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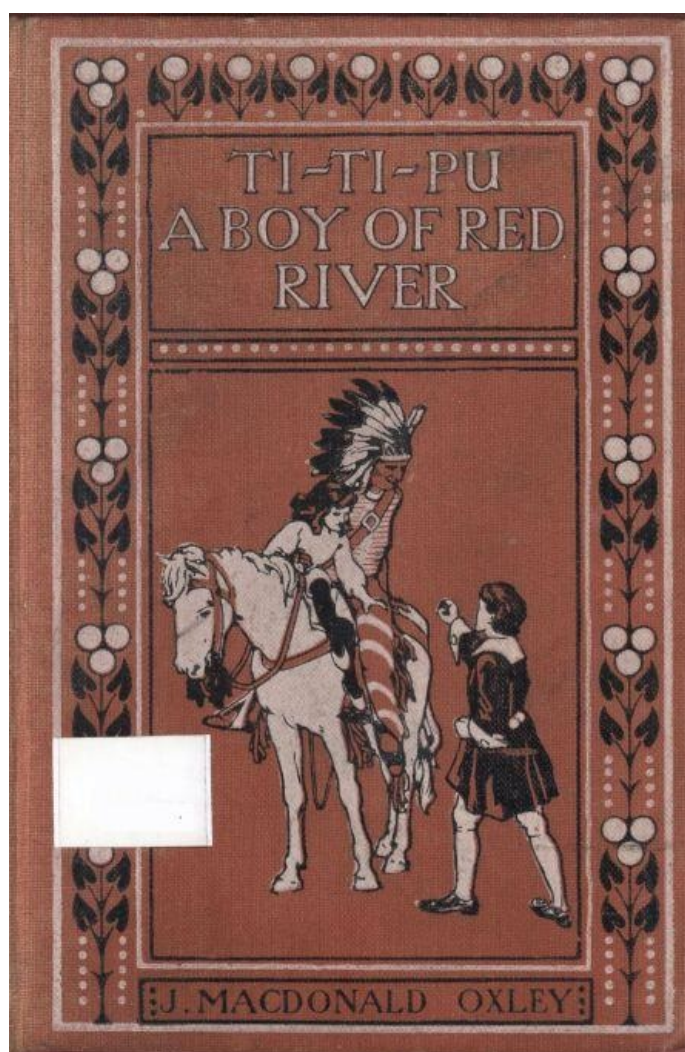
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# **TI-TI-PU**

## **A BOY OF RED RIVER**

**BY**

**J. MACDONALD OXLEY**

Author of 'Standing the Test,' etc.

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## TI-TI-PU

### A Boy of Red River

#### CHAPTER I

##### From the Old World to the New

This is how it befell. Thomas Douglas, Earl of Selkirk, thought that a flourishing colony right in the midst of the rich hunting-grounds of the Hudson's Bay Company, in which he was interested, would prove no less a benefit to the natives than an excellent thing for the colonists. Accordingly, he busied himself in persuading a number of his fellow-countrymen to leave their hillside farms, and, with their families, voyage to the unknown wilds of the New World.

Among those whose courage was equal to this enterprise was Andrew Macrae, accompanied by his good wife, Kirstie, his sturdy son, Hector, then just on the edge of his teens, his bonnie wee daughter, Ailie, and his two splendid sheep dogs, Dour and Dandy.

The dogs' names were not given them at random. They just fitted their natures. A more serious creature than Dour surely never stood upon four legs. He bore himself as if he were responsible, not merely for the occupants of the sheep-cote, but also of the cottage as well. He was never known to frisk or gambol, or to bark without due cause.

Dandy was the very opposite, as black as a raven, save for a superb snow-white shirt-front, which he managed to keep marvellously clean, and a few touches of golden-brown on his shapely head. He was only a little sligher than Dour, and as lively and frolicsome as the other was impassive. Although not quite the equal of Dour, Dandy was an excellent sheep dog, too, and many a cotter envied Andrew the possession of the two fine creatures.

Hector loved both dogs dearly, albeit he stood a trifle in awe of Dour. The dogs were as much members of the family as Ailie and himself. He would have shared his last bit of bannock or sup of 'parritch' with either of them, and they fully returned his affection, each in his own way.

Hector was a 'braw laddie,' in very sooth. From his father, he got the straightness and strength of body, the deftness of hand and foot, and the rapidity of thought that made him an unquestioned leader among his playfellows, and from his mother the light, crisp hair, the laughing blue eyes, and the happy turn of speech that made the other boys love as well as obey him.

He stood in much awe of his father, who was as strict as he was just, but his mother had his whole heart, and many a time did he go to her for comfort, when reproved by Andrew for some little bit of heedlessness.

With little Ailie, a dark-eyed, dark-haired sprite, not like either parent, to protect and pet, the

Macraes made up a notably happy family group, and were the recipients of many attentions from their fellow passengers, on the long voyage on a slow sailing ship to the bleak shores of Hudson's Bay.

That voyage out proved far from being a pleasant holiday. Cooped up in an over-loaded vessel, whose accommodation was scant at best, fed upon pork and beef that was saltier than the sea itself, and hard biscuits that became alive with weevils ere the ship reached its destination, all the colonists suffered more or less severely. It spoke well for the stamina of the Macraes that they bore the privations of the passage better than the majority, and landed at York Factory in fairly good trim.

'Eh, but glad I am to put my feet upon the solid ground again!' exclaimed Andrew Macrae, with heartfelt emphasis, as he sprang out of the boat and strode up the beach, and, in so saying, he spoke for every one on board the vessel.

Hector's legs wobbled under him in so absurd a fashion that he tumbled over several times in his first attempt at running, and even Dour and Dandy, for a little, seemed hardly to understand that they were free to bound away in any direction they pleased.

But presently all the colonists were landed, and, having been kindly welcomed by the Hudson's Bay Company's employees at York Factory, made haste to bestow themselves as best they might among the buildings of the fort.

The Macraes were fortunate in getting a snug room to themselves, and there, with their two children and faithful dogs, they settled down to await the beginning of the next stage of their long journey.

On the following morning, Hector, accompanied by Ailie, and having Dour and Dandy, went down to the beach, where there was much going on to entertain them.

The sailors were busy unloading the vessel of her very miscellaneous cargo, comprising tea and tobacco, sugar and salt, blankets and muskets, knives, hatchets, and all the varied articles required for provisioning the forts, or trading with the Indians, while Indians and half-breeds lounged near by, watching them with half-contemptuous interest. The Hudson's Bay officials moved briskly about, giving sharp orders, and, in and among them everywhere, were dogs of all ages and sizes, but alike in resembling wolves or foxes, for the Huskie breed was predominant.

The sheep dogs made no attempt to find favour with the others. On the contrary, they kept close to Hector, their gleaming eyes, curling lips, and bristling necks expressing in the clearest way what they thought of their new acquaintances. The latter were not long in showing their feelings in the matter. No sooner did the collies draw near them than they rushed to meet them, snarling and growling so ferociously that Hector began to feel a little alarmed, while Ailie shrank closer to him, clasping his hand tightly in hers, and murmuring: 'I'm frightened. They'll bite us.' 'They won't dare to,' responded Hector bravely, albeit his heart was thumping at a lively rate. 'I'll drive them off with my stick,' and he flourished gallantly a slender cudgel that he had picked up at the gate of the fort.

But the graceless Huskies had small respect for a stick when not in the hands of a man, and they closed in about the little group in a very menacing way. At last they got so close that Dour and Dandy, in their love and loyalty to the two children, could restrain themselves no longer, and, at the same moment, they flew at the throats of the two foremost assailants.

Instantly, there was a terrific uproar, the dogs barking and wrangling furiously, Hector shouting: 'Away, you brutes!' while he laid his stick stoutly upon the backs and heads of the Huskies, and poor little Ailie shrieked pitifully at what she believed to be the imminent peril of all four.

The collies fought superbly. Fearfully outnumbered as they were, their superior sagacity and speed of movement for a while enabled them to hold their own. Keeping close together in front of the children, they struck to right and left with their keen white fangs, slashing the Huskies on head and shoulder, so that one after another slunk away, howling dolefully.

But for each one thus driven off, two others rushed to the attack, and, in spite of the splendid play Hector made with his stick, at the risk of being badly bitten himself, the issue must have gone hard against the gallant collies, for the Huskies would not have stopped until they had torn them to pieces. But, in the nick of time, a stalwart figure came charging down the beach with mighty strides.

Into the thick of the melee plunged Andrew Macrae, using, with unsparing energy, not only his heavily booted feet, but his tightly clenched fists. On this side and that fell his tremendous blows, and every one meant a disabled or disheartened dog, until, presently, the whole pack had fled out of reach, and the wrathful Scotsman stood panting but triumphant, Ailie clinging sobbingly to one knee, and Hector standing breathless at the other, while Dour and Dandy, after a brief greeting, made haste to take stock of themselves, and see what damage they had suffered at the teeth of the evil-tempered Huskies.

## CHAPTER II

### At Odds with Bruin

'Ech, bairns!' exclaimed Andrew, putting a calming hand upon the head of each of the agitated children, 'but they're an ill lot of curs to set upon ye in that unmannerly fashion. I'm richt glad I heard the row they were making, and thocht that maybe Dour and Dandy might be glad o' my help. I'm sore mistaken if those snarling beasts,' and he indicated with a sweep of his hand the Huskies now hovering at a respectful distance, 'will be ettlin' to feel my foot verra soon. They're nae fules, though they don't know how to be decent to strangers.'

By this time Ailie's tears were stayed, and Hector had recovered his wind, so they continued along the beach, the collies keeping close to Andrew's heels, giving vent to triumphant little growls whenever a Huskie ventured within earshot.

As the sailing vessel had to lie out in the deep water, her cargo was being brought ashore in big boats, with high bows and sterns that could each carry a wonderful load. The process of discharging interested all the little party, and they were standing watching it, when one of their fellow-travellers came up, and, pointing to the boats, said: 'It's in those barkies that we're going to the Red River. I canna say I like the look of them ower much. They're right clumsy things, in my opinion.'

Before Andrew could make reply, Hector broke in with an eager 'Oh, are we truly going on those boats? Eh, but that will be fine!—won't it, Ailie?' And he gave his sister a hearty hug, just by way of expressing his joy.

His father smiled with grave indulgence. 'I would think ye'd had mair than enough of the water for a spell, laddie. I wonder ye're so eager to take to it again.'

'Eh, but that was in a big ship, father,' responded Hector, defending himself, 'and a boat will be different, and we will go along the river instead of on the ocean.'

'We'll see, we'll see,' said Andrew, sagely, 'the river may not be sae guid to us as you think.'

As the season was slipping by, and as it was important for the settlers to reach their destination in good time before the long winter came, the preparations for the remainder of the journey were hurried as much as possible.

