

I will quit it, forthwith. It was not of my seeking. Better keep an eye on your goods, papa."

With that she was gone, leaving the three of us staring at each other, Montell a bit apprehensive, it seemed to me. Barreau was first to find his voice.

"I would advise you to get your trail outfit in readiness to-night," he told Montell bluntly, "and start south in the morning. Otherwise I will give no guarantee of peace and good will in this camp. I can't stand much of that sort of thing."

Montell seemed to consider this. If he felt any uneasiness over the implied threat he maintained an undisturbed front. Hunched on the stool like a great toad, one fat hand on each knee, his puffy eyelids blinking with automatic regularity, he regarded Barreau in thoughtful silence.

"I guess that's the proper card," he uttered at last. "I can make it back, all right, if it does come bad weather. I got to get her home, that's sure. You can kinda keep out of sight till we get started, can't you, George?"

"That's as it happens," Barreau returned indifferently. "Meantime, have you grub-staked any of these hunters? Are the Indians beginning to come in?"

Montell nodded. "Quite a few. Two or three camps up the river, the boys say. Some of 'em wouldn't make no deal till you showed up. Don't you let none of 'em have too big a debt, George."

Barreau shrugged his shoulders at this last caution. He sat staring into the fire, his lean, dark face touched with its red glow. Then abruptly he got up and opened the door.

"It's dark, Bob," he said to me. "Let us go to the cabin." And without another word to Montell he left the store, I following.

It was just dark enough so that we could distinguish the outline of the post buildings, and the black, surrounding wall of the stockade. The burned stable had been rebuilt during our absence. Within it horses sneezed and coughed over their fodder. On the flat beyond the post I could hear the night-herder whistle as he rode around the grazing mules. From this window and that, lights shone mistily through the scraped-and-dried deer-skin that served for glass. And at the far end of the stockade a group of men chattered noisily about a roaring fire. Yet the lights and sounds, the buildings of men and the men themselves seemed inconsequential, insignificant, proportioned to their surroundings like the cheeping of a small frog at the bottom of a deep well. The close-wrapping wilderness, with its atmosphere of inexorable solitude, enfolded us with silence infinitely more disturbing than any clamor. It may have been my mood, that night, but it seemed a drear and lonely land; the bigness of the North, its power, the implacable, elemental forces, had never taken definite form before. Now, all at once, I saw them, and I did not like the sight.

We did not make our way straight to the cabin. Barreau had no mind to go hungry. He stopped at the mess-house and bade the cook send our supper to us, when it was ready. Then we went to the cabin, flung our lean packs in a corner, built a fire, and sat by it smoking till a voluble Frenchman brought the warm food.

Again Barreau had fallen into wordless brooding. For the hour or more that passed after we had eaten he lay on his bed staring at the pole-and-dirt roof. He was still stretched thus, an unlighted cigarette between his lips, when I took off my clothes and laid me down to sleep. And when at daybreak I wakened and sat up sleepily, Barreau's bedding was neatly smoothed out on the bunk. His smoking material, which had lain on the table, was gone; likewise his rifle, cartridge-belt, and the pack-rigging he had cast aside the evening before. It seemed that Mr. Barreau must have gone a-journeying.

I opened the door and looked about me. Here and there men busied themselves at sundry occupations. The sun had but cleared the tree-tops, and on flat and hillsides deep black shadows still nestled. My roving eyes finally settled on one of these blots of shade, and presently I saw four figures, mounted, two of them leading extra horses, ascending the south bank. Looking more closely I observed that one was a woman. Mr. Montell, I decided, was taking time by the forelock. I stood with hands jammed in my trousers pockets, wishing that I, too, were homeward bound, wondering if Bolton had got either of my letters, and if he had made any attempt to trace me—and a lot of other footless speculation.

CHAPTER XIII—A FORETASTE OF STRONG MEASURES

Thus thrown upon my own resources, I betook myself to the roomy cabin where the cook reigned supreme. Thence, with breakfast disposed of, to the store. I found there a small, bewhiskered man bowed over a ledger, and a dozen husky packers stowing goods on the shelves. The clerical person gazed at me over a pair of steel-rimmed spectacles in a colorless, uninterested sort of way. I took him to be the bookkeeping machine of the concern, and such proved to be the case. And when I asked for "George," prudently refraining from mention of surnames he

told me primly that "Mr. Barreau" had gone up the river, leaving word that I was to make myself at home in the meantime. Having delivered himself of this message, he resumed his task. So I continued my round of the post until I located old Ben Wise. What between chatting with Ben, and sundry games of seven-up with one or two of the others whom I knew, and long spells of sitting alone in the cabin smoking over the fire, I managed to murder time for three days. At the end of which period Barreau returned.

He did not come alone, but at the head of a veritable flotilla of birch-bark canoes, laden with a picturesque mixture of Indians, squaws, round-faced pappooses, sharp-nosed dogs, and the household goods pertaining to these. By the appearance of things I inferred that he had been out to jog up the natives who had signified willingness to trade with the house of Montell. They beached the canoes, and pitched their lodges along the river bank, a little way from the stockade. In the two hours of daylight following the arrival of the vanguard other little parties came slipping quietly around the curve of the Sicannie, pitched their camps, and set about cooking food. The flat was speckled with twinkling dots of fire when dark vanquished the long twilight.

Barreau was tired, and had little to tell. I had come by a new deck of cards through favor of the colorless Mr. Cullen, and we played a silent game or two of euchre that night before turning in. By dawn we had breakfasted and were at the store, and the copper-skinned men of the lodges began to come in and cast their eyes upon such things as they desired.

All forenoon I watched this silent outfitting of the hunters, saw this one and that stand wrapped to the ears in his gaudy blanket, seeming not to see or to be conscious of aught that transpired. Then of a sudden he would point abruptly to a certain article, a trap or two, maybe, a caddy of tea, a flask of powder, and emit a guttural sound that Barreau interpreted to Cullen, who would solemnly make an entry in his notebook. When the red brother had reached his trading limit, his squaw took the burden of his purchases on her back, and he strode forth wrapped in a dignity even more striking than his blanket, she following meekly at his heels.

"How do you manage to keep track of them all?" I asked Barreau, as we sat at dinner. "Suppose these Indians that you outfit now don't show up again? Can you trust them so absolutely? For my part I can hardly tell one from another."

"You'd find out that they have distinct individual characteristics," Barreau replied, "if you were with them long. I know most of these fellows well enough to pick them out of a crowd. In fact, a good many of them won't trade except with me—which is one strong hold I have over my slippery partner. And so far as trusting them, an Indian's word is good as gold. For every dollar's worth of stuff we let them have this fall they'll bring ten dollars' worth of pelts next spring—

unless it is an extraordinary winter. Anyway, we don't stand to lose a great deal on what we trust them for. Where we will make money will be in the spring trade. They'll have plenty of furs left after their debt is paid, and they'll want guns and more powder, flour and tea for the summer, tobacco, and clothes and gew-gaws for the women and pappooses. If the winter is normal we're going to have a big trade; bigger even than I thought. I wouldn't mind," he concluded, with a short laugh, "if Montell had to go clear to Benton, and got snowed in there. That would eliminate one dangerous factor. But that's too much to hope for."

"It's a long trip," I reflected. "He can't get to the Missouri in time to send his daughter down on the last boat, even. The river will freeze any day now. Benton would be a dreary place for her to stay alone, I should think. He may stay there with her."

"Not likely," Barreau contended. "As it happens, she knows one or two rather nice families who are wintering at Benton, and she'll be apt to stay with them. He has been altogether too keen to have his finger in this winter's pie—when it wasn't needed there. No, the old fox has something up his sleeve—something that he's been leading up to ever since we left Benton. He'll be back, if he has to come on his hands and knees."

Barreau was right. Montell did come back, and the date of his return was only something more than forty-eight hours from the time of that conversation. We were stretched upon our respective bunks, I listening to Barreau's talk of long-dead traders who had undertaken to buck the Hudson's Bay Company, when some one tapped on the door; and at Barreau's laconic "come in," who but Montell himself should enter! He shut the door carefully behind him, and waddled to a seat. Barreau raised on one elbow.

"You!" he said sharply. "Back here already? What has happened now?"

Montell took off his hat and threw it petulantly on the floor. The expression on his face was sour as curdled milk.

"We couldn't make it, that's all," he growled. "I guess the H. B. C.'s gettin' busy all at once. Anyhow, we got headed off."

"How?" Barreau demanded.

Montell flung out his hands expressively.

"Easiest way in the world," he sputtered wrathfully. "Some feller with a good eye just trailed us up, and killed off our stock—shot 'em one by one. Finally we was afoot. So we turned back. Couldn't walk clear to MacLeod. Damn 'em, anyway!"

"No one hurt?" Barreau asked quietly.

"Barrin' blistered feet—no," Montell snapped.

His gaze involuntarily travelled to his own broad, shapeless feet, and a smile flickered across Barreau's countenance. There was a momentary lull.

"What are you going to do now?" Barreau inquired next.

"I'm goin' to take eight men, by God! and a string of mules, and hit it in the mornin'," Montell exploded. "I ain't goin' to have that girl winter here, if I know it. And I ain't goin' to be headed off from nothin' by the Hudson Bay or any other damned outfit. I'll show them bushwhackin' parties a trick or two. They'll find old Montell ain't so slow. I just come over here to let you know I was back, George, so's you wouldn't be gettin' into the foreground to-morrow mornin' when we're fixin' to start. You might just as well be accommodatin'."

"Oh, to be sure. As a favor from one gentleman to another," Barreau observed sarcastically. "Anything to oblige. But if I were you I should not try it again—not till you can take the outfit lock, stock, and barrel. You may find it only a waste of mules, if not worse. Evidently the Company is minded to pen the lot of us here, and teach us a lesson."

"Just so the girl's out of it," Montell muttered defiantly, "they got my permission to go ahead with their teachin'. We've held our own for quite a spell. But I got to get her clear. So I'm goin' to tackle it again."

"Very well," Barreau said indifferently. "But you had better take a few pair of snowshoes. You may need them."

"Maybe so," Montell returned. "But I bet I get a scalp or two if they go to settin' us afoot *this* trip." And he gathered up his hat and left the cabin.

Barreau lay back on his bed a long time without remark. Then he said aloud, apropos of nothing in particular:

"I shouldn't be surprised if that was the way of it."

I looked over at him, and catching my interrogative gaze, he went on.

"I've simply been doing a bit of inductive reasoning. Taking things as they are in this country what more natural than that the Hudson's Bay Company should have become alarmed lest we grow to a formidable competitor, and have simply made up their minds that we must be ousted, by hook or by crook. They have a way of keeping posted, you know. I shouldn't be surprised if one or two of the men on our payroll were Company spotters. Here is Montell and his daughter, and myself. They might reason that by driving him back and intimidating him, forcing him to winter here, and then harassing us in every conceivable way till spring, they may make us glad to quit. For instance, they could try to kill off our stock and poison our dogs. And if there was a chance to burn us out, why that would be the finishing touch. I shouldn't be surprised if that is their scheme. And then along in the winter they might even go so far as to have the Mounted Police pull one chestnut out of the fire for them, by revealing my whereabouts."

"How does it come," I asked, in some surprise, "that they haven't done that before, if they know that George Barreau, the fur-trader, is Slowfoot George of the MacLeod country?"

"For the very good reason that they want no Mounted Policemen in this neck of the woods," he said decidedly. "They don't want to establish a precedent. They have lorded it in the North for generations, and so long as they continue to do so the Canadian government will permit it. Once the Police begin to come here, the Company authority is at an end. Also their monopoly—for a Mounted Police post up here would mean open country, and a swarm of free traders. Of course, what I said, is mere theory, but I might be on the right track. If I am, we may look for merry times here this winter, and you and I may have to take to the deep snows before spring."

"Suppose—while we're theorizing," I ventured, "that Montell had an idea he could get along without you—if he wants to settle your chances of sharing in the profits, as you think—why mightn't he give the Police a quiet hint, if he gets through?"

"I can very well imagine him doing that," Barreau responded thoughtfully. "But he can't make it go without me; at least, not just yet. And I do not think he will get through, for all his determination."

I kept Barreau's prophecy in mind. Days of busy outfitting slipped by; I kept no track of the hunters who indebted themselves to the post, but they came and went by scores. The days merged into a week. At the end of it a black ruck of clouds came scudding out of the west. Thick and lowering they gathered over head, and one day at noon, while Barreau and I stood in the doorway of the store, watching a great multitude of damp snowflakes come eddying down through the still air, Montell, his daughter, and the eight men, came plodding afoot to the gate of the stockade.

CHAPTER XIV—INTEREST ON A DEBT

They filed past the store, a weary looking squad, Montell's fat jowl drawn into sullen lines, the men not wholly free of a certain furtive bearing. Observing them I could very well enter into their feelings. My brief experience between Benton and MacLeod had taught me something of the fear that stalks at the elbow of a hunted man. The girl looked up at Barreau and me, and for the first time there

was no curl to her lip, no scornful gleam in her eyes. Only a momentary flash of interest. Then the listless, impersonal expression came back to her face. She walked at her father's elbow like one utterly worn out. The men branched off to the bunkhouse. Montell and his daughter went straight to their cabin.

"I think he is beginning to have a profound respect for the Company," Barreau told me that night as we sat over our fire. "They have set him thinking. It seems that none of his men could get so much as a glimpse of a moccasin track. Still, their saddle horses and pack-mules were systematically shot down, until they were afoot again. After that they were not molested. He knows that his whole party could as easily have been put out of the way. That seems to have put the fear of God into the lot of them. They can't understand the object. I don't, myself, altogether. But I could hazard a close guess, I think."

