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MENOTAH

A Tale of the Riel Rebellion

By

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LONDON

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CONTENTS

Part I—THE HEART'S JOY

[CHAPTER I](#)—THE FOREST
[CHAPTER II](#)—MENOTAH—HEART THAT KNOWS NOT SORROW
[CHAPTER III](#)—THE BUDDING OF A PASSION
[CHAPTER IV](#)—THE FORT
[CHAPTER V](#)—THE FIGHT
[CHAPTER VI](#)—THE BREAKING OF THE DAWN

Part II—THE HEART'S GRIEF

[CHAPTER I](#)—THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE
[CHAPTER II](#)—THE COMING OF DAVE
[CHAPTER III](#)—THE RIVALS
[CHAPTER IV](#)—WHITE WINS
[CHAPTER V](#)—PACTOLUS
[CHAPTER VI](#)—DENTON'S DESCENT
[CHAPTER VII](#)—AN INCIDENT
[CHAPTER VIII](#)—THE PIERIAN SPRING
[CHAPTER IX](#)—THE LAUGH THAT DIED

Part III—THE HEART'S PEACE

[CHAPTER I](#)—LAMONT
[CHAPTER II](#)—THE LIFE-OBJECT
[CHAPTER III](#)—RESURRECTION
[CHAPTER IV](#)—CHARACTER
[CHAPTER V](#)—THE DEAD HEART
[CHAPTER VI](#)—DURING THE DAY
[CHAPTER VII](#)—DISCOVERY
[CHAPTER VIII](#)—RETRIBUTION

PREFATORY NOTE

In the following story of the Canadian North-West Rebellion, Louis Riel—leader of a hopeless enterprise—has not been introduced as an active character. He was himself so colourless, so commonplace, that a true picture must have been uninteresting, while a fictitious drawing would have been unsatisfactory and out of place with the plan of this story. He was much like his brother, who lives to-day on an unpretentious farm in the Red River Valley, dull-witted, heavy-featured and obtuse—in fact, a French half-breed of the ordinary stamp.

So the plot of this work tends more towards the study of passion, and dwells upon what was undoubtedly one of the principal reasons for the revolt, viz., the unscrupulous treatment of the Indian women by the white invaders. The 'Governor and Company of Adventurers of England trading into Hudson's Bay,' generally and more commonly known by the simpler title of the 'Hudson's Bay Company,' had well paved the way for this miserable laxity in matters of morality.

The mighty shadow which looms behind this tale of the Rebellion is that of the loyal Archbishop Taché. He it was, though the fact has not been recognised generally, who, almost unaided, crushed the rising spirit of independence in half-breeds and Indians, and brought the insurrection to a close. Surely it is not too late to do justice to the memory of this truly unselfish prelate.

The writer was present in the riverside town of St Boniface on a certain still evening during the August of 1894. There all the houses, and even the trees that lined the streets, were heavily draped in black; men and women passed slowly with heads uncovered and attitude of grief; it was as though each had lost his or her nearest and dearest relative. There was not a sound along that little town of mourning.

For the Archbishop lay dead in the Cathedral. Later, when the sun was setting over this place of universal grief, the writer came within the dark building, crept up a winding stairway, to find himself confronted suddenly by a singularly solemn spectacle. Before the altar, robed in full pontificals, sat in State the dead Archbishop, while lamps flickered solemnly, and muttered intercessions arose from the trembling lips of a ring of kneeling priests.

This strange silence, broken only by the whisperings, or occasional deep gasps of breath; the feeble glimmerings of lights along the rapidly darkening scene; the presence of the mighty dead still presiding in the second Cathedral that his efforts had raised^[1]—all this made up a spectacle dramatically impressive, and one not readily to be forgotten.

The writer came at length to the side of the dead prelate, and bent to reverently kiss the cold gloved hand of the mighty dead. Then he departed, with a silent resolve to do such justice as he could to the memory of this beloved Father and Pastor, who had worked so nobly for the welfare of the country of his adoption.

Menotah's story is a sad one, yet, for purposes of truth, not sad enough. The colours might well be painted with a far darker brush, but the book would then probably be deemed too ghastly and too realistic. The steady march of civilisation is pushing farther north each year, while Menotah's history is repeated daily. The only thing which can free that wonderful land from the vice and oppression of its masters is the building of the Hudson's Bay Railway. About forty miles of the track (from Winnipeg to St Laurent on Lake Manitoba) have been constructed, but the rails lie rotting in the prairie grass. This line would open up a country of boundless timber and mineral resources, and might well create many a fresh industry.