Yet there seemed so much to be done, that September was at hand ere the little brigade of 'York boats,' with their precious freight of humanity and goods, hoisted their big sails, and moved slowly off up the river, amid a parting volley of cheers and good wishes from the people of York Factory, many of whom would have been glad enough to accompany them.

Hector was in the highest spirits. This method of travelling was altogether to his liking: no longer the cramping confinement of the sailing-ship, but the freedom of the roomy boat; no more tumbling about among the rude billows, but smooth gliding on the bosom of the river; no dreary waste of chill, gray water, but on either hand the well-wooded banks glowed with varied colour, the light yellow of the fading poplar contrasting with the dark evergreen of the spruce, while the willows of an intermediate hue seemed to shade the two tints into each other. Here and there the bright purple of the dogwood, the sombre brown of the dwarf birch, and the gay yellow of the shrubby cinquefoil gave richer notes of colour, while, to the keen-eyed, restless boy, there was ever the hope of some wild animal—a fox, a deer, or perhaps even a bear—being sighted as they advanced.

It was not all plain sailing, however. In some places, the current was so strong that it became necessary to resort to tracking. Only the women and children remained in the boat, while the men, taking hold of a line fastened to the foot of the mast, tugged and toiled along the river bank, one-half their number working at a time, and then being relieved by the other; thus dragging the clumsy craft forward at the rate of about two miles an hour.

Andrew Macrae did not shirk his share of the hard work, but of course Hector was not expected to join the trackers, and so, accompanied by Dour and Dandy, he scampered freely along the top of the bank, being bidden by his father not to roam out of sight.

For some time he obeyed this injunction implicitly. But, on towards mid-day, the collies caught a glimpse of something that caused them to dart off into the woods, barking furiously. Carried away by excitement, Hector followed them, running at top speed straight away from the river.

He could easily hear the dogs when he could not see them, and so, recking nothing of what might happen, he raced after them, until presently the change in their barking announced that whatever animal it was they had been chasing, they had brought it to bay.

A moment later, he came out into a little glade at the farther side of which a big black bear stood upon its hind legs, in front of a great tree, and made furious efforts to seize Dour and Dandy with its forepaws, or to deal them such buffets that they would never bark again.

It was a thrilling spectacle for the most experienced hunter, but for Hector, who had never seen any kind of a bear before, and whose generous heart was at once filled with anxiety for the dogs that were so dear to him, it simply made him forget himself entirely.

Rushing forward, he shouted: 'Leave them alone, you brute! Don't you hurt my dogs!'

Considering that the dogs must have started the row, by finding the bear in the first instance, this was rather unfair to Bruin. But Hector had no thought for the exact justice of the case. His one concern was for the dogs.

He had picked up a stout stick in the course of his ramble, and this he now swung above his head in threatening fashion, little knowing that, if he should venture within striking distance, the bear would not only parry his blow, but knock his ineffective cudgel out of his grasp as easily as though it were a feather.

Still shouting he hardly knew what, the fearless boy ran right up to the combatant and, so engrossed was Bruin with his two lively assailants, that he did not notice his coming until he was within a couple of paces of him.

Then he caught sight of his two-legged enemy, stared at him for a moment with manifest amazement, let forth an ominous growl, and, dropping upon all fours, made straight for him with open mouth.

Well was it for Hector that Dour and Dandy were not less strong than they were active and brave. They sprang upon the bear, one at either side of his head, and before he could shake himself free, Hector, not needing to be told that his only safety was in flight, had darted off at the top of his speed in the direction of the river.

In hot pursuit, the bear followed, with the dauntless dogs hanging to his flanks and greatly impeding his movements. Otherwise, clumsy creature though he seemed, he would soon have overhauled his quarry.

Happily, Hector was no less sure than he was swift of foot. There are few smooth places in the Highlands, and he had learned to race over the roughest ground without a stumble.

On he went, exulting in his own speed, even though deeply concerned for his own safety, and after him lumbered the bear, as fast as the faithful dogs would suffer him to move. Yet, hindered and harried as he was, Bruin steadily gained on the boy, as the latter could not help noticing. 'I maun climb a tree!' he panted. 'The creature will na get me there. Eh, that's a grand tree yonder. I'll rin for it.'

Changing his course slightly, Hector made for a stately pine that held out welcoming branches at a friendly height from the ground. If he could reach it and spring into them, he would be able to laugh at his fierce pursuer's futile efforts to reach him. Summoning all his fast waning strength for a supreme effort, he dashed towards the tree.

## CHAPTER III

### A Cold Plunge

Hector had all but reached the pine. In fact, one more stride would have brought him to its trunk, when his right foot slipped upon one of the outspreading roots, hidden under a carpet of smooth brown needles, and he pitched forward, narrowly escaping striking his head against the massive trunk.

He was little hurt by the fall, but he was very much dazed, and the bear might have had him in its deadly hug ere he could have recovered himself, had not a new actor appeared upon the scene. The boats had come to a halt to rest the men just about the time that Hector ran off after the dogs, and Andrew Macrae, noting the boy's disappearance, snatched up a gun and climbed the river-bank to see what had become of him.

'He's na here,' he exclaimed in surprise, as he stood looking all about him. 'Where can the feckless bairn ha' gone to?'

Just then his keen ears, trained not to miss the slightest sound, caught faintly the sharp barking of the two dogs. 'Eh! eh!' he muttered. 'They've started up some creature—maybe a squirrel or the like. I'll just run and see what they're doing.'



So, gun in hand, he set off at a long easy lope that was little slower than a horse's trot. As the barking came more strongly to his ears, he realized that something serious was taking place, and quickened his pace, until he had reached the limit of his powers.

But a few minutes of such exertion were required to bring him to the scene of action, and swinging around the pine tree, he arrived at the very crisis of his son's peril.

Throwing the gun to his shoulder, and not waiting to take careful aim, he fired just as the great black brute reared to strike at Hector. The whole charge of heavy buckshot took effect full in the bear's breast, and down he pitched almost upon Hector, but incapable of further harm.

Mr. Macrae's feelings were so mixed that he hardly knew how to express himself. He had been angry with Hector for straying away from the river-bank, but now he was naturally hugely proud of his own success as a bear killer, and this rose superior to his anger. Raising Hector to his feet, he said, mildly enough: 'Ye didna heed ma word, laddie,' and then added with swelling voice, 'eh, but it's a grand creature! Rin now to the boat, and tell the men to come and help me with it. I canna carry it back alone.'

Relieved beyond expression at his escape from the bear, and from his father's deserved reproof, Hector darted off, and presently returned with several of the men, who were all greatly interested in the big game Andrew Macrae had bagged.

Andrew was anxious that his 'gude wife' should see his noble prize, before it was skinned, and so he persuaded the men to help him take it down to the river.

The little party made quite a triumphal procession, with Hector proudly leading the way, the four strong men bending beneath the weight of their trophy, and the two dogs frisking and barking about them, evidently quite aware of the important part they had played in the business.

Of course, Hector's mother both scolded and coddled him, and little Ailie gazed with startled eyes at the motionless monster, and Dour and Dandy came in for unlimited praise and patting, which they accepted with their wonted dignity. Among the boatmen were those who knew exactly what to do with the bear, which was in superb condition, and the splendid skin having been carefully removed, the best part of the meat was saved to provide juicy steaks and cutlets for the travellers' table.

From the Hayes River, the boats turned into the Stool, and then into the Fox River, and later into the Hill River, which was the most rapid of all, and very difficult to work up against its opposing currents.

One of the worst places was Rock Portage, where the river, pent in by a range of small islands, formed several cascades, none of which could be ascended by the laden boats. It was, therefore, necessary to take out all the cargo, portage it across one of the islands, and then, by dint of tremendous toil, drag the big boat across the island, and launch it again above the cascade.

This sort of thing went on day after day, until at last, to the infinite relief of the tired toilers, they reached Oxford House, an important post of the Hudson's Bay Company, where a rest of several days was allowed for them to recuperate.

During all this toilsome progress, Hector never had a dull moment. He helped whenever he could, and when not required for this, found plenty to occupy his attention. He was the best of brothers to Ailie, taking her to play upon the bank, picking flowers for her, and pointing out the birds in the trees, and the tiny creatures that rustled through the dry grass. Often his mother would join in these little rambles, and then Hector's happiness was complete. He felt himself the man of the party, and assumed an air of importance that greatly tickled his shrewd, fond mother.

The halt at Oxford House was enjoyed by everybody. Here both ducks and trout were to be had in plenty and most of the men went either shooting or fishing. Andrew Macrae preferred the former, and, having succeeded in securing the loan of a canoe, with a half-breed to paddle it, took Hector off with him for a day's sport.

The weather was favourable, and Cross-Eye, the half-breed, who got the name from his eyes being on the bias, promised them plenty of ducks. They paddled up the lake for several miles until they came to a kind of enclosed bay, whose shores were lined with a thick growth of underbrush.

'In there we go,' said Cross-Eye, in his queer guttural tone, and the canoe was directed to a good landing-place. 'Hide him,' grunted the half-breed, and the light craft was lifted out of the water, and concealed among the trees.

They next proceeded to put themselves out of sight, there to patiently wait the appearance of the ducks. Mr. Macrae and Cross-Eye settled down comfortably. Not so Hector. He had absolutely nothing to do but search the sky for the black specks that would grow into the toothsome birds they sought, and, as none of these were visible, he naturally grew restless. He fired questions at Cross-Eye, in spite of the taciturn half-breed's surly responses, and he bothered his father with proposals to do this or that, none of which were approved.

At last he gave a cry of delight, at the same moment that Cross-Eye grunted in a relieved way. Far to the west, a thin black line showed faintly above the horizon, and rapidly grew more distinct. The ducks were coming at last.

Crouching close to the ground, and hardly breathing in their excitement, the three hunters awaited their approach. When the orderly array of winged *voyageurs* had come within reach of the sound, Cross-Eye proceeded to imitate their cries with a marvellous fidelity.

Hector was amazed at the sounds which issued from him. They were so perfectly bird-like.

Instead of flying over, the ducks hesitated, returned the cries that attracted their attention, and then, with much flapping of wings, dropped down upon the still surface of the little bay, right in front of their hidden enemy. The moment they were well within range, at a signal from Cross-Eye, the report of two guns rang out like one, and two ducks gave their last quack.

With wonderful quickness the half-breed had the canoe launched, but Hector was no less quick in springing into it, and off they went after the birds. A few powerful strokes brought them to where they lay upon the water.

'You get them,' grunted Cross-Eye, as he held the canoe steady, and Hector leaned over the side to pick up the ducks. It was not a difficult thing to do, but the sudden excitement after the wearisome waiting had flustered him. He was so eager to do his share of the work that he overdid it, and upset the canoe, throwing the half-breed and himself into the water.