All that night and the next day the big snowflakes came gyrating down. The temperature remained the same, just short of freezing, and a dead calm lay over the land. Then it faired gradually. With the clearing sky the feathery snowfall melted and disappeared. Upon its passing the night frosts took on a keener edge. Little vagrant gusts of wind went frolicking through the open spaces in the woods, fluttering the dry, fallen leaves into tiny heaps and scattering them again. Sometimes of a night these same whisperings of the North rattled the bare limbs of the cottonwoods and birch till the miles of forest seemed to voice a protesting murmur. Steadily the cold grew, and the sun rode lower on its diurnal passage. Save the pine and spruce and scattered cedars the great woods shivered in their nakedness, lacking the white robe which the North dons at such season. And presently that came also, with the deep-throated whoop of a north-east gale to herald its coming. In one night the Sicannie froze from bank to bank; at daybreak the wind drove curling streamers of loose snow across its glassy surface, to pile in frosty windows at the foot of the south slope.

During this period we of the post settled into a routine of minor tasks. There were fires to keep against the cold. From dawn to dusk, somewhere within the stockade or on the timbered hill above, the clink of an axeblade on frosty wood rang like a bell. That, and water for cooking, and caring for the stock now housed in the long stable, kept time from hanging heavy on the hands of the men. Barreau and I gravitated between our cabin and the store.

Montell sulked for a week after that last failure to reach the south. Then he emerged from his shell of silence, and became ponderously genial, talkative—a metamorphosis which Barreau regarded with frank contempt. He spoke to Montell no oftener than was necessary, and when he did speak his tongue was barbed. Openly and unequivocally he despised and distrusted his flesh-burdened partner, and he made no effort to hide the fact. For the most part Montell took his sneering unmoved, or grinned pacifically, but there were times when his red

face went purple and his puffy eyelids would droop till the pupils glinted through mere slits, like a cat about to pounce. Then it would be Barreau's turn to smile, in his slow ironic way.

Of the girl, who kept close to the cabin she and her father shared, no word ever passed between the two. Nor did she meet Barreau or myself face to face for a matter of three weeks. Our sight of each was from a distance, and from that distance, with a blanket coat to her heels and a fur cap pulled over her ears, it was hard to distinguish her from one of the few half-breed women who had followed their men into the North. In what way Montell accounted for our presence, I did not know, nor how he explained Barreau's assured position about the post. It may be that she did not notice this incongruity on the part of a supposed fugitive; it may be that Montell was a plausible liar. At any rate, upon the few occasions when we three came near enough to recognize each other, she appeared calmly indifferent. Barreau and I ate in the big cookhouse with the rest of the men. Montell and his daughter had their meals served in the cabin. So we—at least I will speak for myself, for Barreau maintained a stony front and absolute silence on the subject—were saved the embarrassment of meeting three times daily.

Montell himself became very friendly toward me. Bit by bit he drew from me the story of my wanderings, and shook his head over it, assuring me that Missouri river sternwheel men were a hard lot. Once he became reminiscent and spoke of his dead wife and her people with a poorly concealed pride in the alliance. His palpable satisfaction amused me. It seemed odd that a man of his rugged type, a hard-headed business buccaneer, should have that fatuous over-estimation of wealth and so-called "blood." But he had it to the n'th degree. I dare say it was his one weak spot. She was a Charbonne, of the old New Orleans Charbonnes, originally a Hugenot family, but for the last generation or two of St. Louis, he told me; and in the telling he shed his natural carelessness of speech, and spoke in the stilted, exactly-phrased English in which he might have addressed the aristocratic parent of his bride. I knew more or less of the St. Louis Charbonnes myself, and I wondered that I had never heard of Montell or his daughter. Barreau smiled when I spoke of this later.

"That's Montell all over," he drawled. "Marrying a Charbonne stands out as one of the big things he has accomplished. He can't help boasting of it now and then. I imagine that if he were dying in a snowbank that thought would cheer him in his last hour. He regards it as a distinct achievement. He was a big, perfectly-formed, good-looking brute when he met her, and from all I know it was a case of two strong natures brushing aside all obstacles. I've heard that the Charbonnes were furious over what they considered the rankest sort of mesalliance—but they were married, and so far as I know she never discovered his very obvious clay feet. She died in child-birth—the second child. The family has kept up a desultory

intercourse with him for the girl's sake. They recognize her as their own blood, and tolerate him on that account."

A day or two after this Barreau rigged up a dog-team and left the post, bound for a point down the river, where they had established two Frenchmen with some trading goods, on the chance of getting into touch with some few lodges that hunted in that territory. He took one man, and I tramped a few miles with them, for the sake of the snowshoe practice of which I was sadly in need. It looked easy to go stalking over the drifts on those webbed ovals, but it was trying work for a novice I discovered at my first attempt. There was a certain free, swinging stride, which I had yet to master. So it happened that I did not return to the post until that chill hour between sundown and dark.

I was aware that the fire in our cabin was long dead, and the room corresponding in temperature to an ice-box, but I was in no mood for the ultra-friendly conversation Montell had been favoring me with of late. For which reason I eschewed the blaze that I knew was crackling on the store hearth and made straight for my own quarters.

The day's work was at an end. Besides myself not a soul moved within the frosty area of the stockade. The doors of every building were shut tight against the sharp-toothed cold. This I noted almost mechanically. I was beginning to develop the woodsman's faculty of observing detail, without conscious purpose. With my mind busy about the prospect of getting a fire started in the shortest possible space of time my gaze for a moment rested on the Montell cabin, as I stopped at my own door. At that instant Jessie Montell stepped outside, a shawl thrown over her head, carrying in one hand some object covered with a white cloth.

The dogs must have been lying at the end of the cabin. The slam of the door had barely sounded when she was confronted by one wolf-like brute. He faced her boldly, his nose pointed inquisitively toward the thing she carried. She made a threatening gesture and spoke sharply to him, whereat the husky retreated a foot or two—and was instantly reinforced by half a dozen of his fellows. The girl lifted her hand a little higher and berated them, her clear voice reproaching them for their lack of manners. And then of a sudden one cock-eared brute sprang at the thing she carried. He missed, and one of the others had a try. She gave ground, holding above her head what I now saw was a plate; and immediately the snarling pack was snapping at her skirts and she was cut off from the door. I could hear the click of their white fangs as I ran. She backed against the wall, scolding them in a voice that betrayed some alarm.

I reached her on the double-quick, when I saw that the dogs meant mischief. The short-tempered devils turned on me in a body with the first blow I struck. One after the other I knocked galley-west and crooked with the barrel of my rifle,

and shortly emerged victorious from the melee, but with my leggings ripped in divers places and the left sleeve of my *parka* slit as if with a knife. From this last the blood streamed forth merrily, flowing down over my mitten and dripping redly on the trampled snow. Prior to that my experience of vicious dogs had been with those which grabbed and held on. The slashing wolfish snap of the husky was new to me. I stood looking at my gashed arm in some astonishment.

"Why, they've bitten you," the girl exclaimed, with a sharp intake of her breath. "Let me see?"

She spread apart the opening in my buckskin sleeve and frowned at sight of the torn flesh, meanwhile balancing on her other hand the plate of meat that had caused the onslaught. Most women, I found time to reflect, would have dropped it at the first intention, but she had clung to it as a miser clings to his gold.

"Come in and let me tie that up," she commanded peremptorily, and flung open the door, giving me little chance to debate whether I would or no. And I followed her in, as much through a sudden desire to see a little more of this very capable and impulsive young lady, as to have the sharp sting of the wound allayed.

She brought water in a basin, a sponge, and a piece of clean linen which she speedily reduced to strips; and after helping me remove the *parka* proceeded to dress the gash in my forearm with deft tenderness. During this ministering to my need we were both silent. When it was done she tilted her head on one side and surveyed her handiwork, for all the world like a small bird perched on a limb and looking down. This fanciful notion struck me as rather absurd, and the more I thought of it the more absurd it seemed, till I found myself smiling broadly. Likening Jessie Montell to a saucy bird was, in a way, a very far-fetched comparison. She was distinctly unbirdlike—apart from that trick of tipping her head sidewise and gazing speculatively at whatsoever interested her.

"I'm really and truly sorry I got you into such a scrape," she apologized sweetly. "I suppose I should have thrown the meat to those ferocious things. But dear me, I'd toiled so over it, getting it thawed and fixed for papa's supper, that I hated to see it literally go to the dogs. You mustn't let the cold get into that cut. You'll have a nasty sore if you do."

"Oh, I'll see that the cold doesn't have a chance at it," I assured her. "And you don't need to feel guilty on my account. I'd rather it was my arm than yours. I'm only too glad to pay a little interest on my debt."

She looked puzzled for a second.

"Oh," she said then, "you mean that time on the *Moon*. There's no debt to me. Those ruffians would have paid little heed to me. Mr. Barreau——"

She colored and broke off abruptly, with an impatient gesture.

"Papa has been telling me about you," she changed the subject. "Another

St. Louis unfortunate"—smilingly—"aren't you. As the Scotch say, I feel 'verra weel acquentit.' Your mother and my aunt Lois were more or less intimate. So that I know you by proxy, in a way."

I don't recollect just what reply I made. If she were trying to put me at my ease she made a woeful mess of it the very next minute, for she demanded to know, with embarrassing directness:

"Why in the world didn't you stand your ground at Benton? Whatever possessed you to cross the line?"

"Well, you see—I—it was——" and there I halted lamely. I couldn't discuss the ethics of my flight with this self-sufficient young woman. My grounds for self-justification in that particular instance, were rather untenable. I couldn't explain the psychology of the thing to her, when I couldn't quite grasp it myself. I couldn't honestly admit that I had refused to stay and face the consequences of Tupper's sudden end at my hands because I was overwhelmed with fear. I didn't believe that myself. Even if I had believed it, I would have been ashamed to admit frankly to that gray-eyed girl that I had run away because I was afraid. It had been a peculiar situation for me, one that I could hardly attempt to make clear to her. With Barreau it had been different. He seemed to understand, to divine how and why I did such and such a thing at such a time and place, with but a meager explanation from me. Certain effects invariably led him intuitively to first causes.

Moreover, with her I seemed to be put upon the defensive. I found myself reflecting on what she would do in such a case, and instantly deciding that Miss Jessie Montell would defy the devil and all his works if she thought herself in the right. In addition thereto I felt that she was unconsciously appraising me and classing me as a weakling; and that, added to my own half-formed conviction that in time of trial I was likely to prove so, made me a most uncomfortable individual for a few moments. Montell's entrance saved me from a rather unwelcome situation. There is no knowing how deep a tangle I should have got myself into—she was so uncompromisingly direct. Montell, however, opened the door at the crucial period, and she turned to him with a recital of the huskies' outbreak, lighting a cluster of candles as she talked.

"If you don't shut up those ferocious brutes, or feed them a little oftener," she concluded, "they'll devour somebody one of these days, and there won't be so much as a moccasin left to tell the tale." At which extravagant forecast we all three laughed, and I felt myself equal to the occasion once more.

The upshot of this dog episode was that I stayed to supper with them, and went to my own cabin rather late in the evening.

CHAPTER XV—STRANGERS TWAIN

My arm was somewhat swollen, and it throbbed like an ulcerated tooth, when I got up the following morning, but I made shift to build a fire. When the icy chill was banished from the room, I dressed, and was getting what comfort I could out of a smoke when Montell knocked at my door, bringing a cold gust of air when he entered.

"Oho," said he, "stirrin' round, eh? This ain't much like home, is it? How's the arm?"

I told him briefly, having little inclination to enlarge on that theme—the pain was sufficient without the aggravation of discussing it.

"Uh-huh," he grunted. "Now you just come along to the shack and have Jess fix it up again. She's pretty near as good as a doctor. And seein' she's partly responsible, it's no more'n fair. There ain't no use you makin' a hermit of yourself."

I attempted to dodge this invitation, which seemed to savor of command. Montell's semi-jocoseness rather jarred on me. For one thing his heartiness didn't quite ring true. Possibly I misjudged him. He could have had no particular motive for posing on my account. But I got the impression that his solicitude was of the lip rather than of the heart. While I had passed a very pleasant evening with them, I did not contemplate making myself at home in the Montell cabin, by any means. I had a vague feeling that it involved disloyalty to Barreau. Montell, however, was quite insistent, and as I had no forthright reason for being churlish I ended by going with him.

He made a great fuss at helping me off with my coat, and while he hovered over me in his ponderous way Miss Montell came out of the other room. She nodded to me and smiled a greeting, whereupon he, busying himself with hanging my coat and hat upon a peg, plunged into a jesting account of my reluctance to leave my own fireside, relating with much detail what he said and what I said, and how I owed it to my arm to have it well cared for, and so on—till I wearied of

his gabble. I don't think she listened half the time. She moved about the room, getting a basin and warm water and other first, or perhaps I should say second, aids to the injured. And she washed and bandaged afresh the laceration, with an impersonal absorption in the task that I half resented.

When she had finished, breakfast, hot from the cookhouse, was brought by one of the "breed" women, and Miss Montell seated herself at the table and airily waved her father and myself to places on her right and left.

That was how I came to break bread with them a second time, and it was not the last by any means. In the ensuing five or six days I wore a distinct path between my cabin and theirs. Montell made it a point to descend upon me at some hour of the day, and, after all, I was not so loth. I am constrained to admit that Jessie Montell was the one bright spot in those dreary, monotonous days. With Barreau gone, I was a lonely mortal indeed. Those evenings at Montell's passed away many a leaden-footed hour. After that first time Jessie never challenged me in that imperious, judicial manner, anent my Benton escapade. We spoke of it, to be sure, but in terms dispassionate, uncritical. When Montell was about, he and I played cribbage. When she and I were alone, we talked. We discovered a similar taste in books, a mutual acquaintance or two in St. Louis. And we gravely discussed the prospects of getting home in the spring. Naturally, she was a rabid partisan, hating the Hudson's Bay Company with outspoken frankness. Moreover, she spoke confidently of her father's power to beat them at their own game, notwithstanding the strong hand shown by the Company so shortly before. Of Barreau's part in the war for pelts, she seemed profoundly ignorant. His name never passed her lips.

Once the swelling left my arm the torn place healed rapidly. So that by the end of a week I felt no inconvenience, and it was beyond need of any treatment save a simple bandage to protect it from the rubbing of my sleeve. Then I bethought me of my neglected snowshoeing, and sallied forth on the track of that free, effortless stride which had so far eluded me. At the gate of the stockade I turned back, on the impulse of the moment, and went to the Montell cabin to ask Jessie if she were a snowshoe expert or wished to become one.

"Thank Heaven for a chance to see the outside of this stockade wall once more," she cried, in mock fervor. "Will I go snowshoeing? Yea, and verily. I detest being mewed up, and I don't like to wander off alone. This big desolate country is so forbidding. Yes, I've snowshoed a little—one winter in the Wisconsin woods."

She had more of a mastery over the webbed boots of the North than I, it shortly transpired. We went up the river a mile or two, crossed it, and climbed to the top of a bald point that immediately appealed to us as an ideal coasting-place. We were in something of a light-hearted mood, anyway, and like a pair of children on a holiday amused ourselves by sliding down and climbing back

to slide down again. Thus we passed two or three hours, at imminent risk of frozen cheeks and noses, for it was bitterly cold, so cold that the snow crunched beneath our feet like powdered rosin. And when we wearied of that we went trailing home over glistening flats that lay between us and the post. Down on the bare bottomlands of the Sicannie a tenuous frost-haze hung in the air. Back from the valley edges the great woods stood in frozen ranks, branches heavy-freighted with the latest fall of snow. To the west towered the mountain range, robed in ermine now instead of summer purple; huge, ragged crests, flashing in the heatless sun.

"What insignificant creatures we are, after all," the girl stopped suddenly and looked back at the white peaks, and to the north and south where the somber woodland stood like twin walls. "For a true sense of his own importance in the universe one has only to face—this." She nodded toward the surrounding forest, and the Rockies crouching against the far skyline. "It is so big—and so silent. It gives me a feeling of being pitted against a gigantic, remorseless power—a something indefinable, and yet terrible in its strength. Power—when I can understand it—fascinates me. But this makes me shrink. Sometimes I actually feel afraid. They say that men compelled to stay up here alone often go mad. I hardly wonder. I don't think I like the North."

"So you feel that way," I rejoined. "So do I, at times."

She assented soberly.

"Perhaps we are blessed or cursed, whichever it may be, with too much imagination; and give it overfree rein."

"No," I returned, blundering on in an attempt to voice that which I had often felt, but could never express. "There is an atmosphere, a something about these immense spaces that sits hard on the nerves. We don't have to imagine these things; they're here. It seems to me that any wilderness untamed must have that same effect; it overawes one. And man hasn't tamed this yet. The North is master—and we feel it."

We plodded a few yards farther.

"The North is master—and we feel it," she repeated presently. "I resent that. I shouldn't care," she murmured thoughtfully, "to be wholly at the mercy of the North. It reminds me of the sea, cold and gray and pitiless." And she fell into a silent reflective mood as we trudged along to the post.

Just at the gate of the stockade we met two men—two tall men burdened with shoulder-packs. I knew the face of every man in the pay of Montell, but these were not of his following. Yet somewhere, sometime, I had seen them; my memory insisted upon this. But where or when, I could not instantly recall.

They passed within a few feet of me, their *parka* hoods drawn close about their cheeks. I had only their profiles to spur my recollection. But that sufficed. I

stood watching them bear away to the north, and as mechanically I shuffled the cards of memory a picture flashed out clear as the ace of spades in a diamond suit. The two men were those who had come to the camp of Three Wolves early in the fall, the same who had sat upon the log with Barreau that morning and made overtures for peaceful capitulation. Once I had placed them, my interest flagged. I turned and entered the stockade. Jessie had kept on to the store. Montell was standing on the stoop, as I reached the building, his hands thrust deep in the pockets of his fur coat. By the fixity of his gaze as I turned the corner I guessed that he was watching the two men. A backward glance showed them just vanishing into the belt of spruce that ran to the brow of the hill.

"Well," I greeted, "you've had callers to break the monotony, I see."

"That's what," he replied. "Queer fish, too. Wouldn't stay no time at all. Claimed to be free traders like ourselves, and wanted to know if we minded 'em tryin' to pick up a few pelts around here in the spring. Got a stock of goods, they said, somewhere between here and the Peace."

I pricked up my ears at that. Someone had fibbed properly. And when it was on the tip of my tongue to say that they were Hudson's Bay men, I refrained. That information would keep, I reflected. The more I thought of it the less I cared to make any assertions. The men had done no harm apparently. If they had lied to Montell he was probably shrewd enough to know why. If Montell were lying to me, he likely had good reasons. I dropped the matter forthwith. It was for Barreau to speculate upon, when he returned.

So I went into the store and warmed myself, and, after Jessie went home, spent the rest of the afternoon playing pinochle with Ben Wise. But the sight of those men in buckskin had jarred me out of the peaceful routine of thought that the quiet weeks had bred. I was once more brought up against the game of cross-purposes that Barreau and Montell were playing, and the Hudson's Bay Company again loomed as a factor. I wondered if anything had befallen Barreau. He had told me he would be back in four days—the time had doubled. Ben brought me up standing in the midst of these reflections. He threw down his cards in disgust.

"I quit yuh," he growled. "By gosh, I want to play cards when I play, an' do my dreamin' in bed." So we put up the deck, and I went to my cabin and built a fire.

The cheery warmth of the cabin, after the exertion of snowshoeing, and sitting there in a state of mental passivity, soon begot drowsiness. I piled wood on the fire, and stretched myself on the bunk. And the next minute, it seemed, I was being shaken out of my sleep—but I opened my eyes to candle light, and Barreau standing over me, smiling.

"Come out of the trance, old snoozer," he laughed cheerfully. "I've just got in. Suppose we go and eat before the cook shuts up shop."

"Amen to that," I replied.

I put fresh wood on the fire, which had sunk to a few dull embers, while Barreau busied himself with the wash-basin and comb. Stripped of the *parka* that had cast confusing shadows on his features I saw that he had suffered attack from the frost. A patch of blackening skin stood over each cheek-bone.

"I see you got bitten, too," I remarked—and went on to tell him of my clash with the huskies.

"I had worse than husky dogs to contend with," he returned in a matter of fact way. "Our two Frenchmen, the cabin and everything in it, has been spirited away. I went on a scouting trip, thinking I might get track of something. I've laid out every night since I left here. Hull fared even worse than I; he may lose some of his toes."

"And you found——" I started to ask.

"Nothing," he replied carelessly. "I don't think the men came to any harm. But it's one more item on the debit side."

Over in the mess-house we had the long room to ourselves, except for the cook pottering over his fire. And in the midst of the meal I bethought me to tell Barreau of the two strangers, and Montell's account of their mission. He laid down his knife and fork and listened intently.

"Free traders, eh?" he drawled. "Not so bad for Montell, that—or has the Company taken a fresh tack, I wonder? They knew I was away. I had a feeling that we were being watched, and so had Hull. Quite an engrossing little three-cornered game, isn't it, Bob?"

We left the cookhouse without referring to this again. A light shone dully through the store window nearest us, and we walked toward our cabin, and just short of the door Barreau turned aside.

"I may as well go and tell him that the brothers Grau have gone over to the enemy," he said to me. "Come along, Bob, and see him squirm. He always does when he is stabbed in such a vital point as the purse. That's a veritable heel of Achilles with him."

Montell was alone. He stood with his back to the fire, legs spread apart, hands clasped behind him. He looked very well satisfied with himself. His little eyes surveyed us placidly from under the blinking, puffy lids.

"Well, George, you're back, eh?" he observed. "How's everything below?"

"Very well, I dare say," Barreau answered, during the process of making a cigarette, "from the other fellow's point of view."

Montell's eyelids drew a little nearer together.

"How's that?" he inquired, in his mildest manner.

And Barreau, when he had found a box to his liking and seated himself on it beside the fire, proceeded to tell him very much as he had told me. The two of

them eyed each other a few seconds. Then Montell bit the end off the cigar he had tucked in one corner of his thick-lipped mouth and spat it viciously into the fireplace.

"God damn 'em!" he snarled. But whether the Company or the two Frenchmen he did not specify—perhaps both. Barreau laughed softly.

"Don't let your angry passions rise," he sneered. "Temper always induces apoplexy in fat people. A man of your beefy tendency should be very careful."

Montell's heavy jowl quivered slightly, and his jaws clamped together. Aside from that he kept an impassive front. With that last shot Barreau turned his gaze to the fire, and as Montell stood staring intently before him there was an interval of silence. In the hush a scuffling sound arose in the rear of the store.

"Them darned rats," Montell muttered.

He cocked his head aside and stood in a listening attitude, I, watching him unobtrusively, saw his glance flit furtively from me to Barreau and then to a table standing just back from the hearth. For the first time I noticed then that a rifle lay upon it, the general direction of the muzzle toward Barreau. Again he looked swiftly from me to George, and then stared straight away into the black shadows that shrouded the far end of the long room. Once more the rustling and scraping sounds could be heard.

"Them darned rats," he repeated. "They'll eat us out before spring."

He left the fire and stole softly back among the shadows, whence presently came the noise of something being thrown, followed by Montell's voice cursing the rats.

Barreau had not once turned his head. But I had watched Mr. Simon Montell as much because his actions interested me as because I expected anything to happen. And I distinctly saw the rifle shift its position when he passed the table end; as if he had accidentally brushed against the projecting stock. Accidentally or otherwise, the muzzle then pointed straight at Barreau. I have a deep-rooted aversion to seeing the business end of a gun directed at a man unless such is the intention of the man behind it. Loaded or empty, my father taught me, never point a gun at anybody unless you mean to hurt him. And so I reached over and gave the rifle a hitch that pointed it toward the opposite wall, just as Montell returned from his rat hunting.

"By thunder, I'd oughto took that to 'em," he declared—as if he had but noticed the rifle.

He placed himself before the fire again. In a minute or so came the subdued rustling of the rats. Montell winked at me, picked up the Winchester, cocked it, and went tip-toeing toward the rear. Barreau came out of his study at the click of the hammer. He flashed a quick glance after Montell. Then quietly he moved his box backward till his body, when he seated himself, was no longer clearly

outlined in the firelight.

The rat activities ceased. After a time Montell came poking back again, carrying the rifle in his right hand. As he reached the end of the table, so close to me that I could have touched him, and within six feet of Barreau, he stumbled, pitched sharply forward, and the report of the gun made my heart leap.

With the forward lurch of Montell's body Barreau cast himself backward like an uncoiled spring, and fell full length, thus escaping the bullet. He made no attempt to rise, simply rolled over on his side. For an instant a pistol glinted in his hand, and his thin lips were drawn back from his white, even teeth. As quickly as he had drawn it he thrust the six-shooter back out of sight. The habitual unruffled expression came back to his face as Montell got upon his feet, leaving the rifle upon the floor. Barreau sat up then.

"By the great horn spoon," Montell stammered. "I—I oughto be kicked. By gosh, I thought that hammer was down. Darn me for a careless fool, runnin' round with a loaded gun and stumblin' over a little piece of wood. I'd no idee I was so blamed clumsy. I guess I'm gettin' old all right."

Barreau laughed, a cold-blooded unmirthful sound. He got up from his sitting posture, laid hold of the rifle, and stood it against the wall beside him. Then he sat down on his box, and felt with his fingers till he located the bullet hole. It was embedded in the log, on a level with his breast.

"Clumsy?" Barreau said, in a voice nearly devoid of inflection. "Well, yes; it was rather clumsy."

Montell was facing the light now. Barreau got up from his box again, and Montell took a step backward. Thus for a half-minute the two faced each other silently, gray eye pitting itself against cold, steel-blue. Montell weakened under that direct contemptuous glare. His glance sought me in a furtive way, and the fat, pudgy hands of him began to fidget.

"Don't do it again, Montell," Barreau said slowly, and his tone was like a slap in the face.

Then he sat down upon the box and rolled himself another cigarette.

CHAPTER XVI—CLAWS UNSHEATHED

The heavy log walls must have muffled the shot completely, for, contrary to my expectations, no inquiring faces came poking in the door. In pure defiance, I believe, Barreau kept his place by the fire, smoking placidly till it wore on to ten o'clock. Then Montell, pursing up his lips, put on his overcoat and left without a word. Shortly after that Cullen came in, followed by Ben Wise. They slept in the store, one at each end. At their entrance Barreau drew the *parka* hood about his ears and we took our departure.

The fire was down to a single charred stick, but the chill had not yet laid hold of the air within, and we made ready for bed before the numbing fingers of the frost made free with our persons. I stretched myself on my bunk and wrapped the blankets and a rabbit-skin robe about me, but Barreau sat on the edge of his bed, staring into the candle flame as if he sought therein the answer to a riddle.

"If those Company men made the same proposition to Montell," he broke out suddenly, "that they made to me, it is ten to one that Montell stands ready to deliver the goods. That would account for the baldness of that play to-night."

"You think he did mean it, then?" I had so far given Montell the benefit of the doubt, despite a growing conviction that he had stumbled purposely.