Now there was nothing of the hero in Cross-Eye. He was both angry with Hector for his awkwardness, and alarmed about his own safety. So, without one thought of the boy, he made for the shore as fast as he could, in spite of Mr. Macrae's indignant appeals to him to help Hector.

As for the latter, he had not been born and bred beside a Scottish loch without learning to swim. Indeed, neither Dour nor Dandy could get faster through the water. But the ice-cold lake into which he had been so suddenly plunged was a different thing from the sunny loch in summer-time.

Before he had taken a dozen strokes towards the shore, the deadly chill laid hold upon him, and numbed his arms and legs until he could scarce keep his head above water. Indeed it did go under once, the water smothering the cry for help that his peril had wrung from him, ere his father, throwing off his coat, plunged in to his rescue.

## CHAPTER IV

### Hector Entrapped

Before Mr. Macrae had reached Hector, he, too, felt the paralysing effect of the glacial water. But he was a man of enormous strength, and, wallowing through it like a whale, grasped the boy firmly with his left hand, while he struck out for the canoe, which rocked upon the water in supreme indifference to their struggles for life.

'Keep up, laddie, keep up,' he panted. 'I'll get ye safe ashore.' Reaching the canoe, he drew down the side until Hector could seize it with his stiffening hands. 'Noo, then, laddie, ye'll just haud on there, and I'll push the thing to the land.'

Hector held on with the strength that his terror gave him, and Mr. Macrae, grasping the canoe at the other side, pushed it through the water with all his might.

In this fashion they made the shore, where Cross-Eye stood shivering and glowering at them. Mr. Macrae's first impulse was to warm his skin pretty thoroughly for his cowardly desertion of the boy. But before his hand fell, he checked himself, saying: 'Ye feckless loon!—ye ken nae better, nae doubt. Yer only thought was for yer ainsel'. Well, we'll say nae mair. Come, let's make a fire and dry our things.'

The half-breed, who had evidently expected some rough usage, looked immensely relieved at the quick turn of affairs, and set himself to the building of a big blaze, with such skill and energy, that the chilled duck-hunters were presently basking in its welcome warmth.

As soon as their clothes were dried, they recovered the ducks, which were still floating on the water, and then hid themselves to await another flock. Their patience was rewarded by the securing of some half-dozen more. Then, feeling well content with the day's bag, they paddled back to Oxford House.

A few days later, the boats resumed their journey, crossing Holey Lake, ascending a little river to Hell Gate—a very difficult place to pass—and so on by way of Echenamis, and Sea River,



and across the Play Green Lakes, to Norway House at the north end of Lake Winnipeg.

Here all difficulties with rocks and rapids ended—the exhausting labours of the portage were over. With broad sails hoisted to the wind, the big boats ploughed through the turbid waters of the shallow lake, traversing it from north to south, and without any mishap, reached the end of their voyage. The colonists, heartily weary of being cooped up in the boats so long, were only too glad to be put out upon the solid land.

They were now actually in the Red River country, for which they had ventured so much, and it was with eager, anxious eyes that they looked about them.

The Red River itself constituted the central feature of the landscape. Having its source in the elevated land some hundreds of miles away, it flowed in a muddy, sluggish fashion into Lake Winnipeg. On its west side the country was one boundless level plain of rich, deep loam, whose fertility would presently amaze the newcomers, accustomed to the grudging, niggardly soil of their native land. On the east the scene was more varied with hill and dale, and skirted at no great distance by what were called the pine hills, covered with timber, and running parallel to the river all the way.

'The gude God be thankit!' ejaculated Andrew Macrae, as his keen gray eyes surveyed the fair prospect, all glowing beneath the splendour of an unclouded sky, and, removing his bonnet, he offered a brief yet fervent thanksgiving. 'Eh! but it's a fine land!' he continued. 'Why, ye scarce can see a stane on it, and where there are sae mony flowers, there'll be nae lack o' fat crops in the comin' year.'

Thus speaking, Andrew gave voice to the first impression of all the men, while the women, with glad eyes, noted the soft beauty of the country, and said to one another that it was a bonnie place, and they were glad they had come to it.

As for the children, they could hardly contain themselves. The thick, soft grass in which they could roll and tumble without let or hindrance was a pure delight to them. Oh, what a romp they and the dogs did have! and how heartily Hector and Ailie entered into the merriment!

There were somewhat primitive carts to carry the heavy baggage, but the colonists all had to walk; and it was, consequently, at no hurried rate of progress, that they moved southward to their final destination.

It was in the beginning of October that the weary, travel-worn colonists, with their families and possessions, reached the tract of land beside the Red River which their lordly patron had selected for their settlement.

Their very first proceeding was to gather together and offer thanks to God, for His providential care of them through all the perils of the long journey. Never before had the clear sweet air of the prairie been stirred by the strains of sacred song, and, as the solemn beautiful music of the Psalms rose heavenward, there hurried to the wondrous novelty a motley crowd of fur hunters, half-breeds, and Indians, who remained to listen in gaping curiosity, if not in reverent appreciation, to Andrew Macrae's dignified reading from 'the Book,' and to the lengthy prayers that followed from other men of the party.

The instant the praise service was concluded, Hector, accompanied by Dour and Dandy, started out to inspect their new home. The boy was in high spirits, which his four-footed friends shared. At least, Dandy did, for he frisked and barked with great vim, thereby attracting the attention of the suspicious, snarling curs that belonged to the residents, who had never seen so handsome a member of their race before. Dour bore himself with more dignity, yet it was evident that he understood that they had arrived at the end of their tiresome travelling, and that he rejoiced thereat.

Naturally Hector turned his steps towards the fort, which was the most conspicuous feature of the scene. This did not belong to the Hudson's Bay Company, but to their bitter rivals, the North-West Fur Company, and, had the boy only known, was the stronghold of those who were to give the settlers many miserable days.

It was not a very imposing affair, simply a stout stockade in the form of a square, having one gate protected by short towers, and enclosing a cluster of buildings, only one storey in height, built in the same rough fashion.

Hector, drawing near the gate, which stood wide open, looked curiously in. The whole thing was entirely novel to him, and, boy-like, he greatly longed to understand it. Dour and Dandy, feeling ill at ease now, kept very close to him. They did not altogether like the look of things, and would have preferred retracing their steps, but of course they had not the slightest notion of deserting their young master.

As Hector stood hesitating, a young man, coming from the interior, beckoned to him in a friendly fashion, saying: 'You want come in. All right, you come.' He was clearly a half-breed, and had a dark, evil face that was far from prepossessing.

Hector instinctively disliked him, but could not very well refuse his invitation, even though

the shrewd collies sniffed so suspiciously at his legs that the fellow shrank away lest they should bite him. 'Nice place, eh?' he asked, with a sly ingratiating smile. 'Plenty good furs in there,' and he pointed, with a very dirty finger, to the largest of the buildings. 'You stranger, yes? Come I show you the store.'

Hector had a premonition of trouble, but was not sufficiently strong-minded to beat a retreat, as he should have done. The half-breed certainly seemed courteous, even if the expression of his face were sinister.

Following his guide, the lad entered the trade-house, which contained the goods used in bartering with the Indians for their furs, and was astonished at the quantity and variety of the stock displayed. Here were guns, pistols, knives, hatchets, blankets, shirts, caps, mitts, tobacco, tea, sugar, smoked and salted meats, handkerchiefs, sashes, snowshoes, moccasins, coats and trousers, and so on, piled upon the floor according to a rude, but no doubt effective system.

'Plenty goods here, eh?' said the half breed, with a crafty leer, as if his object were to arouse the boy's envy. 'Company very rich—very strong—have many forts all about'—and with a sweep of his arms he indicated a wide stretch of territory. Hector certainly was much impressed by what he saw, and felt free to say so, whereat his guide seemed much gratified.

'Come now see furs—oh! fine furs!' he cried, and, taking hold of Hector's arm, led him off to another building, even more solidly built than the trade-house. A single door was both the means of admittance and of lighting the place. Inside were ranged bales of furs, the pelts of marten, mink, otter, bear, fox, wolf, and beaver, which had been trapped by Indians and half-breeds in far-away places, and brought in to exchange for the goods they coveted.

Some of the skins were loose, and the half-breed drew Hector's attention to a particularly fine blue fox, which he explained was worth 'heap money.' Hector was examining this, passing his hand over the soft, rich fur, when suddenly he was tripped and thrown upon the floor by his scoundrelly guide, who, before the boy could regain his feet, dashed out of the door and slammed it shut, setting the great bar across it.

In perfect darkness and bewilderment, Hector picked himself up. Can you blame the poor lad if his first feeling was something very like panic-stricken terror? He had been taken so completely by surprise, and felt so utterly helpless. Through the thick door, he could hear the angry barking of Dour and Dandy, who were evidently defending themselves against assailants of some kind, and he shouted with all his might: 'Help! Help! Let me out! Let me out!'

## CHAPTER V

### The Search for Hector

Again and again Hector cried out for help and deliverance from his prison, but, even had there been any one near, they could hardly have heard him through the thick walls and solid door of the fur-house.

Pressing his ear against the join of the door, he heard the fierce barking of the collies growing fainter and fainter, until presently he heard it no more. Evidently they had been dragged off by the half-breed, and confined somewhere.

The truth of the matter was that, to the dogs, Hector owed the alarming situation in which he found himself. While he hung about the gate of the fort, the half-breed had noticed the splendid creatures, and, at once coveting them, set about getting them into his possession. Extraordinary as his conduct may seem, the subsequent experiences of the settlers showed only too clearly that he really was not running any great risk of trouble to himself.

The faithful collies, knowing that their young master was shut up in the fur-house, stayed close at the door, and this enabled the rascally half-breed, with the aid of another whom he called upon, to fasten thongs around their necks, and to drag them off, in spite of their frantic opposition.

Hector shouted and kicked at the door, until, at last, exhausted and despairing, he threw himself down among the furs, and burst into futile tears.

'What are they going to do to me?' he sobbed. 'Oh, I wish I'd never gone near the fort! How can father find out where I am?'

How, indeed, was the question. Mr. Macrae had many things to engross his attention, and Mrs. Macrae was so used to Hector's roaming about on his own account, that she would not be apt to miss him until sundown. As it fell out, it was from a most unlooked-for source that the clue

came. Having made the best arrangements they could for shelter, and these were very scant at best, the settlers gathered together for their evening meal. Then did the mother-heart of Mrs. Macrae begin to feel concerned for her son. 'Where is Hector?' she asked her husband. 'I have na seen him these many hours. Was he no with you?'

'He was no with me at all,' answered Mr. Macrae, turning his keen glance in every direction. 'He went aff with the twa dogs a gude while ago, and I didna see just which way he went.'

'God grant he's na got into any harm!' sighed Mrs. Macrae. "'Tis a strange place this, and there's na tellin' what may happen to the laddie.'

'Oh, he's a' richt,' responded her husband, cheerfully. 'He'll be wanting his bannocks, and that'll bring him back soon.'

But when night fell, and still no sign of Hector, the Macraes grew very anxious. Andrew set out to make enquiries, and went through the party of settlers, asking if any of them had seen the boy since mid-day. Several of them had noticed him strolling about, accompanied by the dogs, but no one could say definitely in what direction he had gone.

When the mystery was at its height, and the whole party was aroused to concern for the missing boy, suddenly Dour appeared, and rushed up to Mr. Macrae, barking joyfully. The remains of a raw-hide thong, which he had bitten through close to his body, hung about his neck, and, with all the means of expression at the command of the most sagacious of his kind, he strove to tell his story.

'Gude dog! Gude dog!' murmured Mr. Macrae, patting the clever creature fondly. 'There's been ill wark, nae doot. Come with me, friends, an' we'll sift it to the verra bottom.'

Slipping pistols into their pockets, for there was no telling what might happen, half-a-dozen of the men signified their readiness to accompany Mr. Macrae in the search for his son. They were stalwart, stern-looking men, with shaggy faces, and piercing, fearless eyes—not the men to be trifled with by any one, and now deeply intent upon their purpose, for their hearts beat in sympathy for the anxious father and mother.

'Lead on, Dour, gude dog,' said Andrew; 'ye dootless ken the way. We'll keep close ahind ye.'

The intelligent animal, fully grasping his master's meaning, set off at once straight for the fort, the men following at a rapid jog-trot, in order not to be left behind. When they arrived at the fort they found the gate closed, but, as Dour was insistent about entering, Mr. Macrae did not hesitate to rap loud and long upon the stout timber with the butt of his pistol.

For some time there was no response, for although those inside had not yet gone to bed, they were all so engrossed in drinking, smoking, talking, or gambling that they did not hear him. At last a rough voice was heard demanding in a surly tone: 'What do you want? Who are you?'

'I want to see the Governor of the Fort,' replied Mr. Macrae, in a tone that had no uncertain sound about it.

'He no see you now. He busy,' was the growling reply, as the speaker turned to go away.

'But I maun see him, and that richt awa,' retorted Mr. Macrae, and at his signal the whole party fell to smiting the gate with their heavy pistol butts. This thundering tattoo evidently impressed the man inside, for he came back to the gate, and, in a slow, sulky fashion, proceeded to unfasten the stout bars that held it. Opening it a couple of inches, he peered suspiciously at the importunate callers, but the latter gave him no time to scrutinize them; for, led by Mr. Macrae, they threw themselves upon the heavy gate, forced it wide open, and charged through ere the bewildered Metis realized their purpose.

There was no difficulty in distinguishing the factor's residence, for it fairly blazed with light, and thither the group of stern, stalwart men directed their steps, Dour, satisfied that they knew what they were about, keeping close at his master's heels.

The door of the house stood wide open, but Mr. Macrae did not attempt to enter without first rapping in a proper manner. His summons brought out a young lad, evidently from Scotland, who showed a very different spirit from the surly half-breed at the gate. 'Ye wad hae a word wi' the Governor, eh?' he asked, with a pleasant smile. 'Just bide ye there, an' I'll gie him yer message.'

He disappeared into the room at the right, and Mr. Macrae prepared himself to address the important official he had asked for. But he was not to have that privilege in a hurry. The minutes went by without the Governor appearing, or the young Scotsman returning, and, in rising wrath, Andrew Macrae was just about to knock on the inside door, when suddenly it opened, and there stood before him a thick-set, shaggy-haired personage, whose deeply flushed features showed that he had been dining not wisely but too well. 'What is it?' he demanded brusquely. 'Why do you bother me now? Why can't you wait until the morning?'

In a firm, yet respectful, tone, Hector's father stated the reason of his coming. 'Tut! Tut!' growled the man. 'I can't attend to that to-night. Come back to-morrow,' and he was about to

close the door, when Mr. Macrae, with a quick movement, thrust his foot against it, and at the same moment he laid his hand firmly upon the factor's arm.

'It's ma ain bairn I'm seeking, and I shall na leave here until I find him.' As he spoke, his companions pressed close behind him, shoulder to shoulder.

The factor's bloodshot eyes went from one stern, intent face to another. Manifestly, these were not men to be trifled with. Obscured by strong drink as his brain was, enough sense remained to understand that. With an oath he flung the door open, and said sneeringly: 'Do ye expect to find him in here?'

Through the cloud of tobacco smoke that filled the room, Mr. Macrae saw several men sitting at the table with glasses before them.

'Surely not;' he replied, an accent of fine scorn in his deep voice. 'But with your permission, I'll search the fort.'

'Do so, and——' here followed rough words, but Andrew, having gained his point, took no notice of the man's gross rudeness.

## CHAPTER VI

### Ordered Off

'Come awa', men,' he said to his companions. 'We'll na give o'er till we've searched the place throughout. Lead awa', Dour, gude dog.'

The clever collie needed no second bidding. He had been very impatiently awaiting the conclusion of the colloquy at the factor's, and now bounded across the open space between the different buildings, making straight for the fur-house.

By this time, several of the inmates of the fort had gathered, curious as to what was up, and, had Mr. Macrae been alone, their sinister looks might well have made him anxious concerning his own safety.

But his only thought was for Hector, and the grave, sinewy men by his side, though few in numbers, were not the kind to invite hasty attack; so, paying no heed to threatening looks or menacing utterances, the little party reached the door of the fur-house.

Upon this, Mr. Macrae struck hard with his pistol-butt, calling out: 'Hector, laddie, are ye there?'

Instantly there came back from the interior a muffled cry of joy, and the faint words: 'Father! oh, father! is that you?'

There was a stout padlock fastening the door, but Mr. Macrae quickly prised this off, and tore the door open. Out of the interior darkness rushed Hector and flung himself, half-sobbing, into his father's arms.

Andrew returned the embrace warmly, and then asked in a tone of surprise and concern: 'Was no' Dandy with you?'

'Why no, father!' replied Hector. 'The man that shut me up took both Dour and Dandy away with him.'

'Then we maun find the dog,' was the resolute rejoinder. 'Here, Dour, gude dog, call Dandy.' Without a moment's hesitation, the well-trained creature poured forth a volley of barks that meant as plainly as possible, 'Dandy, where are you? Tell us.'

'Now listen, friends, for the answer,' said Mr. Macrae, with a grim smile.

There was no doubt about the response, for out of the surrounding gloom burst a chorus of canine music that fairly made the welkin ring, and how Dandy's particular contribution could be distinguished seemed a hopeless problem.

But Mr. Macrae waited silently until the commotion had somewhat subsided, and then, pointing to the northern end of the enclosure, said confidently: 'There's whaur they've got Dandy.'

Dour evidently approved of their going thither, and presently, turning the corner of one of the most remote buildings, they found the object of their search, half-strangled in his frantic efforts

to break the thong that held him fast.

'God be thanked—we've found all three, and they're nane the waur of it,' said Mr. Macrae, in a tone of fervent gratitude; and then, his voice changing to righteous indignation, 'by the morn we'll find out why this was done to ma laddie, and who did it.'

With the morn, however, came strange and startling events, that caused Hector's peculiar experience to be entirely forgotten. To understand these aright, a little explanation is necessary. Although the great Hudson's Bay Company claimed full ownership of the North-West, their right to this vast wilderness was vigorously disputed by a company formed in Lower Canada and called the North-West Fur Company. The rivalry between the two companies for control of the fur-trade was intense and unscrupulous. They resorted to all sorts of stratagems to injure each other, and wherever one built a fort, the other soon established a second within sight. Often their employees, made wild with strong drink, broke out into open violence and many lives were lost, and a number of forts sacked and burned in the course of the bitter struggle.

Now, the Nor-Westers, as they were called for short, regarded the advent of the Scotch folk with lively animosity. They suspected it to be a shrewd device of their rivals to get a firmer grip upon the country. The new-comers would not be rovers like themselves, but settlers, who would build houses, and till the rich soil, and multiply in numbers until they became a power in the land.

This far-seeing scheme must be nipped in the bud, and forthwith they set themselves to do it.

The strange part of the whole affair was that they ran slight risk of interference with their nefarious design from their hated rivals, for the employees of the Hudson's Bay Company, although, of course, they would take no part against the immigrants, were little more in favour of their coming than the Nor-Westers. They did not want the country settled. They had much rather it should remain a hunters' paradise, and they were not disposed to lift a finger on behalf of the newcomers.

The first morning after the settlers' arrival seemed full of kindly promise. Summer was just giving way to autumn. The prairie air was clear and bracing without being too cool. The sun shone from an azure sky upon a vast expanse of golden-hued turf almost as level as a floor, that only required to be turned over by the plough to be ready for fall seeding.

The hardy Scotch folk, accustomed to the rocky uplands and stony meadows of their 'ain countree,' looked with wonder and delight at the rich inheritance into which they had come.

'Eh, mon! but it's grand, grand!' ejaculated Saunders Rowan, in a tone of unqualified appreciation. He was the senior member of the party, and had been rather given to 'croaking,' but this glorious morning his doubts and fears were all dispelled.

The women busied themselves preparing the morning meal, while the children and dogs romped and rolled joyously in the rich, soft grass. It was altogether a pretty picture, that seemed to be a happy augury of the good times in store.

Suddenly, like a bolt out of the blue, this scene of gladness and peace changed to one of terror and strife. With no more warning than if they had risen out of the ground itself, there charged down upon the defenceless settlers a band of Indians in full war paint, mounted upon their piebald ponies, armed with spears, bows, arrows, and guns, which weapons they brandished fiercely, while they gave their awful war-whoop with all the power of their lungs.

Crying to their children, and gathering them close, as the mother hen does her chickens at sight of a hawk, the women huddled together in a panic-stricken group, while the doughty dogs faced the enemy with flashing teeth and threatening growls, and the men rushed to snatch up their guns, or anything else that might serve as an effective weapon.

For a moment it seemed as if blood must be shed. The Indians seemed ripe for mischief and the stalwart Scots were determined to defend their dear ones to the last extremity.

But before a blow was struck, the band, at a signal from their leader, brought their horses to a halt, and ceased their hideous howlings. The leader then drew out from his mob of followers, and holding up his hands in token of his wish to parley, asked in broken English for the chief man of the strangers.

There was at first some hesitancy among the Scots at replying to this. They had never formally chosen a leader, although, naturally, some of the men had shown themselves stronger and shrewder than others. Presently all eyes turned towards Andrew Macrae. No man was fitter by appearance or sagacity to be their spokesman, and, in response to their unmistakable choice, he stepped forward.

'I'm but one of our little company, yet if ye'll tell me what ye mean by a' this claverin' and scarin' peaceable folk, I'm ready to talk wi' ye.'