"Why, of course; that's obvious, isn't it?" Barreau declared. "You know he did. Else why did you move that gun after he'd very artfully contrived to point it my way?"

"So you were watching him, after all?" said I.

"I always watch him," he answered drily.

"I feel sure that he sees—or thinks he sees—the way clear, once I'm attended to," Barreau continued. "I've been looking for this very thing. It came to me that day we struck the pack-trail. You remember? I started to tell you, and changed my mind."

I nodded. The incident was quite fresh in my memory—my juvenile egotism had received a bump on that very occasion.

"It struck me with a sort of premonitory force, as I stood there looking at those mule tracks," he went on, "that if the Company offered him the same terms they did me he would jump at it. They offered me forty thousand dollars to get out of the game, to give them a bill of sale of my interest—*and they would take care of my partner.* You see? Now I'm satisfied they wouldn't incorporate that last clause in any offer to Montell. I'm not boasting when I say that from the beginning I've been the thorn in the Company's flesh. Every time they've locked horns with me, I've come out on top. They might offer him forty thousand, but he'd have to guarantee them against me. And I think that performance to-night is a sample of how he will try to clear the way."

"To put it baldly," I said. "You think he'll kill you out of hand—if he gets a chance to do it in a way that won't prove a boomerang?"

"Exactly," Barreau observed.

"Then," I suggested, and even as the words were on my tongue I stood amazed at the ruthless streak they seemed to uncover, "why not catch him at it—and do the killing yourself. There's no law here to restrain *him*, apparently. Be your own law—if you know you're *right*."

"I can't." Barreau muttered. "Not that my conscience would ever trouble me. He's protected in a way he doesn't dream of. And he's too wary of me to lay himself liable. If anything happens it will be an accident; you know how it would have been to-night. You, sitting right there, could not have declared it otherwise, no matter what your private opinion might have been. He has pretty well calculated the chances. No, Mr. Montell is not going to put himself in any position where I'd be clearly justified in snuffing him out."

For a minute or so he sat silent, frowning at the candle on the table between my bunk and his.

"How he would bait me," he went on presently, "if he knew that killing him is the one thing I desire to avoid, at any cost! I hope it doesn't come to that. It would be only just, but I have no wish to mete out justice to him. His miserable life is safe from me, for her sake—no, I'll be honest: for my own. I want him to live, till I can force him to tell her a few truths that she will never believe except from his own lips. I was a seven times fool for not doing that long before we reached Benton. I could have forestalled all this. But I didn't suspect he was tolling her on—for a purpose."

He stopped again. It was not the first time that Barreau had touched upon that theme, and always his tongue had been stricken with a semi-paralysis just short of complete revelation. In a general way it was plain enough to me, from the verbal collisions between himself and Montell on that same subject. And though I was humanly curious enough to want the particulars at first hand, I made no effort to draw forth his story. Hence I was surprised when he took up the thread of the conversation where he had left off.

"One reads of these peculiar situations in books," he rested his chin in the palms of his hands and stared abstractedly at me, "but they are seldom encountered in everyday living. I dare say the world is full of women, good women, beautiful, brilliant women, that I might have won. Yet I must fall victim to an insane craving for an elfin-faced, hot-tempered sprite who will have none of me. Six or seven years ago she was a big-eyed school-girl, with a mop of unruly hair. Then all at once, she grew up, and—and I've been the captive of her bow and spear ever since. Love—the old, primal instinct to mate! It's a brutal force, Bob, when it focuses all a man's being on one particular woman. I never told her, but I'm sure she knew; I know she did. And she—well, a man never can tell what a woman thinks or feels or will do or say, or whether she means what she says

when she says it. I don't know. But I've thought that she did care—only she wouldn't admit it until I made her. She's the type that wouldn't give herself to even the man she loved without a struggle. And I'm just savage enough to be glad of that. I've only been waiting till this spring and the end of this fur deal, so that we would have the wherewith to live, before I cornered her and fought it out.

"But I've waited too long, I'm afraid. You see, Montell has always been against me; that is, he has secretly been cutting the ground from under my feet since he learned that I wanted *her*. The old fool looks into his own heart and seeing perfect bliss in an alliance with 'blood' and 'money,' straightway determines that these two will insure her future happiness—oh, I can read him, like an open book. He'd move the heavens to bring about what he'd term 'a good match.'

"As it happens I can compare pedigrees with the best of them—Good Lord!" he broke off and laughed ironically. "That's sickening; but I'm trying to make the thing clear. Naive recital this, I must say. Well, anyway, I measured up to the standard of breeding, but fell wofully short on the financial requirements. And, somehow, foxy Simon grew afraid that I was in a fair way to upset his cherished plans for Jess. This was after we'd gone in together on this fur business. He had always acted rather guardedly about Jessie and myself, but I had him there; so long as she went out, I could meet her socially, and he could not prevent. Then a year ago last summer the Hudson's Bay undertook to run me out of this country. That bred the trouble on High River, and after that I was really outlawed. I expect he began at once to figure how he could turn that to his advantage—regarding me as a dishtowel that he could wring dry and throw aside. He has nursed a direct, personal grudge since the first season. Naturally, he wanted to dominate everything, and I wouldn't let him. He thought himself the biggest toad in the puddle, and it angered him when he found himself outsplashed. He made mistakes. I corrected them, and held him down at every turn; I had to. It was a ticklish job, and I made him move according to my judgment. Which was a very bitter sort of medicine for a man of Montell's domineering stamp. So he was not long in developing a rancorous dislike of me, which seems to have thrived on concealment.

"Where I made the grand mistake was in letting him keep her from knowing that we were partners in this business. Without giving the matter a second thought I had kept our business strictly to myself. He hinted that others might follow our lead, and at first we had visions of making terms with the Hudson's Bay and building up a permanent trade here. After two or three years of this I didn't think it well to plunge into explanations last spring. I made a mistake there, however; the mistake, I should say. Jessie had gone out a good deal the last two winters, both in St. Louis and New Orleans, and she was becoming quite

a belle. For all that, I think—oh, well, it doesn't matter what I think. To make a long story short, a day or two before the *Moon* went upstream she told me that she was going as far as Benton with her father. I, of course had to rise to the occasion, be very properly surprised and inform her that I, too, contemplated a trip on that same steamer. And I straightway hunted Montell up and tried to have him dissuade her from the journey.

"I didn't fathom the purport of it, even then—although I knew that he would welcome any chance to put me wrong in her eyes. It was too late, I felt, to volunteer any details concerning my part in her father's business up North. So I contented myself with his assurance and her statement, that she would see him as far as Benton and then return on the *Moon*.

"You see, I could easily imagine what would be her opinion of me, if she learned all the unsavory details with which the Northwest has been pleased to embellish the record of Slowfoot George. She has such a profound scorn for anything verging on dishonesty, and according to the sources of her information I've got some very shady things laid at my door. I can't be anything but a moral degenerate, in her eyes. Oh, he engineered it skilfully. If I had only waited at Benton till the bull-train was ready to start!

"You know how her returning panned out. I believe now, that he intended from the first that she should go on to MacLeod. I'd come to the conclusion that he would knife me on the business end, and that was why I wanted Walt Sanders with me. But it didn't occur to me that his plans were so far-reaching. That unfortunate Police raid delivered me into his hands at the psychological moment I was like a cornered rat that day she came to the guardhouse and peered in on us through the cell door. I couldn't help lashing back when she was so frankly contemptuous. I could see so clearly how he had managed it. And having accomplished his purpose he saw to it that escape was made easy, for he still needed me up here. Mind you, it would have been pretty much the same if I had not been taken by the Police. He would have seen that she was well posted before she left MacLeod.

"The rest you have seen for yourself. She spoiled his plan a little, perhaps, by coming all the way once she had started. That wasn't his fault; he didn't want her to come here, especially after I picked up one of her combs that night we came to the camp, and threatened him if he didn't send her home. She *is* wilful. And the only way he could have kept her from coming to the Sicannie would have been to go back himself.

"If our presence here has puzzled her you may be sure he has made satisfactory explanations. I am only biding my time. If I can hold him down and stand off the Hudson's Bay till the furs come in, I can win out so far as the money end is concerned. And if I am to lose her, by God he'll pay for it! She shall know the

truth if I have to choke it out of him one word at a time."

"It looks like a big contract," I sympathized.

He made a gesture that might have meant anything, but did not reply. Presently he reached for his tobacco. When his cigarette was lighted he blew out the candle. By the glowing red tip I could follow his movements as he settled himself and drew the bedding about him. "Oh, Bob," he addressed me after a long interval.

"What is it?" I answered.

"If that old hound and I should get mixed up, you keep out of it. Somebody will have to see that Jess gets out of this God-forsaken country. You're woods-wise enough to manage that now."

"Why, of course I'd do that," I replied. It was a startling prospect he held forth. "But I hope nothing like that happens."

"Anything might happen," he returned. "We're sitting on a powder-keg. I can't guarantee that it won't blow up. Montell is a bull-headed brute, and so am I. If he should throw a slug into me, I'd probably live long enough to return the favor."

Then, after a pause: "I've been running on like an old woman. That rifle business to-night jarred me like the devil. Maybe a decent night's rest will scatter these pessimistic ideas. Here goes, Robert; good-night."

With which he turned his face to the wall, and did, I verily believe, go at once to sleep. And he was still asleep, his head resting on one doubled-up arm, when I got up and lighted the candle at seven in the morning. My slumbers had been beset by disturbing visions of violent deeds, the by-product of what I had seen and heard that evening; Barreau, by his cheerful aspect on arising, had banished his troubles while he slept.

The day dawned, clear and cold and very still. It passed, and another followed, and still others, till I lost track of their number in the frost-ridden cycle of time. Montell's momentous stumble grew to be a dim incident of the past; sometimes I was constrained to wonder if, after all, he had done that with malice aforethought. Upon divers occasions I met and talked with Jessie, but I did not go to the house again, until Barreau hinted, one day, that unless I continued the intimacy I had accidentally begun, Montell would think I suspected him, that I was taking Barreau's side.

"There is no use in your making an enemy of him," he said.

"Well," I replied, "I must say I don't altogether like his fatherly manner. He makes me uncomfortable."

"Nevertheless," Barreau declared, "he has taken a fancy to you. He's human. And seeing it's not your fight, you'd better not break off short on that account. Better not antagonize him. It's different with me; I have no choice."

Influenced more or less by Barreau's suggestion, I suppose, I found myself giving assent that very afternoon when Montell asked me to the cabin for supper and a session at cribbage. Over the meal and the subsequent card-game he was so genial, so very much like other big easy-going men that I had known, I could scarcely credit him as cold-bloodedly scheming to defraud and, if necessary, murder another man. Somehow, without any logical reason, I had always associated fat men, especially big, fat men, with the utmost good-nature, with a sort of rugged straightforward uprightness that frowned on anything that savored of unfair advantage. I could not quite fathom Mr. Simon Montell—nor George Barreau, either, so far as that goes.

Shortly after that, at the close of an exceeding bitter day, an Indian came striding down the Sicannie to the post. When the guard at the big gate let him in his first word was for the "White Chief," as Barreau was known among the men of the lodges. Ben Wise came shouting this at the door of our cabin, and we followed Ben to the store. The Indian shook hands with Barreau. Then he drew his blanket coat closer about him and delivered himself of a few short guttural sentences. Barreau stood looking rather thoughtful when the copper-skinned one had finished. He asked a few questions in the native tongue, receiving answers as brief. And after another period of consideration he turned to me.

"Crow Feathers is sick," he said. "Pneumonia, I should judge, by this fellow's description of the symptoms. The chances are good that he'll be dead by the time I get there—if he isn't already. The medicine man can't help him, so old Three Wolves has sent for me, out of his sublime faith in my ability to do anything. I can't help him, but I'll have to go, as a matter of policy. Do you want to come along, Bob? It won't be a long jaunt, and it will give you some real snowshoe practice."

I embraced the opportunity without giving him a chance to reconsider which he showed signs of doing later in the evening. Curiously enough Montell also attempted to dissuade me from the trip.

"What's the use?" he argued. "You'll likely get your fingers or your feet frozen. It's a blamed poor time of the year to go trapesin' around the country. You better stay here where there's houses and fires."

The cold and other disagreeable elements didn't look formidable enough to deter me, however; I wanted something to break the monotony. A trip to Three Wolves' camp in mid-winter appealed very strongly to me, and I turned a deaf ear to Montell's advice, and held Barreau strictly to the proposal which he evinced a desire to withdraw.

That evening we got the dog harness ready, and rigged up a toboggan for the trail, loading it with food, bedding, and a small, light tent. Two hours before daybreak we started. There was a moon, and the land spread away boldly under

the silver flood, like a great, ghostly study in black and white.

All that day our Indian led us up the Sicannie. There was no need to use our snowshoes or to "break" trail, for we kept to the ice, and its covering of snow was packed smooth and hard as a macadam roadway. By grace of an early start and steady jogging we traversed a distance that was really a two days' journey, and at dusk the lodges of Three Wolves' band loomed in the edge of a spruce grove. Then our Indian shook hands with Barreau and me, and swung off to the right.

"He says his lodge is over there in a draw," Barreau told me, when I asked the reason for that.

The dogs of the camp greeted us with shrill yapping, and two or three Indians came out. They scattered the yelping huskies with swiftly thrown pieces of firewood, and greeted Barreau gravely. After a mutual exchange of words Barreau vented a sharp exclamation.

"The devil!" he said, and followed this by stripping the harness from the dogs.

"What now?" I asked, as I bent over the leader's collar.

"You'll see in a minute," he answered briefly, and there was an angry ring in his voice.

The dogs freed and the toboggan turned on its side, he led the way to a lodge pointed out by one of the hunters. A head protruded. It was withdrawn as we approached, and some one within called out in Cree. And when we had inserted ourselves through the circular opening I echoed Barreau's exclamation. For sitting beside the fire which burned cheerfully in the center, was Crow Feathers himself, smoking his pipe like a man in the best of health. Nor was there any suggestion of illness in the voice he lifted up at our entrance. Barreau fired a question or two at him, and a look of mild interest overspread Crow Feathers' aquiline face as he answered.

"It was a plant all the way through," Barreau declared, sitting down and slipping off his mitts. "Three Wolves sent no message to me. Crow Feathers never was sick in his life."

"I wonder who's responsible?" said I. "Do Indians ever play practical jokes?"

He shrugged his shoulders at the suggestion. Crow Feathers' squaw pushed a pot of boiled venison before us, and some bannock, and we fell upon that in earnest. Not till we had finished and were fumbling for tobacco *did* Barreau refer to our wild-goose chase again.

"I'd like to have speech with that red gentleman who led us up here," he said grimly. "It may be that Mr. Montell has unsheathed his claws in earnest. If he has, I'll clip them, and clip them short."

CHAPTER XVII—NINE POINTS OF THE LAW

A perceptible wind from out the east blew squarely in our teeth all the way down the Sicannie. Slight as it was, a man could no more face it steadily than he could hold his nostrils to sulphur fumes blown from a funnel. All day it held us back from our best speed. Time and again we were forced to halt in the lee of a wooded point, where with threshing of arms we drove the sluggish blood back into our numbing finger-tips. Twice the frost struck its fangs into my cheeks, despite the strap of rabbit fur that covered my face between eyes and mouth. Barreau rubbed the whitened places with snow till the returning blood stung like a searing iron. Twice I performed a like office for him. So it came that night had fallen when we lifted up our voices at the gate of the stockade. And while we waited for it to open, our dogs whining at the snarl of their fellows inside, some one in the glimmer behind us hailed the post in French. A minute later the frosty creak of snowshoes sounded near and a figure came striding on our track. As he reached us the gate swung open. A group of men stood just within. One held a lantern so that the light fell upon our faces—and, incidentally, their own. They were strangers, to the last man. Barreau ripped out an oath. For a second we surveyed each other. Then one of the men spoke to him who had come up with us:

"Is there aught afoot?" he asked, with a marked Scotch accent.

"Not that I have seen, Donald," the other replied.

"Then," said the first, speaking to Barreau, "come ye in an' put by your dogs. Dinna stand there as if ye looked for harm."

"I am very sure there will be no harm done us," Barreau drawled, unmoved in the face of this strange turn of affairs. "But I am of two minds about coming in."

The Scot shrugged his shoulders. "That's as ye like," he observed. "'Tis not for me tae compel ye. 'Tis merely the factor's word that if ye came, he desired speech wi' ye. Ye will find him noo at the store."

Barreau considered this a moment. "Lead the way then, old Bannockburn,"

he said lightly, "we will take our dog-team with us."

"Keep an eye to the rear, Bob," he muttered to me. "This may be a trap. But we've got to chance it to find out how things stand."

I nodded acquiescence to this; for I myself craved to know how the thing had been brought to pass.

The group of men scattered. Save the Scot with the lantern, not one was in sight when Barreau halted the dogs and turned the toboggan on its side by the front of the store. Our lantern-bearer opened the door and stepped inside, motioning us to enter. My eyes swept the long room for sign of violent deeds. But there were none. The goods lay in their orderly arrangement upon the shelves. The same up-piled boxes and bales threw huge shadows to the far end. There was no change save in the men who stood by the fire. Instead of Montell warming his coat-tails before the crackling blaze, a thin-faced man stood up before the fire; a tall man, overtopping Barreau and myself by a good four inches. He bowed courteously, looking us over with keen eyes that were black as the long mustache-end he turned over and over on his forefinger. A thatch of hair white as the drifts that hid the frozen earth outside covered his head. He might have been the colonel of a crack cavalry regiment—a leader of fighting men. His voice, when he spoke, bore a trace of the Gaul.

"Gentlemen," he greeted, "it is a very cold night outside. Come up to the fire."

He pushed a stool and a box forward with his foot and turned to a small, swarthy individual who had so far hovered in the background.

"Leave us now, Dufour," he said. "And you, Donald, come again in a half hour." "*Oui, M'sieu.*" Dufour gathered up his coat and departed obediently, the Scot following.

As nonchalantly as if he were in the house of a friend Barreau drew his box up to the fire and sat down; thrust the parka hood back from his face and held his hands out to the blaze. But I noticed that he laid the rifle across his knees, and taking my cue from this I did the same when I sat down. A faint smile flitted across the tall man's features. He also drew a seat up to the fire on the opposite side of the hearth so that he faced us.

"It is to Mr. Barreau I speak, is it not?" he inquired politely.

"It is," Barreau acknowledged. "And you, I take it, are Factor Le Noir of King Charles' House."

"The Black Factor, as they call me—yes," he smiled. "I am glad to have met you, Mr. Barreau. You are a hardy man."

"I did not come seeking compliments," Barreau returned curtly. "Why are you here—you and your *voyageurs*, making free with another man's house? And what have you done with Simon Montell and his daughter? and the forty-odd

men that were here two days ago?"

"One thing at a time," Le Noir answered imperturbably. "Is it possible that you do not know of the arrangement which was made?"

"It is obvious that there was an arrangement," Barreau snorted. "What I would know is the manner of its carrying out."

"To be brief, then," the other said, speaking very slowly and distinctly, as if he measured out his words, "for a consideration Simon Montell has abandoned the field. While my Company permits no competitor in the trade, according to our charter, yet sometimes it is cheaper to buy than to fight."

Barreau's shoulders stiffened. "Your charter is a dead letter," he declared. "You know it as well as I. That, however, is beside the point. You have made terms with Montell—but you have made none with me."

"Possession is nine points of the law," Le Noir returned tranquilly. "Having bought we will now fight, if it be necessary. One does not pay twice for the same goods. Be wise, and seek redress from—well, if the fat man has tricked you, make *him* pay."

"Suppose I choose instead to make the Company pay," Barreau drawled. "What if I come to you with a hundred well-armed red men at my back?"

"Ah, it is of that I wished to speak with you," the Black Factor crossed his legs and emphasized his remarks with a waggling forefinger. "Of that very thing. I know that you are not easily turned aside, but this time—listen. To-night, here within these stockade walls, there are four redcoat men from MacLeod. They have come seeking"—he paused significantly—"you can guess whom they seek. Now, if, when you leave here, your tracks should point to the Indian camps of the west—why, then the redcoats shall be shown it. And I will send twenty men to help them. But if you take the south trail these four will return empty-handed."

Barreau sat a minute or two pondering this. "You win," he said at length. "I am not the man to beat my fists on a stone. Give us flour and tea—and your word as a gentleman that the Police shall not be put on our track—and we quit the Sicannie."

"You shall have the tea and the flour," Le Noir agreed. "There are the shelves. Take what you want. I give my word for the Police. I would beg of you to stay to-night, but these government men have sharp ears and eyes. Should they get a hint—I cannot put a blanket over the mouths of my men——" he spread his hands as if to indicate that anything might happen.

Throughout our brief stay Barreau's thinly veiled vigilance did not once relax. The supplies he selected I carried to the door while he stood back watching me with his rifle slung in the hollow of his arm. If this wary attitude irked Le Noir he passed it by. To me it seemed that Barreau momentarily expected some overt act.

Eventually we had the food, a hundred pounds of flour, a square tin of tea, a little coffee, some salt and pepper and half a dozen extra pairs of moccasins lashed on the toboggan. Then he stirred up the surly dogs and we went crunching over the harsh snow to the stockade wall attended by Donald and his lantern, and the Factor himself swathed to the heels in a great coat of beaver.

At the drawing of the bar and the inward swing of the great gate, Barreau put a final question to Le Noir. "Tell me, if it is not betraying a confidence," he said ironically, "how much Montell's flitting cost the Company?"

"It is no secret," the Factor replied. "Sixty thousand dollars in good Bank of Montreal notes. A fair price."

"A fair price indeed," Barreau laughed "Good-night, M'sieu the Black."

The gate creaked to its close behind us as the dogs humped against the collars. A hundred yards, and the glimmering night enfolded us; the stockade became a vague blur in the hazy white.

Barreau swung sharp to the west. This course he held for ten minutes or more. Then down to the river, across it and up to the south flat. Here he turned again and curtly bidding me drive the dogs, tramped on ahead peering down at the unbroken snow as he went. We plodded thus till we were once more abreast of the stockade. For a moment I lost sight of Barreau; then he called to me and I came up with him standing with his back to the cutting wind that still thrust from out the east like a red-hot spear.

He took the dog-whip from me without a word, swinging the leaders southward. In the uncertain light I could see no mark in the snow. But under my webbed shoes there was an uneven feeling, as if it were trampled. We bore straight across the flat and angled up a long hill, and on the crest of it plunged into the gloomy aisles of the forest. Once among the spruce, Barreau halted the near-winded dogs for a breathing spell.

"We will go a few miles and make camp for the night," he said. "This is Montell's trail."

"The more miles the better," I rejoined. "I'm tired, but I have no wish to hobnob with the Policemen."

"Faugh!" he burst out. "There are no Policemen. That was as much a bluff as my hundred well-armed Indians. Le Noir is a poser. Do you think I'd ever have gotten outside that stockade if there had been a redcoat at his call? Oh, no! That would have been the very chance for him—one that he would have been slow to overlook. I know him. He's well named the Black Factor. His heart is as black as his whiskers and the truth is not in him—when a lie can make or save a dollar for his god—which is the Company. We have not quite done with him yet, I imagine. Hup there, you huskies—the trail is long and we are two days behind!"

CHAPTER XVIII—THE LONG ARM OF THE COMPANY

The fourth day out, at a noon camp by a spring that still defied the frost, Barreau straightened up suddenly from his stooping over the frying-pan.

"Listen," he said.

His ears were but little keener than mine, for even as he spoke I caught a sound that was becoming familiar from daily hearing: the soft *pluff*, *pluff* of snowshoes. In the thick woods, where no sweeping winds could swirl it here and there and pile it in hard smooth banks, the snow was spread evenly, a loose, three-foot layer, as yet uncrusted. Upon this the foot of man gave but little sound, even where there was a semblance of trail. So that almost in the instant that we heard and turned our heads we could see those who came toward us. Three men and two women—facing back upon the trail we followed.

The men I recognized at once. One was Cullen, the bookkeeping automaton; the other two were half-breed packers. They halted at sight of us, and from their actions I believe they would have turned tail if Barreau had not called to them. Then they came up to the fire.

"Where now?" Barreau demanded.

"We go back on ze pos', M'sieu," one of the breeds declared.

"What of the others?" Barreau asked sharply. "And why do you turn back?"

"Because Ah'm not weesh for follow ze fat trader an' die een som' snowbank, me," the breed retorted sullenly. "M'sieu Barreau knows zat ze Companie has taken ze pos', eh?"

"I do," Barreau answered. "Go on."

"Ze Black Factor hees say to heem, 'w'y not you stay teel ze spreeng,' but M'sieu Montell hees not stay, an' hees mak talk for us to com' wees heem on ze sout' trail. Eet don' mak no diff'rence to me, jus' so Ah'm geet pay, so Ah'm tak ze ol' woman an' com' long. Montell hees heet 'er up lak hell. Ever' seeng she's all right. Zen las' night som'body hees mak sneak on ze camp an' poison ze dog—ever' las' one—an' hees steal som' of ze grub, too. Zees morneeng w'en Jacques

Larue an' me am start out for foller dees feller's track, hees lay for us an' tak shot at us. Firs' pop hees heet Larue—keel heem dead, jus' lak snap ze feenger. Ah'm not go on after zat. MacLeod she's too dam' far for mak ze treep wit' no dog for pull ze outfeet. Not me. Ah'm gon' back on ze pos'. Ze Companie hees geev me chance for mak leeveeng. For why som'body hees poison ze dog an' bushwhack us Ah don' can say; but Ah know for sure Montell hees dam' crazee for try to go on."

"You, too, eh, Cullen?" Barreau observed. "Oh, you are certainly brave men."

"He was a fool to start," Cullen bristled; the first time I had ever seen a flash of spirit from the man of figures, "and I am not fool enough to follow him when it is plain that he is deliberately matching himself against something bigger than he is. There was no reason for starting on such a hard trip. The Hudson's Bay men did us no harm. The factor did advise him to stay there till spring opened—I heard him, myself. But he was bound to be gone. Whoever is dogging him means business, and I have no wish to die in a snowbank—as Jean puts it."

"How was the taking of the post managed?" Barreau asked him next.

Cullen shook his head. "I don't know," he mumbled. "It was just at daylight of the morning you left for Three Wolves camp. Somebody yelled, and I ran out of the cookhouse where I sat eating breakfast. The yard was full of Company men. And when I got to the store why there was Montell making terms with the Company chief; a tall, black-mustached man. We started within an hour of that. Montell seemed in great haste. He is determined to go on. I felt sorry for Miss Montell. I tried to show him the madness of attempting to walk several hundred miles with only what supplies we could carry on our shoulders. *He* wouldn't turn back, though."

"For a very good reason," Barreau commented. "Which a man who knew as much of our affairs as you did, Cullen, should have guessed. Well, be on your way. Doubtless the Black Factor will welcome your coming."

The three men had laid down the shoulder-packs with which they were burdened. They re-slung them, and passed on with furtive sidelong glances; the women followed, dragging a lightly loaded toboggan.