The Indian leader straightened up in his saddle. The stern, stalwart Scotsman was no antagonist to be trifled with, and his first intention of using the ready wit for which he had a reputation, to bait the strangers for the amusement of his followers, before proceeding to

rougher measures, underwent a change. Such a man needed to be dealt with in a different fashion. Accordingly, assuming as much dignity as he could command, he began to explain what the alarming demonstration meant.

His speech was a strange jargon compounded of English, French and Indian words that would have sorely puzzled poor Mr. Macrae, were it not helped out by a vigorous pantomime, that enabled him to follow the drift of it, after a fashion.

The purport was serious enough, and his normally grave countenance grew graver still as the meaning became clearer to him.

In brief, it was an order to quit! Having at last reached their haven, after so long and perilous a journey over sea and land, they were summarily commanded to depart, and that without delay.

## CHAPTER VII

### How Hector Got His Nickname

At first, Mr. Macrae refused to credit his own intelligence. The idea was too appalling, and in his slow, deliberate way he made the Indian leader repeat and reiterate his sinister communication.

Then, calling aside the seniors of his party, who had all been watching the parley with intent, anxious faces, he told them the startling truth.

Naturally enough, they likewise were at the outset incredulous, and stirred to righteous wrath. What had this howling mob of painted and befeathered Indians to do with them? They were not the lords of the land now, whatever they might have been before the coming of the white man. Lord Selkirk was the rightful owner of the broad, rich acres to which they had made so painful a pilgrimage, and they, the settlers, were the possessors in his name. Not one step would they budge. They had come to stay.

All this, and more, Mr. Macrae repeated to the Indian leader with the utmost emphasis, but he might as well have spared his breath.

'Non—no—non!' the fellow responded in his hybrid jargon. 'Must go way. No stay here. No food, no fire, no tepee. Go way down there,' and he pointed due south.

While this parley was proceeding, the other members of his party had been quietly forming a circle about the band of settlers, drawing steadily closer until they were almost within touch of them. As it happened, little Ailie, her first fright having passed off, grew interested in the gay trappings of the Indians, and, ere her mother noticed, sidled towards one of them, in order to touch the feathers that adorned his leggings.

She was just beside his stirrup, when, with a quick movement, he reached down, grasped her under the arms, and swung her up before him, saying, in what was meant to be a soothing tone:

'Ma jolie petite. You like ride—eh?' Ailie gave a scream of terror, that reached the ears of her mother and Hector at the same moment. The former stood transfixed, but Hector, whose position was somewhat behind the Indian, with the spring of a panther reached the pony's withers, and the next moment had the Indian's throat tightly clasped in his strong young hand.

The pony, frightened by the sudden addition of a second rider, at once began to buck and rear, so that even its expert owner could hardly retain his seat, doubly hampered as he was, holding Ailie, and being held by Hector.

Noting his predicament, his companions closed in upon him to give him help, and just at that moment Mrs. Macrae, her comely countenance aflame with maternal anger, darted into their midst, and reaching up, caught Ailie in her arms, crying: 'Ma bonnie bairn! Are ye hurt?' The Indian let go his burden readily enough, and turned to attack Hector.

But the latter was too quick for him. He had seen his mother's action, and the instant Ailie was safely in her arms, he let go of the Indian's throat, and threw himself to the ground, narrowly escaping being trampled upon by the ponies of the nearest Indians.

The whole thing happened so quickly that many of both parties saw nothing of it but the excitement it occasioned, and, for the moment, there was a complete break-up of the parley between Mr. Macrae and the Indian leader.

When order was in some measure restored, and Mr. Macrae had assured himself that neither of his children was in any wise injured, he once more gave attention to the serious situation

which had so unexpectedly presented itself.

With considerable difficulty he made the Indian understand that he must have time to consider his astounding communication, and to consult with the other men of his party. To this the fellow, with much show of reluctance, at last consented, and a gruff command sent the whole cavalcade cantering off to a little distance, where they dismounted, and, squatting upon the turf in a sort of circle, proceeded to light their pipes, and talk in guttural tones of what had happened.

The Scots, that is to say the older men of the party, now gathered in a little knot, their countenances grown suddenly haggard, for they all realized that they were face to face with a crisis more menacing than anything they had previously encountered.

"'Tis unco strange. I canna understand it at all," said Mr. Macrae. "Noo that we are come here after sae great trouble they say we canna bide, but maun gang away doon to the States, where we dinna want to be."

'Let us gang ower to the fort there,' suggested Saunders, pointing to the Hudson's Bay fort, which stood on the bank of the river, about a quarter of a mile distant. 'Surely the Governor will take our pairt and winna let these savages have their way with us.' This suggestion met with instant approval, and three of the party, including Mr. Macrae, were appointed to carry it out.

They at once set out across the prairie, while the other men rejoined the women, to await the result of the embassy.

But no sooner had the three got well started, than with whoops and yells the Indians sprang on their ponies and came cantering towards them, waving their weapons in a way that meant only one thing—the Scotsmen must go no farther. Baffled and disheartened, the latter, after a futile attempt at parley with the Indians, walked slowly and in silence back to their companions.

The situation seemed as desperate as it was bewildering. They were utterly at a loss either to understand it or cope with it. Lord Selkirk had given them to believe that they would be warmly welcomed at Red River, and afforded all necessary assistance in settling down, and this was the way in which his promises were being fulfilled.

In their extremity they sought guidance and strength from God, and, to the amazement of the Indians, who had again drawn closer, the stately music of the Psalms rose from their midst, followed by the sonorous voice of Saunders, laying before the Lord of all the anguish of their hearts.

When their prayers were over they all felt more composed in mind, although no light had come to them concerning the crisis.

The Indians again withdrew a little distance, and Hector, who was as curious as he was courageous, and whose eye had been taken by the gay feathers and beaded buckskins of the Indian leader, which certainly made a brave show, went over towards him for a closer inspection, Dour and Dandy following at his heels.

The Indian, noting the movement, advanced to meet him with an amiable grin, and, just before they came together, threw himself off his cayuse, as much as to say: 'See, I'm willing to be on even terms with you.' He was rather a fine-looking fellow, and Hector, little as he yet knew about the red men of the plain, somehow felt that this was no ordinary one.

He towered above the boy as they stood side by side, and, smiling mischievously, he lifted the latter's thick cap from his head, and went through the motion of scalping him. The next instant, his teasing expression changed to one of lively admiration, he thrust his hands into Hector's curly locks, exclaiming: 'Ti-ti-pu! Ti-ti-pu!'

Hector, for a moment, was somewhat startled, but he did not betray it. Dour and Dandy, however, did not quite like the proceedings, and growled menacingly through their glistening teeth. The fact of the matter was the Indian had never seen such a poll of golden curly locks before, and, accustomed as he was to the straight, black, limp tresses of his own people, they seemed to him something almost supernatural. Thenceforward he would call Hector nothing but 'Ti-ti-pu,' and the nickname stuck like a burr, until only the gravest members of his own party hardly ever thought of calling him anything else.

In sore perplexity the Scots took counsel together as to what they should do. Their stock of provisions was nearly exhausted, and although they had amongst them all a good deal of money, of what use was it if the hostile residents would not sell them anything?

'It wad seem as though we maun go ewa' doon south for the winter at any rate,' said Mr. Macrae, in a tone of profound despondency. 'The ways of Providence are beyond our ken. We maun just trust that the Lord will guide us, and provide for our necessities.'

The Indian leader was then informed that, if they were allowed to obtain a supply of provisions, and such other things as would be necessary for the journey, they would obey their orders and go down to the United States.



This was assented to, and, after some further parley, most of the Indians went away, leaving the rest of their number on guard. The settlers, with heavy hearts, made preparations for the night.

Among the older members of the little band of pilgrims, to whom the promised land seemed about to prove so bitter a disappointment, there was not much sleep that night, and the morning found them haggard, weary and depressed. But after they had all, like one great family, united in prayer and the singing of the Psalms, they became more composed. They were in God's hands, and dark as everything now looked, He would send light in the end.

Soon after sunrise, the Indians reappeared in force, this time in quite good humour, the settlers having already agreed to obey their orders, and Mr. Macrae had little difficulty in making arrangements with them to conduct the party to Pembina.

Under other circumstances, the settlement of the terms would have been very amusing, for on the one side the language employed was a mixture of Gaelic and English, and on the other of Indian jargon and mongrel French, so that a great deal had to be made out by means of signs and gestures, and contortions of countenances. Hector watched the proceedings with intense interest. To tell the truth, after his first fear of them had passed away, and he realized that they were not going to kill and scalp his people, he was quite taken by the Indians, and eager to get upon friendly terms with them.

By the leader he was particularly attracted, and, in exchange for the nickname the Indian had given him, he, on his part, got the red man to give him a name whereby to call him, namely, Wikonaie, which he presently shortened to Wikon.

His friendship with the Indian, Hector's father looked upon with approval. He himself was perhaps of too unbending a nature to make any advances towards a more amiable footing, but he was very glad to see Hector accomplish it in his frank, boyish way.

Word was given that the start for Pembina would be made early the next morning; and one of the bitter things the settlers had to endure was being deprived of all their arms. Poor Rob McEwen had to part with his greatest treasure, a flintlock that his father had carried and used to good effect in the battle of Culloden, and who can blame him if the tears stood in his grey eyes as, after fondling the firearm as tenderly as if it were a baby, he let it go from him never to get it back? But even harder perhaps was the case of Jeanie Sinclair, who had to part with her marriage ring, whose glitter caught the eye of a big Indian, who would not be denied the gleaming treasure.

In spite of all their troubles, the settlers did not forget to sing their Psalm and to join with one of their elders in earnest prayer, ere they sadly turned their faces southward.

## **CHAPTER VIII**

### **On the Move Again**

The procession that set forth for Pembina certainly presented a curious sight. It might have been intended to represent the triumph of savagery over civilization.

Decked out in their gayest garb, fully armed, and mounted upon spirited horses, the Indians pranced about in lordly style, giving orders to the unfortunate folk from over sea, who, although they were really so much superior to them, for the time being were completely in their power.

Mr. Macrae had succeeded in making an arrangement with the Indians that they should carry the young children upon their horses, for, of course, it would be out of the question for the little ones to walk, and this gave the riders the chance to have a good deal of amusement at the expense of the mothers of the children.

No sooner had the strange cavalcade got well under way than the rascals galloped off ahead, and were presently out of sight on the boundless prairie, while the bewildered, anxious mothers ran crying and pleading after them, until they fell exhausted upon the turf.

Ailie Macrae was among those thus carried off, and Hector pursued the Indian who held her until even his stout legs could not take another stride, while Dour and Dandy, barking fiercely, continued the chase a mile or two farther.

But, as he lay panting upon the grass, his first excitement having passed away, he began to reason the theory out. 'That's just a trick they're playing on us,' he said to himself. 'They'll bring the bairns back nae doot, but it's a mean trick, and I'll tell them so.'

And the boy was as good as his word. When the horsemen, having had their fun, came back to

those on foot, with the children unharmed, and in most cases having greatly enjoyed the wild gallop, Hector made straight for his new friend, Wikonaie, and with high-pitched voice and vigorous gesture, made plain to him what he thought of the performance.

Wikonaie smiled at his passionate earnestness, and took no offence at his fearless scolding. 'You talk big words,' he said, in a tone of good-humoured admiration. 'You be big chief some day. Me like you.' This soft answer completely turned away Hector's wrath, and, in spite of himself, a smile took possession of his flushed features.

'Ha! Ha! Wikonaie,' he cried, 'ye're a canny chiel. Ye ken right well how to get out of it.'

And so the matter ended between them, but it was a noticeable fact that, although some of the other Indians repeated the foolish trick, Wikonaie took no further part in it, and that henceforth it was little Ailie that rode upon his saddle, and was so happy there that she was always sorry when she had to dismount.

The procession could make but slow progress. The settlers were no less heavy of foot than of heart, and both women and men alike had to carry, up to the limit of their strength, such of their belongings as they could not possibly part with. Moreover, their English-made boots were not at all the right thing, and their poor feet swelled out and blistered inside them, until some could scarcely stand upright.

How they envied the Indians their soft moccasins, and how they vowed to themselves that they would put off their clumsy, uncomfortable boots for them at the first opportunity!

So they struggled on over the prairie, the weather, fortunately, continuing fine and warm, so that they could sleep in the open air at night without inconvenience. At last footsore, weary, and sad of heart, they reached their destination.—Pembina, a frontier settlement of the United States, where they were now to pass the long, cold winter.

Hector was rather sorry when the journey came to an end, tiresome as it was to his seniors. They went so slowly that he had plenty of time to roam at his will, and never without the company of Dour and Dandy. He would make excursions to the right and left of the line of march, and generally manage to find plenty to amuse and interest him.

'Eh! but ye're grand friends to have!' he would cry to his faithful four-legged playmates after a wild scamper over the prairie, which set all three of them panting. 'Ye ken as much as most ordinary folk, and ye can run faster and farther than the best man that ever lived. Indeed, I just wish I could run about half as fast myself. It would be a fine thing to be able to do,' and then he would take their hairy heads between his hands, and rub his own face fondly between them.

At Pembina, they were well received by the residents, who seemed glad to have such an addition to their numbers, and, with their aid and advice, they at once set about getting ready the huts or tents that would be their only homes for many months to come. With all who could help lending a hand, these simple habitations did not take long to put up, and in the course of a few days, each family had their own little dwelling, such as it was, and the whole party felt in better spirits than they had done for many a day.

Mr. Macrae's hut was one of the best of the little group. Taking the Highland cottage as his model, he constructed out of sods, wood, and canvas, the latter serving for the roof, a really snug affair with a 'butt' and a 'ben,' that gave him much satisfaction, and of which Hector was immensely proud, as it was the only 'residence' in the camp having two rooms.

Shelter having thus been secured, the next thing to be taken into account was the food question. Happily the answer to this lay right around them. The country was rich in game. From the frisky rabbit to the lordly buffalo, the prairie or the woods offered the hunter rich reward for his skill and patience.

To Hector's vast delight, his father bought a gun for him as well as for himself.

'Ye're a big laddie now,' said Mr. Macrae, his grave features lighting up with a rare smile of love and pride, as he watched the boy fondling the firearm as a mother would her baby, 'and it is right you should learn to use the gun. Be verra careful with it, laddie, and dinna forget that powder and bullets are very scarce, and maun na be wasted.'

Hector, of course, promised to be as economical as possible of ammunition, and, having thanked his father over and over again, rushed off to show his gun to the other boys in the party.

Naturally his first essay as a hunter was against the rabbits, that were quite plentiful in the clumps of trees which were a feature of the country. With Dour and Dandy bounding and barking beside him, and a young half-breed with whom he had picked up an acquaintance as his companion, he set off very proudly and confidently. Baptiste had promised to guide him to the best places for the bunnies, and Hector said confidently to his mother, as, with no small anxiety in her eye and voice, she was warning him to be careful in handling the gun: 'To be sure, mither, to be sure; I'll take the best o' care o' myself and the gun, and, mither, I'll bring ye back as many rabbits as I can carry.'

It was a boyish boast, for he had yet to shoot his first rabbit; but Hector had that happy quality, 'a gude conceit of himself,' and it was a great help to him in life.

Reaching the woods, the dogs, with the fine intelligence of their noble race, ceased bounding and barking aimlessly, and, with lowered heads, ran silently hither and thither seeking for game. They were not long in picking up a brace of bunnies that gave a fine chance for a shot ere they leaped away out of range.

'Shoot 'em—queek!' cried Baptiste excitedly.

Hector threw the gun to his shoulder with all speed, and pulled the trigger without stopping to take aim. Naturally the charge of shot buried itself harmlessly in the side of a tree, and the panic-stricken rabbits vanished unhurt.

'Bah!' cried Hector, in disgust at his miserable marksmanship. 'I did na touch them! Eh, Baptiste, but they're awfu' smart!'

Baptiste, considerately doing his best to smother a smile, nodded in assent and muttered something about trying again.

Another chance soon came, but Hector had no better luck, and he began to realize that shooting the long-eared, long-legged little creatures was not so easy as he had at first imagined. Having failed for the third time, he handed the gun, in disgust, to the half-breed, saying: 'Here, Baptiste, you try.'

Baptiste eagerly seized the fire-arm, and the next rabbit that was started he tumbled over neatly. Another and another was shot in quick succession, and then, returning the gun with a grateful smile, Baptiste said: 'Now you shoot.'

Hector's next attempt, happily, was not a miss, and encouraged by this, he kept on with varying success, until, between him and Baptiste, nearly a dozen rabbits had been bowled over. Then, satisfied with their bag, they hastened homeward to proudly exhibit the results of their day's hunting.

'Weel done, laddie, weel done!' exclaimed Mrs. Macrae, patting Hector fondly. 'Ye'll be getting us mony a gude dinner, I'm thinking.'

## CHAPTER IX

### The Buffalo Hunt

Soon after the arrival of the Selkirk settlers at Pembina, the people of the place set about preparing for the great fall buffalo hunt, and they cordially invited the Scots to join them.

The latter accepted the kind invitation eagerly, and all the men who had a little money to spare purchased guns and ammunition from the store-keepers.

For days the settlement and the Scotch camp were full of bustle. Ponies had to be provided for all the hunters, provisions prepared, as they would be away probably for ten days or so, and a number of other things attended to.

Mr. Macrae, having decided to go himself, at first wanted Hector to remain behind with his mother, but the boy pleaded so earnestly to be taken, and the loving, self-sacrificing mother, though she dreaded some mishap, so warmly supported his plea, that, to his abounding joy, his father consented.

It was an odd-looking cavalcade that set forth from Pembina on a bright, bracing October morning. The Scotsmen looked very awkward as, mounted upon Indian ponies, some of which were so small that the long legs of the riders almost touched the ground, they strove to carry their guns and keep their seats with some sort of dignity.

The Pembina folk, whether white or half-breed, were all good riders, and, having taken the pick of the ponies, as was only natural, looked remarkably well, while half-a-score Indians who were to act as guides galloped hither and thither, whooping and brandishing their guns by way of showing off.

Hector was delighted with the pony that fell to him, a sturdy, piebald creature, in quite good condition and full of life, but not at all vicious. No knight of old sallying forth in full armour could have felt prouder than did the Scotch laddie, as, with Dour and Dandy barking and pretending to bite the pony's nose, he took his place in the motley procession.

'Eh, father, but isn't this just grand!' he cried, enthusiastically, as he cantered beside his father, whose stalwart frame looked bigger than ever as he rode solemnly upon a steed that, assuredly, had never carried so weighty a rider before. 'See what a fine horse I have, and he's that good, too! Oh, but I hope we'll be sure to find the buffalo!'

'Ye need na fash yersel', laddie,' responded Mr. Macrae, with one of his wise, kind smiles. 'Ye'll have plenty of riding upon your little horse, and we're likely enough to find the buffalo, for these folk ken just where to look for them. So be patient an' ye'll have your desire.'

They travelled for two days due west, and then made camp on a lovely spot beside a clear flowing stream, where a clump of trees afforded them both shade and firewood. Farther west stretched the prairie where roamed the noble animal of whom they were in quest.

Soon after dawn the next morning the whole camp was astir, and after a hurried meal everybody got ready for the day's business. The weather was all that could be wished, and spirits ran high.

'Ye'll keep as near to me as ye can, eh, laddie?' said Mr. Macrae to Hector. 'There'll be mony ways o' getting hurt, e'en though ye may be careful.'

'Yes, father, I'll try,' answered Hector promptly, but in his heart he felt that once the chase really began his speedy pony, with only his light weight to carry, must soon run away from the scarcely larger animal that had his father's two hundred pounds upon his back.

A veteran hunter, nick-named Buffalo Carter, took entire charge of the hunt, and under his short, sharp commands the party was divided up, and sent off in different directions.

There were six in the party to which Mr. Macrae and Hector were assigned, and their captain—so to speak—was a shrewd, good-humoured half-breed, Narcisse by name, who had killed many score of buffalo in the course of his career. He had taken a liking to Hector, and he greatly admired Dour and Dandy, who, having vented their superfluous spirits, were now trotting quietly along beside Hector's pony, and he said to him in a sort of aside: 'You keep close to me, eh! *mon petit ami*. Kill big buffalo for sure, eh!'

Hector responded with a grateful smile. 'I will that if I can, but your fine horse will likely run away from my pony.'

'Non-non—that's all right,' laughed Narcisse, pleased at the compliment to his steed. 'You keep so near me as possible.'

The different groups of riders being about a quarter of a mile apart, the whole party covered a pretty wide stretch of prairie, as they steered due west at a leisurely lope.

The leader's plan of campaign was that, on a herd of buffalo being sighted, every effort should be made to surround it without stampeding it, and to this end instructions had been given to the captains of each band that not a shot should be fired until the signal was given by Carter himself.

On they loped over the billowy prairie, the tensivity of eagerness growing with each mile covered. Suddenly, Carter, who was a little in advance of all the others, pulled up on the hither side of a swale, and gave the signal agreed upon for a general halt. It passed from band to band almost instantaneously and the hunters became as motionless as statues.

Carter, slipping from his horse, went forward cautiously on foot some little distance, and then, dropping on all fours, peered over the top of a big swale beyond which, perhaps, was the big game they sought.

'He see 'em! Buffalo near now!' exclaimed Narcisse to Hector, as he tightened rein and grasped his gun more firmly. 'You be ready, eh?' Hector was too excited to do more than nod assent, as he kept his eyes following every movement of Carter.

The latter, evidently satisfied with his scrutiny, made haste back to his horse, and, having remounted, by making a sort of semaphore of himself, waving his arms in rapid fashion, signalled to the captains of each band.