"Rats *will* quit a doomed ship," Barreau remarked. Then he resumed his turning of the meat that sizzled in the pan.

"We will soon come up with them," he said, when we had eaten and were putting the dogs to the toboggan again. "They cannot make time from their morning camp."

The beaten track was an advantage. Now, since the returning party had added a final touch to it, we laid aside our snowshoes and followed in the wake of the dogs, half the time at a jogging trot. In little more than an hour of this

we came to the place where Montell had lost his dogs—and his followers. The huskies lay about the trodden campground, stiff in the snow. Scattered around the cleared circles where the tents had stood overnight were dishes, articles of food, bedding. Montell had discarded all but absolute essentials. A toboggan and its useless dog-harness stood upended, against a tree.

"So much for loss of motive power," Barreau said grimly. "It is a pity to leave all this, but we are loaded to the limit now. If we should lose our dogs——" he left the sentence unfinished.

And so we passed by the abandoned goods and followed on the trail that led beyond. There is a marked difference between the path beaten through snow by seven persons with three full dog-teams, and that made by one man and a slight girl, dragging a toboggan by hand. Barreau took to his snowshoes again, and strode ahead. I kept the dogs crowding close on his heels. It was the time of year when, in that latitude, the hours of daylight numbered less than five. Thus it was but a brief span from noon to night. And nearing the gray hour of twilight he checked the straining huskies and myself with a gesture. Out of the woods ahead uprose the faint squeal of a toboggan-bottom sliding over the frosty snow. Barreau's eyebrows drew together under his hood.

"It's a hundred to one that there will be fireworks the moment I'm recognized," he muttered finally. "But I can see no other way. Come on."

A hundred yards farther I caught my first glimpse of the two figures, Montell's huge body bent forward as he tugged at his load. Barreau increased his speed. We were up with them in a half minute more. Montell whirled with a growl half alarm, half defiance. He threw up the rifle in his hands. But Barreau was too quick for him, and the weapon was wrenched out of his grasp before he could use it. With an inarticulate bellow Montell shook himself free of the shoulder-rope by which he drew the toboggan and threw himself bodily upon Barreau, striking, pawing, blaspheming terribly. Strangely enough Jessie made no move, nor even cried out at the sight. She stood like one fascinated by that brute spectacle. It did not endure for long. The great bulk of Montell bore Barreau backward, but only for a moment. He ducked a wild swing that had power enough behind it to have broken his neck, came up under Montell's clutching arms and struck him once under the chin—a lifting blow, with all the force of his muscular body centered therein. It staggered the big man. And as I stepped forward, meditating interference, Barreau jammed him backward over our loaded toboggan, and held him there helpless.

He pinned him thus for a second; then suddenly released him. Montell stood up, a thin stream of blood trickling from one nostril. He glowered sullenly, but the ferocious gleam of passion had died out of his eyes.

"Get a fire built," Barreau ordered, "and a tent pitched. We shall camp here

to-night. Make no more wild breaks like that, unless you want to be overtaken with sudden death. When we are warm I have something to say to you."

Twilight merged into gray night, and the red blaze of the fire we built glowed on the surrounding trees and the canvas of the tent. A pot of melted snow bubbled and shed steam. Close by it a piece of moose-flesh thawed in the heat. Jessie, still mute, sat on a piece of canvas I spread for her, and held her hands to the flame.

"Now," Barreau challenged Montell, "is a good time for explanations. Only facts, no matter how they gall you, will serve. Speak up. First begin at the beginning, and tell the truth—to her." He motioned to Jessie. She started slightly. A half dozen times I had noticed her looking first at myself and then at Barreau, and there was wonder and something else in her heavy-lashed eyes. Now she flashed a glance of inquiry at her father. For a moment I thought she was about to speak.

I cannot say what there was in Barreau's tone that stirred Montell to the depths. It may have been that finding himself checkmated, dominated by a man he hated so sincerely, another fierce spasm of rage welled up within and ruptured some tautened blood-vessel. It may have been some weakness of the heart, common to fleshy men. I cannot diagnose, at best I can but feebly describe.

Montell's jaw thrust forward. He blinked at Barreau, at his daughter, at me, and then back to Barreau. A flush swept up into his puffy cheeks, surged to his temples, a flush that darkened to purple. His very face seemed to swell, to bulge with the rising blood. His little, swinish eyes dilated. His mouth opened. He gasped. And all at once, with a hoarse rattling in his throat, he swayed and fell forward on his face.

We picked him up, Barreau and I, and felt of his heart. It fluttered. We loosened his clothing, and laved his wrists and temples with the snow water. The body lay flaccid; the jaw sagged. When I laid my ear to his breast again the fluttering had ceased. Barreau listened; felt with his hand; shook his head.

"No use," he muttered.

Jessie was standing over us when we gave over.

"He's dead," Barreau looked up at her and murmured. "He's dead." He rose to his feet and stared down at the great hulk of unsentient flesh that had vibrated with life and passion ten minutes before. "After all his plotting and planning—to die like that."

The girl stood looking from one to the other, from the dead man in the firelight to me, and to Barreau. Of a sudden Barreau held out his hands to her. But she turned away with a sob, and it was to me she turned, and it was upon my shoulder that she cried, "Oh, Bobby, Bobby!" as if her heart would break.

And at that Barreau dropped to his haunches beside the fire. There, when

the storm of her grief was hushed, he still sat, his chin resting on his palms, his dark face somber as the North itself.

CHAPTER XIX—THE STRENGTH OF MEN—AND THEIR WEAKNESS

No wind could reach us where we sat. At the worst, a gale could little more than set the tree-tops swaying, so thick stood the surrounding timber. But the blasting cold pressed in everywhere. Our backs chilled to freezing while our faces were hot from nearness to the flame.

Presently, at Barreau's suggestion, we set up Montell's tent—fashioned after an Indian lodge—in the center of which could be built a small fire. This was for her. We chopped a pile of dry wood and placed it within. By that time the moose meat was thawed so that we could haggle off ragged slices. These I fried while Barreau mixed a bannock and cooked it in an open pan. Also we had tea. Jessie shook her head when I offered her food. Willy-nilly, her eyes kept drifting to the silent figure opposite.

"You *must* eat," Barreau broke in harshly upon my fruitless coaxing. "Food means strength. You can't walk out of these woods on an empty stomach, and we can't carry you."

A swarm of angry words surged to my tongue's end—and died unspoken. Right willingly would I have voiced a blunt opinion of his brutal directness—to a grief-stricken girl, at such a time—but she flashed him a queer half-pleading look, and meekly accepted the plate I held before her. He had gained my point for me, but the hard, domineering tone grated. I felt a sudden, keen resentment against him. To protect and shield her from everything had at once become a task in which I desired no other man's aid.

"Now let us see how much of the truth is in the Black Factor," Barreau began, when we had cleaned our plates and laid them in the grub-box.

He turned down the canvas with which I had covered Montell, and opened the front of the buckskin shirt. Jessie stirred uneasily. She seemed about to protest, then settled back and stared blankly into the fire. Deliberately, methodi-

cally, Barreau went through the dead man's pockets. These proved empty. Feeling carefully he at last found that which he sought, pinned securely to Montell's undershirt, beneath one arm. He brought the package to our side of the fire, considered a moment and opened it. Flat, the breadth of one's hand, little over six inches in length, it revealed bills laid smoothly together like a deck of cards. Barreau counted them slowly. One—two—three—four—on up to sixty; each a thousand-dollar Bank of Montreal note. He snapped the rubber band back over them and slid the sheaf back into its heavy envelope.

"Le Noir did not draw such a long bow, after all," he observed, to no one in particular. "Yet this is more than they offered me. Well, I dare say they felt that it would not be long——" He broke off, with a shrug of his shoulders. Then he put the package away in a pocket under his *parka*. Jessie watched him closely, but said nothing. A puzzled look replaced her former apathy.

That night we slept with the dogs tied inside our tent, and the toboggan drawn up beside our bed. I did not ask Barreau his reason for this. I could hazard a fair guess. Whosoever had deprived Montell of his dogs, might now be awaiting a chance to do a like favor for us. I would have talked to him of this but there was a restraint between us that had never arisen before. And so I held my peace.

I fell asleep at last, for all the silent guest that lay by the foot of our bed. What time I wakened I cannot say. The moon-glare fell on the canvas and cast a hazy light over the tent interior. And as I lay there, half-minded to get up and build a fire Barreau stirred beside me, and spoke.

"Last night was Christmas Eve," he muttered. "To-day—Peace on earth, good-will to men! Merry Christmas. What a game—what a game!"

He turned over. We lay quite still for a long time. Then in that dead hush a husky whined, and Barreau sat up with a whispered oath, his voice trembling, and struck savagely at the dog. The sudden spasm of rage subtly communicated itself to me. I lay quivering in the blankets. If I had moved it would have been to turn and strike him as he had struck the dog. It passed presently, and left me wondering. I got up then and dressed. So did Barreau. We built a fire and sat by it, thawing meat, melting snow for tea, cooking bannock; all in silence, like folk who involuntarily lower their voices in a great empty church, the depths of a mine, or the presence of death. Afraid to speak? I laughed at the fancy, and looked up at the raucous sound of my own voice, to find Barreau scowling blackly—at the sound, I thought.

Before long Jessie came shivering to the fire. The rigors of the North breed a wolfish hunger. We ate huge quantities of bannock and moose-meat. That done we laid Montell's body at the base of a spruce, and piled upon it a great heap of brush. Jessie viewed the abandonment calmly enough—she knew the necessity. Then we packed and put the dogs to the toboggan, increasing the

load of food from Montell's supply and leaving behind our tent and some few things we could not haul. Barreau went ahead, bearing straight south, setting his snowshoes down heel to toe, beating a path for the straining dogs. Fierce work it was, that trail-breaking. My turn at it came in due course. Thus we forged ahead, the black surrounding forest and the white floor of it irradiated by the moonbeams. Away behind us the Aurora flashed across the Polar horizon, a weird blazon of light, silky, shimmering, vari-colored, dying one moment to a pin-point leaping the next like sheet lightning to the height of the North Star. This died at the dawn. Over the frost-gleaming tree-tops the sun rose and bleared at us through the frost-haze. "And that inverted Bowl they call the Sky, whereunder crawling, cooped, we live and die——" The Tentmaker's rhyme came to me and droned over and over in my brain. The "Bowl" arched over us, a faded blue, coldly beautiful.

At our noon camp a gun snapped among the trees, and a dog fell sprawling. As we sprang to our feet another husky doubled up. Barreau caught the remaining two by the collars and flung a square of canvas over them. A third shot missed. He caught up his rifle and plunged into the timber. An hour or more we waited. When he returned I had the toboggan ready for the road.

"I got his track," he said between mouthfuls of the food I had kept warm. "One man. He struck straight east when he saw me start. There may be more though. It is not like the Company to put all its eggs in one basket."

"You think the Company is behind this?" I asked.

"Who else?" he jeered. "Isn't this money worth some trouble? And who but the Company men know of it?"

"Why bother with dogs if that is so?" I replied. "The same bullets would do for us."

"Very true," Barreau admitted, "but there is a heavy debit against me for this last four years of baiting the Hudson's Bay, and this would be of a piece with the Black Factor's methods. Their way—his way is the policy of the Company—to an end is often oblique. Only by driving a bargain could they have taken the post—Montell could have fought them all winter. Even though they bought it cheaply, I do not think they had any intention of letting him get away with money. Le Noir paid—and put me on the trail; at the same time this bushwhacker held Montell back so that we overtook him—otherwise, with two days' start, he might have beaten us to the Police country, where we would not dare follow. Can you appreciate the sardonic humor that would draw out our misery to the last possible pang, instead of making one clean sweep? Le Noir knows how the North will deal with us, once we are reduced to carrying our food and bedding on our backs. He has based his calculations on that fact. These breeds of his can hover about us and live where we shall likely perish. Then there will be no

prima facie evidence of actual murder, and the Company will have attained its end. They have done this to others; we can hardly be exempt. If we seem likely to reach the outer world, it will be time enough then for killing. Either way, the Company wins. I wish to God it would snow. We might shake them off then."

We harnessed the two remaining dogs and pushed on. There was nothing else to do. Either in camp or on trail the huskies, to say nothing of ourselves, were at the mercy of that hidden marksman. So we kept our way, praying only for a sight of him, or for a thick swirl of snow to hide the betraying tracks we made. We moved slowly, the lugging of the dogs eked out by myself with a rope. Barreau broke trail. Jessie brought up the rear.

At sundown, midway of a tiny open space in the woods, our two dogs were shot down. Barreau whirled in his tracks, stood a moment glaring furiously. Then, with a fatalistic shrug of his shoulders, he stooped, cut loose the dead brutes, harness and all, and laid hold of the rope with me.

That night we were not disturbed. Jessie slept in the little round tent. Barreau and I burrowed with our bedding under the snow beside the fire. The time of arising found me with eyes that had not closed; and the night of wakefulness, the nearness of a danger that hovered unseen, stirred me to black, unreasoning anger. I wanted to shout curses at the North, at the Hudson's Bay Company, at Barreau—at everything. And by the snap of his eye, the quick scowl at trivial things, I think Barreau was in as black a mood as I. The girl sensed it, too. She shrank from both of us. So to the trail again, and the weary drag of the shoulder-rope.

At noon we ate the last of our moose-meat, and when next we crossed moose-tracks in the snow, Barreau ordered me in a surly tone to keep straight south, and set out with his rifle.