They caught his meaning, and the next instant, all were in motion closing in toward their leader. When they were near enough he signalled for them to spread out in a single line, then, waving his gun above his head as a final signal for them to do likewise, he dashed forward at the full speed of his swift steed.

As they swept over the swale, the buffalo came in sight—a fine herd, numbering several hundred, grazing on the rich grass in utter unconsciousness of the human cyclone rushing upon them.

The wind blew from them towards the hunters, thus giving the latter, whose ponies' hoofs made scarcely any sound upon the thick turf, the opportunity to get quite close ere an old bull threw up his head, caught sight of the charging cavalcade, and instantly gave vent to a

thundering bellow of warning, that caused the whole herd to cease grazing and huddle together nervously.

Only for a moment did they thus hesitate. Then, moving as one huge black mass, they were off in full flight, with the hunters not a hundred yards behind.

Hector was amazed that such heavy, clumsy-looking creatures could get up such speed, and his excitement rose to its highest pitch as, urging his pony on by voice and heel, he strove to reach the rear of the panic-stricken herd.

Dour and Dandy, in no less a state of excitement, were already snapping at the heels of the buffalo, and enjoying themselves immensely.

Little by little Hector's clever pony, to which, by the way, he had given the appropriate name of Joseph, because his coat was of many colours, caught up to the herd, until, at last, with an extra spurt, he charged right into it, and Hector, not altogether to his comfort, found himself wedged in between two great shaggy animals, whose bloodshot eyes made them look very fierce, even if they were fleeing for their lives.

He did his best to check the speed of his pony, pulling upon the reins with all his might. But Joseph had got the bit in his teeth, and being in a regular frenzy of excitement, all Hector's efforts were fruitless. Not only so, but as the tremendous pace began to tell upon the buffalo, and their speed slackened, Joseph, who showed no signs of tiring, made his way deeper into the herd, until presently Hector was completely surrounded by the huge animals.

His situation was one of great peril, for, although the buffalo were too intent upon flight to pay him any attention, yet if by chance his pony were to stumble or put his foot in a gopher hole, bringing down himself and his rider, they would both infallibly be trampled out of all semblance of life under the hoofs of the mighty creatures.

But not for a moment did the boy lose his wits. Holding hard to the saddle he watched keenly for his chance of deliverance.

## CHAPTER X

### Lost on the Prairie

Not until he had become embedded as it were in the panic-stricken mass of buffalo did Mr. Macrae observe his son's peril.

At almost the same moment Narcisse caught sight of the boy, and, with a characteristic exclamation of horror, at once drove his horse into the herd, that he might, if possible, get to Hector's side.

'Take care! Take care!' he shouted with all his might, not recking that his voice was utterly lost in the thunder of the countless hoofs. 'Keep hold, eh!'

Mr. Macrae followed his example, and the two men plunged into the mob of terrified monsters, steering as best they could for the imperilled boy.

Meanwhile, Hector, who had kept both his head and his seat wonderfully, not forgetting the purpose of the whole affair, pointed his gun behind the shoulder of a fine fat buffalo and fired.

The muzzle of the gun was so close to the buffalo that the discharge burned the animal's hide, and the recoil almost knocked Hector out of his saddle.

But the bullet found its way to the great creature's heart, and, a moment later, down it went, to the delight of the young huntsman. The loud report was not without effect upon the buffalo that hemmed in Hector. They swerved off to right and left, giving him more room and thereby enabling Narcisse and his father to reach his side.

'Ah, laddie!' cried his father. 'I was in great fear for ye. Ye should na have gone into such danger. Be carefu' now, for ye're not yet out of harm's way.'

Hector nodded gaily in reply. He was so exultant over his success that he could think of nothing else for the moment.

As neither Narcisse nor Mr. Macrae had yet bagged their buffalo, they left Hector to stay beside his prize while they went on after the fleeing herd, upon whom the tremendous pace was beginning to tell.

The reports of the guns followed fast upon each other, as the different members of the hunting party, choosing a fine fat cow, or a prime young bull, brought down their victim with unerring aim.

At last the pursuit of the herd ended, and the hunters returned to take stock of results. These were certainly satisfactory: nearly a score of buffalo, all in the best of condition, had been secured, and a supply of food that would keep the whole settlement for many weeks was ensured.

Very proud and content was Buffalo Carter, and all the other members of the party, particularly Hector, whose buffalo was as fine a specimen as any of the others.

'Eh, but it was a warm, stirrin' experience,' remarked Mr. Macrae, with emphasis. 'I never expected to see the like of it. 'Tis a wonderful country, this, and there's a powerful lot to be learned. But I'm right glad I've come, laddie,' he went on, laying his hand fondly upon Hector's shoulder, 'and with the favour of God we shall yet do better here than e'er we could in the land we left.'

This was a good deal for him to say, but the excitement of the hunt had for the time swept away his reserve, and he was in almost as high spirits as Hector.

So soon as they had rested a little, the buffalo hunters set to work to skin the buffalo, and to cut the rich meat into long strips, which, after being dried in the sun, were then minced as small as possible, and so made into 'pemmican,' which was then packed away for use in the winter.

Of course, there was great feasting meanwhile, and the special tit-bits, such as the tongues and the humps, were cooked and eaten with the keenest relish.

Dour and Dandy were so well supplied with bits of juicy steak, or well-covered bones, that they were in danger of overfeeding, and Mr. Macrae had to limit their allowance.

It took several days to prepare the pemmican, and then, laden with it and with the buffalo-skins which would at leisure be made into the warmest of robes, the whole party moved slowly back to Pembina.

'Eh! but I'm glad I killed one myself,' said Hector to his father as they rode along together, 'for now I'll have a buffalo robe of my own, and that will be fine when the winter comes, won't it, father?'

So indeed it proved. There was many a night during the long cold winter at Pembina, when Hector, lying snug and warm under his buffalo-robe, had reason to be thankful for the success of his shot.

The reception of the hunting-party at Pembina was a royal one, and the feasting that followed was shared in by all. Then the remainder of the meat was stored away for the winter.

As already mentioned, Mr. Macrae had taken more pains and spent somewhat more money upon the hut that sheltered his family, and now, having got everything fixed to his satisfaction, with that fore-thought which was one of his distinguishing traits, he resolved to secure a supply of firewood for the winter.

A fine 'bunch of timber,' as it was called locally, stood not more than a mile away, and, hiring a horse and cart from one of the residents, Mr. Macrae, accompanied by his whole family—for it was beautiful weather, being the so-called Indian summer—began his attack upon the trees.

'I'll cut them doon, laddie,' he said to Hector, 'and ye'll chop off the branches, and so we'll just divide the wark between us.'

This arrangement suited Hector, and he did his part faithfully, lopping off the branches so that the trunk itself could be cut up into suitable lengths.

None of the trees were large. The country is not favourable to forest giants, and the wood was fairly soft, so that Hector's task was by no means beyond his powers.

The work went on steadily from day to day, and Mrs. Macrae viewed with the approval and satisfaction of a good housewife the growing pile of fuel that would be right at hand through the long winter.

'Ye always were a good provider, Andrew,' she said, giving her stalwart husband a look of ineffable love and pride. 'Nane o' yer charge will ever want while ye're about.'

From under his shaggy brows, Andrew Macrae returned the look of love and pride; for to him there was no woman so bonnie or so wise as his gude wife, but he pretended to make light of the compliment, saying he was but doing his duty.

The wood-pile at the hut had grown big enough, and they were making their last trip to the timber. Mrs. Macrae had not accompanied them, but little Ailie would not be left at home. She enjoyed too much the ride out on the empty cart, and then back again, perched triumphantly on top of the load, to lose the last chance for it. So father had to yield to her pretty pleadings,

although he would have preferred her remaining with her mother.

The father and son worked very hard that day, and during the afternoon got so engrossed in the completion of their task, that they quite forgot the little girl.

Then, left to her own resources, Ailie, as sturdy a child for her years as ever stepped, wandered off over the prairie in the opposite direction to home, her little head filled with some foolish notion of getting nearer to the sunset.

On and on she went, forgetful of everything but the beauty of the western sky, which had so fascinated her, and it was because her blue eyes were intent upon this, and not upon what was under her feet, that she did not notice the coulee, or break in the prairie, into which she fell with a sharp cry of fright.

Happily it was soft earth at the bottom of the coulee, and Ailie was not injured in the least by her fall. But she was terrified beyond measure at her situation, and screamed for her father and brother with the full strength of her lungs.

But, lying as she was at the bottom of the coulee, a dozen feet or more below the surface of the prairie, her most vigorous efforts could not have been heard many yards away.

There the poor little lonely frightened girl wept and wailed and cried out for her father and Hector, until at last, in sheer exhaustion, she lapsed into a sort of stupor and knew no more.

## CHAPTER XI

### The Losing and Finding of Ailie

It was not until they had completed the day's task and the wood was all ready to be loaded into the cart, that Mr. Macrae missed Ailie.

Not seeing her about, he called out:

'Ailie, Ailie, my bairnie, where are you? Come ye here noo!'

Then, getting no response, he began to call louder and louder, and to go this way and that among the trees, looking anxiously for the golden-haired lassie, while Hector ran out on the prairie calling with all his might:

'Ailie! Ailie! come here.' Still no answer, and as the sun had set and it was already beginning to grow dusk, the anxiety of father and brother became intense.

Little Ailie was lost—lost on the prairie—and in a short time night would be upon them. Oh, what was to be done?

After the first hurried rushing hither and thither without avail, Mr. Macrae, realizing that it would be necessary to carry on the search on a larger scale, called Hector to him and said:

'We must have help. I'll go and get our friends. Ye bide here. Maybe Ailie will come back of herself.'

So saying, Mr. Macrae set off on foot across the prairie at a swift pace, far faster than could have been made by the heavily-loaded cart.

Thus left alone, Hector, in spite of himself, began to feel nervous. Snow, the first of the year, began falling softly and silently.

For some time Hector sat waiting, then the happy thought came to him to set the dogs on Ailie's trail. He took from his pocket a ribbon the child had dropped the day before, and showing it to the clever creatures, told them to 'find Ailie.' They seemed to understand at once what was expected of them, and set out on the vanishing, whitening trail, Hector keeping up with them as best he might.

Soon after this, Mr. Macrae and his party arrived, each man bearing a lantern or torch. They were greatly dismayed to find Hector also missing, and doubly hastened their preparations for the search. Under Mr. Macrae's directions, the party, leaving their horses tied to the trees, until they had first made search on foot, spread out in a long line, ten yards or so separating each man from his neighbour, and proceeded to make a thorough search of the prairie.

It was a weird night, and one such as never before had been seen there—the long line of lights bobbing about as the searchers moved through the darkness.



Meanwhile, Hector's search was being diligently made. Dour and Dandy hesitated once or twice as if puzzled, but in a moment trotted on again, and before very long they led Hector to the coulee. The excited boy fell rather than climbed down, and made straight for a sort of pocket in the bank where he could hear the dogs sniffing.

And there lay Ailie! Curled up like a kitten, and so motionless that, for a moment, Hector's heart stood still with fear. Then a quick move forward in the dim light, and his hand was among the clustered curls, and touching the warm, soft neck.

Ailie was alive! hurt, perhaps, but alive, and in the greatness of his joy the boy sent forth a shout that caused Dour and Dandy above to break forth into an 'exposition of barking' that attracted the attention of several of the searchers, making them wonder if the wise dogs might not have discovered something.

Hector picked up Ailie with the utmost tenderness. The child, aroused from her stupor, gave a little cry of fear, then threw her arms about her brother's neck, and burst into tears.

He hugged, and patted, and soothed her with loving words. 'And are ye no hurt anywhere?' he asked her, half in wonder, half in joy. 'Just to think of it. Oh, but the good God took wonderfu' care of you. Now just you bide there a minute, and I'll try to let them know I found ye.'

Ailie, puzzled but obedient, stood as she was directed, and Hector began to shout with all the vigour of his healthy young lungs. 'Hi there! Come here! I've found her! She's not hurt.'

The clear strong voice rose out of the coulee, and was first heard by those who had noticed the eager barking of Dour and Dandy. 'Ah! ha!' exclaimed one of them, Black Rory Macdonald, his shaggy face lighting up eagerly. 'Come awa', there,'—and off he went as fast as his mighty legs could carry him. He had no trouble in locating the dogs, and holding his lantern over the edge of the little hollow, he at once caught sight of Hector and Ailie.

'The gude Lord be praised!' he cried fervently. 'The bairnie's found, and there's nae hurt upon her.'

His joyous shouts rapidly brought the other searchers, Mr. Macrae being among the first to reach the spot. Without loss of time, the boy and girl were lifted out of the coulee, to be overwhelmed with demonstrations of delight and affection from men who ordinarily kept their feelings very strictly under control.

'And noo awa' tae yer mither—yer poor distracted mither,' broke in Mr. Macrae, gathering up Ailie and starting towards the place where the horses were tethered. With long impatient steps he swept over the ground, and, taking the first horse he came to, put Ailie upon the saddle before him, and galloped off for the encampment, where, with brimming eyes and trembling lips, he placed the child in the mother's arms, saying softly: 'Praise God, Mary, oor bairnie's given back to us.'

The winter came soon after this, and it was well for the Highland folk that they had at home been inured to the cold, for Jack Frost certainly did not spare them at Pembina.

The clear, dry atmosphere misled them at first. They would not realize how cold it really was, until nose or cheeks were nipped. And more than one of them had a narrow escape from being frozen to death.

Yet, upon the whole, the winter passed quite comfortably, albeit the question of food sometimes became a pressing one, when the hunters had been unsuccessful for a time.

One day, Narcisse, who took a lively interest in Hector, rushed to tell him that a great moose had been seen in the woods to the north, and that he was going out next day to hunt for him. He invited Hector to go with him.

Of course, the boy jumped at the invitation, and, his father not objecting, for he had considerable confidence in Narcisse, arrangements for the enterprise were made at once.

## CHAPTER XII

### The Moose Hunt

Mr. Macrae allowed Hector to take Dour and Dandy, and, as Narcisse had two good dogs of his own, they were well provided. The only other member of the party was Narcisse's half-brother, Baptiste, not equal to him in intelligence and experience, but a strong and good-natured fellow, who would take his share of work or danger.

They took a horse apiece, not to ride, for of course they travelled on snowshoes, but to carry their blankets, buffalo-ropes, cooking gear, etc.

Hector was a very happy boy as he set forth on a superb winter morning clad in the warmest of clothing, and striding along upon his snow-shoes, in the use of which he had become quite expert.

His mother watched with eyes in which there was anxiety as well as admiration and love, but all she said was: 'Be verra carefu', laddie, and do whatever Narcisse bids you.'

They steered north-east from Pembina and travelled all day without interruption, except for the necessary mid-day meal.

The country now appeared to change somewhat. The deep woods had given place to rolling prairie, broken at the sky-line by low poplar bluffs. By nightfall they had reached the frozen marshy borders of the Roseau River. East from its waters there stretched hundreds of miles of spruce forest, home of the moose, caribou, and the great timber wolf. A rough camp was quickly made, and in the morning the hunters pursued their way again through the deep evergreens. In a short time more they would have reached the hunting-ground, when an accident occurred, that almost caused them to turn back empty-handed.

Narcisse, on his snow-shoes, in stepping over a half-burned log, fell forward, wrenching his knee so badly that on rising he could scarcely walk. All thought of the hunt had now to be given up, but as they were sadly retracing their steps, they espied the smoke of a tepee at the end of a small clearing.

A few minutes later, and to their joy they were in the broad tepee of their former friend, Wikonaie, who was himself, at that moment, preparing to start on a hunt.

Failing Narcisse, nothing would have suited Hector better than to have Wikonaie accompany them. Narcisse was left in Wikonaie's tepee in charge of the young Indians, and the horses were also left at the camp, as well as Narcisse's two dogs, who answered ill to orders from any one except their master. Then the party eagerly set-out.

The hours were passing without any sign of game, when Wikonaie gave a cry of joy. 'See!' he cried, 'you know what that means? Eh, I will show you a great moose soon.'

Their eyes followed the direction of his finger, and there, plainly printed in the snow, which was softer here, was the great footprint which, from its size, could be no other than that of the quarry they sought. They exchanged exclamations of surprise and delight, and then Wikonaie, bidding them tighten their belts, for there would be no dinner that day, gave out his plan of campaign.

The moose was ahead of him, perhaps only a mile or two; they must push forward with utmost speed and at the same time utmost caution. For this purpose, Wikonaie would lead the way, Baptiste follow, and Hector bring up the rear, keeping Dour and Dandy at heel until their services should be required.

Thus, in Indian file, they went on for quite another mile, when Wikonaie, with a low exclamation of warning, suddenly sank to his knees, at the same time pointing to something under the tree that his sharp eyes at that moment caught.

Coming up to him, the others imitated his attitude, and peered in the direction indicated, until presently they also made out a great dark mass, half-obsured by the tree-trunks, but manifestly not motionless.

'We come up to heem behind,' said Wikonaie, in a dramatic whisper, 'not in front, but on de side. You follow me!'

With the infinite care of the experienced hunter, Wikonaie made his way in a sort of semi-circle which, at the end, brought him within firing distance of the moose, and almost straight behind him. As the wind blew straight from the moose towards the hunters, things seemed very much in their favour.

'Ah, now, we must be ver' careful, ver' careful, not make no noise,' whispered Wikonaie to his companions, who nodded eager assent. Yard by yard they crept upon their unconscious prey. The giant creature had struck a small bunch of particularly young and juicy trees, and he was enjoying them to his heart's content.

When Wikonaie deemed they were sufficiently near, he gave the signal for them to be ready to fire. The next moment the woods rang out with a strange wild shout, which would have startled anything in the way of man or beast: and the moose, thus rudely interrupted in his rich repast, flung up his head with a snort, partly of fear and partly of defiance.

This was the moment for which Wikonaie was waiting. 'Now fire!' he cried, drawing the trigger of his own gun as he spoke.

Almost as one, the three reports startled the echoes of the woods, and the moose, suddenly wheeling round, the incarnation of fury and of fright, was met by the two dogs, Dour and Dandy, who sprang gallantly at him, barking and leaping for his great nose. Bewildered by this novel attack, he thought flight the best thing, and sped off into the woods at an amazing pace. Indeed, he went so fast that Hector, who had fully expected to see the great creature drop instantly, began to fear lest he might not be mortally wounded after all, and they should lose him in the woods. Wikonaie's countenance showed no such anxiety. True the moose had disappeared with the dogs at his heels, but he left on the spotless snow the sure sign of a stricken animal—great splashes of red, which told that he could not go very far.

'We follow heem now, eh?' cried Wikonaie, rapidly reloading his gun, the others doing the same. Off they set along the blood-marked trail, and, about the end of a mile, Wikonaie gave a shout of joy, for there, just ahead of him, fallen at the foot of an unusually large tree, was their quarry, to all appearances dead. Now, for the first time, Wikonaie showed a rashness which he had not before; for dropping his gun, and drawing his hunting-knife, he went triumphantly up to the fallen monarch, and waved the keen steel above his massive antlers in token of victory.

The next instant, with a roar of startling ferocity, the moose sprang to his feet, hurling Wikonaie over on his back, right in front of him, where a single stroke from one of his tremendous forelegs would have made of the Indian a bleeding lifeless hulk.

Fortunate indeed was the presence of the dogs, Dour and Dandy, as they, realizing the crisis, sprang at the moose's head with utter fearlessness, and one of them succeeded in securing a temporary hold upon the thick neck. This bewildered the monster for a moment, and that gave Hector an opportunity, to which the boy, all of a tremble as he was, happily proved equal.

To free himself from the dogs the moose tossed his head high in the air, thereby flinging Dour to one side, but at the same time exposing in the completest way his magnificent breast. Hardly pausing to take aim, Hector fired, and the bullet went straight to the heart of the noble creature.

With a despairing bellow, almost like a great human groan, he once more sank at the foot of the tree, this time to rise no more.

How those three rejoiced over their great triumph, Baptiste claiming that his first shot had been fatal; Wikonaie proud of his little Ti-ti-pu, now a strong young brave, skilled in the chase, and a man to be feared in war: and Hector, thankful for the opportunity which had enabled him to save his Indian friend.

Late as the hour was, they decided to return to Wikonaie's tepee, where half the night was spent in extolling Ti-ti-pu's prowess and further cementing the friendship so strangely begun.

And not alone was Hector benefited, but Wikonaie was able to promise that the settlers could return unmolested to their farms in the summer, partly because of his own feeling, and partly because the North-Westerns had ceased to bribe the Indians to make trouble, and they required little persuading to follow the leadership of Wikonaie, their chief.

But the settlers still had a desperately hard time of it, sometimes being reduced to no other food than the wild turnip found in great quantities in that locality, and at the end of the second summer, nearly all of them returned to Pembina for the winter.

This sort of thing went on for several years, until finally, having received further reinforcements from Lord Selkirk, they really began to take root, and a comfortable, self-sustaining settlement grew up, which in large part realized the hopes which had drawn them from the Old World to the New.

Through it all, Hector was a loyal, obedient son. He shared in all his father's toil, did his best to brighten little Ailie's play hours, and altogether bore himself with infinite credit.

None of the Scotch settlers struck deeper roots into the country than did the Macraes, but this story cannot follow them any farther. Suffice it to say, their descendants are some of the finest men and women, not to mention boys and girls, in the Canadian North-West.

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