It was slow work and heavy to lug that load alone. Jessie went ahead, but her weight was not enough to crush the loose particles to any degree of firmness. For every quarter mile gained we sat down upon the load to rest, sweat standing in drops upon my face and freezing in pellets as it stood. And at one of these halts I fell to studying the small oval face framed in the *parka*-hood beside me. The sad, tired look of it cut me. There was a stout heart, to be sure, in that small body. But it was killing work for men—I gritted my teeth at the mesh of circumstance.

"If you were only out of this," I murmured.

I looked up quickly at a crunching sound, and there was Barreau, empty-handed. I shall never forget the glare in his eyes at sight of me standing there with one hand resting lightly on her shoulder. There was no word said. He took up the rope with me, and we went on.

"Where in the name of Heaven are you heading for?" something spurred me to ask of him. The tone was rasping, but I could not make it otherwise.

"To the Peace," he snapped back. "Then west through the mountains, down the Fraser, toward the Sound country. D'ye think I intend to walk into the arms of the Police?"

"You might do worse," some demon of irritability prompted me to snarl.

He looked back at me over his shoulder, slackening speed. For a moment I thought he would turn on me then and there, and my shoulder-muscles stiffened. There was a thrill in the thought. But he only muttered:

"Get a grip on yourself, man."

Just at the first lowering of dusk, in my peering over Barreau's shoulder I spotted the shovel-antlers of a moose beside a clump of scraggy willows. I dropped the rope, snatched for my rifle and fired as Barreau turned to see what I was about. I had drawn a bead on the broad side of him as he made the first plunge, and he dropped.

"Well, that's meat," Barreau said. "And it means camp."

He drew the toboggan up against a heavy stand of spruce, and taking a snowshoe shovel-wise fell to baring the earth for a fire base. I took my skinning knife and went to the fallen moose. Jessie moved about, gathering dry twigs to start a fire.

Once at the moose and hastily flaying the hide from the steaming meat my attention became centered on the task. For a time I was absorbed in the problem of getting a hind quarter skinned and slashed clear before my fingers froze. Happening at length to glance campward, I saw in the firelight Barreau towering over Jessie, talking, his speech punctuated by an occasional gesture. His voice carried faintly to me. I stood up and watched. Reason hid its head, abashed, crowded into the background by a swift flood of passion. I could not think coherently. I could only stand there blinking, furious—over what I did not quite know, nor pause to inquire of myself. For the nonce I was as primitive in my emotions as any naked cave-dweller that ever saw his mate threatened by another male. And when I saw her shrink from him, saw him catch at her arm, I plunged for the fire.

"You damned cub!" he flashed, and struck at me as I rushed at him. I had no very distinct idea of what I was going to do when I ran at him, except that I would make him leave *her* alone. But when he smashed at me with that wolf-like drawing apart of his lips—I knew then. I was going to kill him, to take his head in my hands and batter it against one of those rough-barked trees. I evaded the first swing of his fist by a quick turn of my head. After that I do not recollect the progress of events with any degree of clearness, except that I gave and took blows while the forest reeled drunkenly about me. The same fierce rage in which I had fought that last fight with Tupper burned in my heart. I wanted to rend and destroy, and nothing short of that would satisfy. And presently I had Barreau

down in the snow, smashing insanely at his face with one hand, choking the breath out of him with the other. This I remember; remember, too, hearing a cry behind me. With that my recollection of the struggle blurs completely.

I was lying beside the fire, Jessie rubbing my forehead with snow in lieu of water, when I again became cognizant of my surroundings. Barreau stood on the other side of the fire, putting on fresh wood.

"I'm sorry, sorry, Bob," she whispered, and her eyes were moist. "But you know I couldn't stand by and see you—it would have been murder."

I sat up at that. Across the top of my head a great welt was now risen. My face, I could feel, was puffed and bruised. I looked at Barreau more closely; his features were battered even worse than mine.

"Did you hit me with an axe, or was it a tree?" I asked peevishly. "That is the way my head feels."

"The rifle," she stammered. "I—it was—I didn't want to hurt you, Bob, but the rifle was so heavy. I couldn't make you stop any other way; you wouldn't listen to me, even."

So that was the way of it! I got to my feet. Save a dull ache in my head and the smarting of my bruised face, I felt equal to anything—and the physical pain was as nothing to the hurt of my pride. To be felled by a woman—the woman I loved—I did love her, and therein lay the hurt of her action. I could hardly understand it, and yet—strange paradox—I did not trouble myself to understand. My brain was in no condition for solving problems of that sort. I was not concerned with the why; the fact was enough.

If I had been the unformed boy who cowered before those two hairy-fisted slave-drivers aboard the *New Moon*—but I was not; I never could be again. The Trouble Trail had hardened more than my bone and sinew; and the last seven days of it, the dreary plodding over unbroken wastes, amid forbidding woods, utter silence, and cold bitter beyond Words, had keyed me to a fearful pitch. There was a kink to my mental processes; I saw things awry. In all the world there seemed to be none left but us three; two men and a woman, and each of us desiring the woman so that we were ready to fly at each other's throats. Standing there by the fire I could see how it would be, I thought. Unless the unseen enemy who hovered about us cut it short with his rifle, we were foredoomed to maddening weeks, perhaps months, of each other's company. Though she had jeered at him and flaunted her contempt for him at both MacLeod and the post, Jessie had put by that hostile, bitter spirit. To me, it seemed as if she were in deadly fear of Barreau. She shrank from him, both his word and look. And I must stand like a buffer between. Weeks of suspicion, of trifling, jealous actions, of simmering hate that would bubble up in hot words and sudden blows; I did not like the prospect.

"I have a mind to settle it all, right here and now!"

I did not know until the words were out that I had spoken aloud. As a spark falling in loose powder, so was the effect of that sentence upon a spirit as turbulent and as sorely tried as his.

"Settle it then, settle it," he rose to his feet and shouted at me. "There is your gun behind you."

I blurted an oath and reached for the rifle, and as my fingers closed about it Jessie flung herself on me.

"No, no, *no*," she screamed, "I won't let you. Oh, oh, for God's sake be men, not murdering brutes. Think of me if you won't think of your own lives. Stop it, stop it! Put down those guns!"

She clung to me desperately, hampering my hands. He could have killed me with ease. I could see him across the fire, waiting, his Winchester half-raised, the fire-glow lighting up his face with its blazing eyes and parted lips, teeth set tight together. And I could not free myself of that clinging, crying girl. Not at once, without hurting her. Mad as I was, I had no wish to do that. At length, however, I loosened her clinging arms, and pushed her away. But she was quick as a steel trap. She caught the barrel of my rifle as I swung it up, and before I could break her frenzied grip the second time, a voice in the dark nearby broke in upon us with startling clearness.

"Hello, folks, hello!"

The sound of feet in the crisp snow, the squeaking crunch of toboggans, other voices; these things uprose at hand. I ceased to struggle with Jessie. But only when a man stepped into the circle of firelight, with others dimly outlined behind him, did she release her hold on my gun. Barreau had already let the butt of his drop to his feet. He stood looking from me to the stranger, his hands resting on the muzzle.

"How-de-do, everybody."

The man stopped at the fire and looked us over. He was short, heavily built. Under the close-drawn *parka* hood we could see little of his face. He was dressed after the fashion, the necessity rather, of the North. His eyes suddenly became riveted on me.

"God bless my soul!" he exclaimed.

He reached into a pocket and took out a pair of glasses wrapped in a silk handkerchief. The lenses he rubbed hastily with the silk, and stuck them upon the bridge of his nose. I could hear him mumbling to himself. A half dozen men edged up behind him.

"God bless me," he repeated. "Without a doubt, it *is* Bob Sumner. Somewhat the worse for wear, but Bob, sure enough. Ha, you young dog, I've had a merry chase after you. Don't even know me, do you?"

He pushed back the hood of his *parka*. The voice had only puzzled me.

But I recognized that cheerful, rubicund countenance with its bushy black eyebrows; and the thing that favored me most in my recollection was a half-smoked, unlighted cigar tucked in one corner of his mouth. It was my banker guardian, Bolton of St. Louis.

————

Wakening out of the first doze I had fallen into through that long night I was constrained to rise and poke my head out of the tent in which I slept to make sure that I had not dreamed it all. For the event savored of a bolt from a clear sky. I could scarcely believe that only a few hours back I had listened to the details of its accomplishment; how Bolton had in the fullness of time received both my letters; how he had traced me step by step from MacLeod north, and how he had only located me on the Sicannie River, through the aid of the Hudson's Bay Company. He was on his way to the post. Our meeting was purely accidental. And so on. From the tent I saw a lone sentinel plying the fire. I slipped on the few clothes I had taken off, and sat down beside the cheery crackle of the blaze, to meditate upon the miracle. I was sane enough to shudder at what might have been, if Barreau and I had had a few minutes longer.

In an hour all the camp was awake. Bolton's cook prepared breakfast, and we ate by candle-light in a tent warmed by a sheet-iron stove. How one's point of view shuffles like the needle of a compass! A tent with a stove in it, where one could be thoroughly comfortable, impressed me as the pyramid-point of luxury.

After that there was the confusion of tearing up camp and loading a half-dozen dog-teams. Jessie sat by the great fire that was kept up outside, and her face was troubled. Barreau, I noticed, drew Bolton a little way off, where the two of them stood talking earnestly together, Bolton expostulating, Barreau urging. Directly after that I saw Barreau with two of Bolton's men to help him, load one of the dog-teams over again. He led it to one side; his snowshoes lying on the load. Then he came over to Jessie. Reaching within his *parka* he drew forth the package he had taken off Montell's body, and held it out to her.

"Girl," he said, and there was that in his voice which gave me a sudden pang, and sent a flush of shame to my cheek, "here is your father's money. There is no need for me to take care of it now. Good-bye."

She stared up at him, making no move to take the package, and so with a little gesture he dropped it at her feet and turned away. And as he laid hold of the dog-whip she sprang to her feet and ran after him.

"George, George!" If ever a cry sounded a note of pain, that did. It made me wince. He whirled on his heel, and the dog-whip fell unheeded in the snow.

"Oh, oh," she panted, "I can't take that. It isn't mine. It's blood-money.

And—and if you go by yourself, I shall go with you."

"With me," he held her by the shoulder, looking down into her upturned face. Never before had I seen such a variety of expression on his features, in so short a span of time, hope, tenderness, puzzlement, a panorama of emotions. "I'm an outlaw. There's a price on my head—you know that. And you yourself have said—ah, I won't repeat the things you have said. You know—you knew you were stabbing me when——"

"I know, I know!" she cried. "I believed those things then. Oh, you can't tell how it hurt me to think that all the time you had been playing a double part—fooling my father and myself. But now I *know*. I know the whole wretched business; or at least enough to understand. I got into his papers back there on the Sicannie. There were things that amazed me—after that—I stormed at him till he told me the truth; part of it. You don't know how sorry I am for those horrible, unwomanly things I said to you. How could I know? He lied so consistently—even at the last he lied to me—told me that the Company men had taken the post by surprise, that we were lucky to get away with our lives. I believed that until I saw you find that money. Then I knew that he had sold you out—his partner. I've been a little beast," she sobbed, "and I've been afraid to tell you. Oh, you don't know how much I wanted to tell you; but I was afraid. I'm not afraid now. If you are going to strike out alone, I shall go, too."

He bent and kissed her gravely.

"The Northwest is no place for me, Jess," he said. "I cannot cross it in the winter without being seen or trailed, and there is no getting out of that jail-break, if I am caught. I must go over the mountains, and so to the south, where there are no Police. You cannot come. Bolton, and—and Bob will see you safe to St. Louis. If nothing happens I shall be there in the spring."

She laid her head against his breast and sobbed, wailing over him before us all. I bit my lip at the sight, and putting my pride in my pocket went over to them.

"Barreau," I said, "I don't, and probably never will, understand a woman. You win, and I wish you luck. But unless you hold a grudge longer than I do, there's no need for you to play a lone hand. Let the dead past bury its dead, and we will all go over the mountains together. I have no wish to take a chance with the Police again, myself. You and Bolton seem to forget that I'm just as deep in the mud as you are in the mire."

Barreau stood looking fixedly at me for a few seconds. Then he held out his hand, and the old, humorous smile that had been absent from his face for many a day once more wrinkled the corners of his mouth.

"Bob," he said, "I reckon that you and I are hard men to beat—at any game we play."

———

That, to all intents and purposes, ends my story. We did cross the mountains, and traverse the vast, silent slopes that fall away to the blue Pacific. Bolton had gilded the palm of the Hudson's Bay Company in his search for me, and so they considerately dropped their feud with Barreau—at least there was no more shooting of dogs, nor any effort to recover the money that cost Montell his life. Or perhaps they judged it unwise to meddle with a party like ours.

So, by wide detour, we came at last to St. Louis. There Barreau and Jessie were married, and departed thence upon their honeymoon. When their train had pulled out, I went with Bolton back to his office in the bank. He seated himself in the very chair he had occupied the day I came and saddled the burden of my affairs upon him. He cocked his feet up on the desk, lighted a cigar and leaned back.

"Well, Robert," he finally broke into my meditations, "how about this school question? Have you decided where you're going to try for a B. A.? And when? What about it?"

"I can take up college any time," I responded. "Just now—well, I'm going to the ranch. A season in the cow camps will teach me something; and I would like to run the business just as my father did. I don't think I'll slip back so that I can't take up study again. Anyway, the schools have no monopoly of knowledge; there's a wonderful lot of things, I've discovered, that a fellow has to teach himself."

He surveyed me in silence a few minutes, his cigar pointed rakishly aloft, his eyes half shut. Then he took the weed between his thumb and forefinger and delivered himself of this sapient observation:

"You'll do, Bob. As a matter of fact, the North made a man of you."

I made no answer to that. I could not help reflecting, a trifle bitterly, that there were penalties attached to the attaining of manhood—in my case, at least.

THE END.

SPECIAL STANDARD 12MOS

Bound in cloth. Jacket printed in colors

An Old Fashioned Girl (*Louisa May Alcott*)
Black Beauty (*Anna Sewell*)
Children of the Abbey (*Roche*)
Child's History of England (*Charles Dickens*)

Christmas Stories (*Charles Dickens*)
Dog of Flanders, A (*Ouida*)
East Lynne (*Mrs. Henry Wood*)
Elsie Dinsmore (*Martha Finley*)
Hans Brinker (*Mary Mapes Dodge*)
Heidi (*Johanna Spyri*)
Helen's Babies (*John Habberton*)
Ishmael (*E. D. E. N. Southworth*)
Island of Appledore (*Aldon*)
Ivanhoe (*Sir Walter Scott*)
Kidnapped (*Robert Louis Stevenson*)
King Arthur and His Knights (*Retold*)
Last Days of Pompeii (*Lytton*)
Life of Kit Carson (*Edward S. Ellis*)
Little King, The (*Charles Major*)
Little Lame Prince (*Miss Mulock*)
Little Minister, The (*J. M. Barrie*)
Little Men (*Louisa May Alcott*)
Little Women (*Louisa May Alcott*)
Oliver Twist (*Charles Dickens*)
Pilgrim's Progress (*John Bunyan*)
Pinocchio (*C. Collodi*)
Prince of the House of David (*Rev. J. H. Ingraham*)
Robin Hood (*Retold*)
Robinson Crusoe (*Daniel DeFoe*)
Self Raised (*E. D. E. N. Southworth*)
Sketch Book (*Washington Irving*)
St. Elmo (*Augusta J. Evans-Wilson*)
Swiss Family Robinson (*Wyss*)
Tale of Two Cities (*Charles Dickens*)
Three Musketeers, The (*Alexander Dumas*)
Tom Brown at Oxford (*Thomas Hughes*)
Tom Brown's School Days (*Thomas Hughes*)
Treasure Island (*Robert Louis Stevenson*)
Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea (*Jules Verne*)
Twenty Years After (*Alexander Dumas*)
Uncle Tom's Cabin (*Harriet Beecher Stowe*)
Under Two Flags (*Ouida*)

For Sale by all Book-sellers, or sent postpaid on receipt of 60 cents

M. A. Donohue & Company
711 South Dearborn Street, Chicago

UNCLE WIGGILY SERIES

By HOWARD R. GARIS

Four titles of these famous books, fifty-two stories in each. Printed from large, clear type on a superior quality of paper. Numerous illustrations and jacket printed in full colors. Bound in cloth.

Price each $1.00 Postpaid

Uncle Wiggily and Alice in Wonderland
Uncle Wiggily Longears
Uncle Wiggily and Mother Goose
Uncle Wiggily's Arabian Nights

THOSE SMITH BOYS

By HOWARD R. GARIS

New and complete editions printed from new plates on a superior quality paper. Each book is wrapped in a special jacket printed in colors. Appropriately stamped and handsomely bound in cloth.

Price each 60c Postpaid

Those Smith Boys
Those Smith Boys on the Diamond

THE DADDY SERIES

By HOWARD R. GARIS

Mr. Garis has won the hearts of little folks with his stories. Each is founded on animal lore and is told in simple language. Large, clear text. Special jacket printed in colors. Bound in clothene.

Price each 35c Postpaid

Daddy Takes Us Camping
Daddy Takes Us Hunting Flowers
Daddy Takes Us Fishing
Daddy Takes Us Hunting Birds
Daddy Takes Us to the Circus
Daddy Takes Us to the Woods

Daddy Takes Us Skating
Daddy Takes Us to the Farm
Daddy Takes Us Coasting
Daddy Takes Us to the Garden

M. A. Donohue & Company
711 South Dearborn Street, Chicago

BOYS BANNER SERIES

A desirable assortment of books for boys, by standard and favorite authors. Each title is complete and unabridged. Printed on a good quality of paper from large, clear type. Beautifully bound in cloth. Each book is wrapped in a special multi-colored jacket.

1 — Afloat on the Flood (*Leslie*)
2 — At Whispering Pine Lodge (*Leslie*)
3 — Chums of the Campfire (*Leslie*)
4 — In School and Out (*Optic*)
5 — Jack Winter's Baseball Team (*Overton*)
6 — Jack Winter's Campmates (*Overton*)
7 — Jack Winter's Gridiron Chums (*Overton*)
8 — Jack Winter's Iceboat Wonder (*Overton*)
9 — Little by Little (*Optic*)
10 — Motor Boat Boys Mississippi Cruise (*Arundel*)
11 — Now or Never (*Optic*)
12 — Phil Bradley's Mountain Boys (*Boone*)
13 — Phil Bradley's Winning Way (*Boone*)
14 — Radio Boys' Cronies (*Whipple*)
15 — Radio Boys Loyalty (*Whipple*)
16 — Rivals of the Trail (*Leslie*)
17 — Trip Around the Word in a Flying Machine. (*Verne*)
18 — Two years Before the Mast (*Dana*)

For Sale by all Book-sellers, or sent postpaid on receipt of 40 cents
M. A. Donohue & Company
711 South Dearborn Street, Chicago

BOY INVENTORS' SERIES

The author knows these subjects from a practical standpoint. Each book is printed from new plates on a good quality of paper and bound in cloth. Each book wrapped in a jacket printed in colors.

Price 60c each

1 — Boy Inventors' Wireless Triumph
2 — Boy Inventors' and the Vanishing Sun
3 — Boy Inventors' Diving Torpedo Set
4 — Boy Inventors' Flying Ship
5 — Boy Inventors' Electric Ship
6 — Boy Inventors' Radio Telephone

The "How-to-do-it" Books

These books teach the use of tools; how to sharpen them; to design and layout work. Printed from new plates and bound in cloth. Profusely illustrated. Each book is wrapped in a printed jacket.

Price $1.00 each

1 — Carpentry for Boys
2 — Electricity for Boys
3 — Practical Mechanics for Boys

For Sale by all Book-sellers, or sent postpaid on receipt of the above price.

M. A. Donohue & Company
711 South Dearborn Street, Chicago

GIRLS BANNER SERIES

A desirable assortment of books for girls, by standard and favorite authors. Each title is complete and unabridged. Printed on a good quality of paper from large, clear type and bound in cloth. Each book is wrapped in a special multi-colored jacket.

1 — Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (*Carroll*)
2 — Alice Through the Looking Glass (*Carroll*)
3 — Campfire Girls on a Long Hike (*Francis*)
4 — Daddy's Girl (*Meade*)
5 — Dog of Flanders, A (*Ouida*)

6 — Elsie Dinsmore (*Finley*)
7 — Ethel Hollister's 1st Summer as a Campfire Girl. (*Benson*)
8 — Ethel Hollister's 2nd Summer as a Campfire Girl. (*Benson*)
9 — Faith Gartney's Girlhood (*Whitney*)
10 — Four Little Mischiefs (*Mulholland*)
11 — Polly, A New Fashioned Girl (*Meade*)
12 — World of Girls (*Meade*)

For Sale by all Book-sellers, or sent postpaid on receipt of 40 cents
M. A. Donohue & Company
711 South Dearborn Street, Chicago

THE EDWARD S. ELLIS SERIES

STORIES OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN;
MYSTERY, ROMANCE AND ADVENTURE

Every red blooded American Boy and Girl will be greatly pleased with these books. They are written by the master writer of such books, Edward S. Ellis. There is mystery, charm and excitement in each volume. All the following titles can be procured at the same place this book was procured, or they will be sent postpaid for 25c per copy or 5 for $1.00.

Astray in the Forest
River and Forest
Lost in the Rockies
Bear Cavern
The Lost River
Boy Hunters in Kentucky
The Daughter of the Chieftain
Captured by the Indians
Princess of the Woods
Wolf Ear: The Indian

Read every one of the above Titles.
You will enjoy them
M. A. Donohue & Company
Manufacturers and Publishers Since 1861
701-733 South Dearborn Street, Chicago

FURRY FOLK STORIES

By JANE FIELDING

A series of life tales of our four-footed friends, as related by the animals. These stories are entertaining and pleasing to the young and old alike. Bound in cloth and illustrated. Colored wrapper.

Price each 50 cents postpaid

1 — Bear Brownie, *The Life of a Bear*
2 — Jackie Hightree, *Adventures of a Squirrel*
3 — Kitty Purrpuss, *The Memoir of a Cat*
4 — Master Reynard, *The History of a Fox*
5 — Scamp, *A Dog's Own Story*
6 — Wee Willie Mousie, *Life from his own Viewpoint*

THE JINGLE BOOK

By CAROLYN WELLS

Price each 60 cents postpaid

A popular book of Jingles by this well-known writer. A comic illustration on every page. Bound in cloth and beautifully stamped in colors. Each is book wrapped in a jacket printed in colors.

LET'S MAKE BELIEVE STORIES

By LILIAN T. GARIS

Delightful and fascinating stories; printed from large, clear type on a superior quality of paper, Frontispiece and jacket printed in full colors. Bound in cloth and stamped from appropriate dies.

Price each 50 cents postpaid

1 — Let's Make Believe We're Keeping House
2 — Lets Play Circus
3 — Let's Make Believe We're Soldiers

M. A. Donohue & Company
711 South Dearborn Street, Chicago

BOY SCOUT SERIES

By G. HARVEY RALPHSON

Just the type of books that delight and fascinate the wide awake boys of to-day. Clean, wholesome and interesting; full of mystery and adventure. Each

title is complete and unabridged. Printed on a good quality of paper from large, clear type and bound in cloth. Each book is wrapped in a special multi-colored jacket.

1 — Boy Scouts in Mexico; or, On Guard with Uncle Sam
2 — Boy Scouts in the Canal Zone; or, the Plot against Uncle Sam
3 — Boy Scouts in the Philippines; or, the Key to the Treaty Box
4 — Boy Scouts in the Northwest; or, Fighting Forest Fires
5 — Boy Scouts in a Motor Boat; or Adventures on Columbia River
6 — Boy Scouts in an Airship; or, the Warning from the Sky
7 — Boy Scouts in a Submarine; or, Searching an Ocean Floor
8 — Boy Scouts on Motorcycles; or, With the Flying Squadron
9 — Boy Scouts beyond the Arctic Circle; or, the Lost Expedition
10 — Boy Scout Camera Club; or, the Confessions of a Photograph
11 — Boy Scout Electricians; or, the Hidden Dynamo
12 — Boy Scouts in California; or, the Flag on the Cliff
13 — Boy Scouts on Hudson Bay; or, the Disappearing Fleet
14 — Boy Scouts in Death Valley; or, the City in the Sky
15 — Boy Scouts on Open Plains; or, the Roundup not Ordered
16 — Boy Scouts in Southern Waters; or the Spanish Treasure Chest
17 — Boy Scouts in Belgium; or, Imperiled in a Trap
18 — Boy Scouts in the North Sea; or, the Mystery of a Sub
19 — Boy Scouts Mysterious Signal; or, Perils of the Black Bear Patrol
20 — Boy Scouts with the Cossacks; or, a Guilty Secret

For Sale by all Book-sellers, or sent postpaid on receipt of 60 cents
M. A. Donohue & Company
711 South Dearborn Street, Chicago

*** END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE LAND OF FROZEN SUNS ***

A Word from Project Gutenberg

We will update this book if we find any errors.

This book can be found under: https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/35031

Creating the works from public domain print editions means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works to protect the Project Gutenberg™ concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for the eBooks, unless you receive specific permission. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the rules is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. They may be modified and printed and given away – you may do practically *anything* with public domain eBooks. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

The Full Project Gutenberg License

Please read this before you distribute or use this work.

To protect the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase "Project Gutenberg"), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg™ License available with this file or online at https://www.gutenberg.org/license.

Section 1. General Terms of Use & Redistributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg™ electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms

of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. "Project Gutenberg" is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation ("the Foundation" or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is in the public domain in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country outside the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever

any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase "Project Gutenberg" appears, or with which the phrase "Project Gutenberg" is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

> This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at http://www.gutenberg.org

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from the public domain (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase "Project Gutenberg" associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ web site (http://www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, "Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation."

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.

- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.

- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from both the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and Michael Hart, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3. below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread public domain works in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts,

Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain "Defects," such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES – Except for the "Right of Replacement or Refund" described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND – If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS,' WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTIBILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining

provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY – You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need, is critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™'s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation web page at http://www.pglaf.org .

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Its 501(c)(3) letter is posted at https://www.gutenberg.org/fundraising/pglaf . Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's principal office is located at 4557 Melan Dr. S. Fairbanks, AK, 99712., but its volunteers and employees are scattered throughout numerous locations. Its business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887, email business@pglaf.org. Email contact links and up to

date contact information can be found at the Foundation's web site and official page at http://www.pglaf.org

For additional contact information:

Dr. Gregory B. Newby
Chief Executive and Director
gbnewby@pglaf.org

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without wide spread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit https://www.gutenberg.org/fundraising/donate

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg Web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: https://www.gutenberg.org/fundraising/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works.

Professor Michael S. Hart is the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For thirty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as Public Domain in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Each eBook is in a subdirectory of the same number as the eBook's eBook number, often in several formats including plain vanilla ASCII, compressed (zipped), HTML and others.

Corrected *editions* of our eBooks replace the old file and take over the old filename and etext number. The replaced older file is renamed. *Versions* based on separate sources are treated as new eBooks receiving new filenames and etext numbers.

Most people start at our Web site which has the main PG search facility:

http://www.gutenberg.org

This Web site includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.