The characters in this work are for the most part actual life studies. None are overdrawn, not even Peter Denton, least of all McAuliffe.

The local colour is simply so much word photography. The particular fort on the Great Saskatchewan has been described with absolute accuracy of detail. The river pool (Chap. II.) is there; also the island in mid-stream, where the fight actually occurred; the great rapids, the oil swamp, the log wharf—all are there. In fact, description and dialogue has entailed upon the writer rather an effort of memory than any strain upon the imagination.

[1] The first Cathedral was destroyed by fire immediately after completion, when all the parish records were destroyed.

PART I

THE HEART'S JOY

CHAPTER I

THE FOREST

'There will be full moon to-night, and a south wind. Then the evil one will steal from the marshes. For there will be war and fire. War and Fire!'

Within that deep green shade of the forest, amidst the picturesque sweepings of the foliage, the heat rays of the sun could scarcely be felt, for odorous firs overspread their thick tresses above. Here, in this strange, peaceful retreat, active squirrels leapt with mathematical accuracy from bough to bough; mosquito hawks, in their green and gold glories, cut through the slanting beams of light with a sharp hissing of wings; erratic locusts, on a lower plane, hurled their aimless bodies clumsily into space, falling wherever destiny might direct.

The speaker remained invisible, while the lingering sounds of the joyous voice died slowly away. A young man, who heard the sudden cry from the heart of the surrounding silence, started and listened eagerly for an approaching footstep, which came not. Only the happy echo broke upon the calm in a full tide of harmony; this merged into a half gasp of musical laughter; then came peace again as the last vibration settled into silence.

The listener wondered, then became interested. There had been no flaw in the musical cadence of that cry. The fiery utterance—bearing a latent warning—proceeded surely from the heart of one who found life a time of joy, who gloried in the exultation of overflowing vitality, who was also intoxicated by an over-gift of health. This passing sound, like the flitting shadow cast by an invisible presence, contained a message of youth's hot passion, of a self-conscious rapture of beauty. Those words fell from the lips of one who had made no acquaintance with sorrow.

The expectant, yet disappointed, listener shifted the rifle to his shoulder and rubbed his hands, which were hot and moist, upon a bunch of flowering moss. He seemed uneasy, if his feelings might be judged by the anxious attention he gave to each slight movement in the adjoining bush. But after a period of waiting he drew himself up, inclined his head forward, and listened attentively. Then he nodded and smiled in self-satisfied manner, listened again, and finally began to work his way through the thick undergrowth with the subtle motions of the practised bushman. Perhaps a rippling echo of that musical voice had travelled faintly down the wind and touched his ear.

He disappeared, while the boundless forest of the Great Saskatchewan whispered drearily beneath the soft-stirring breeze of evening.

Lonely, somewhat wild, yet certainly there was a rough grandeur in this particular arrangement of nature's handiwork; a stern beauty, which must have fascinated the hunter; a wonderful blending of colours, which would have caused the heart of the painter to despair. Paths, in the ordinary sense of the term, were there none, though a sinuous, barely defined trail, where mocassined feet passed occasionally, writhed dimly away here and there. The venturesome explorer who plunged into these unknown recesses chose out his own particular route, fought a way through the entanglement of undergrowth, while none might ever follow in his footsteps.

Tangled masses and bewildering festoons of drooping boughs, tinted to many a different shade of green; black and grey rocks; red sand stretches, surmounted by wire grass or huge ant-hills; octopus-like bushes, thorn-protected and thickly covered with red berries. Such were the principal objects of distinction beneath a solemn green canopy, which spread like some threatening cloud overhead.

Crack!

Wild echoes fled shrieking through the forest, while a pale mist of blue smoke rose, flouted upward fantastically, curled and lengthened—then finally melted.

Just before that sharp, whip-like report had cut the air, a splendid buck deer sprang from the thick of the sweeping branches out into the open. Away it bounded, with the ease and certainty of a well-aimed arrow, over a ridge of splintered rocks. Away—across to the opposite shadows, where lay shelter and life.

But then the weapon screamed death, and spat the bullet forth.

While still in the air, the graceful creature's body stiffened, as though each muscle had been thrilled and stretched by an electric current. The nimble feet touched the ground, but not now to dart away in fresh flight. The deer tottered forward, because the impulse to seek shelter was a dying passion, but the slender legs gave way. After staggering blindly, it fell to its knees; then, after swaying backwards and forwards with pitiful gasping, it finally rolled over upon the moss bed with a groan, while warm blood trickled cruelly over the short soft fur.

'Good shot, Winton! You took him fine, boy.'

Then two men stepped from the bushes. The one, who thus spoke his opinion of the other's aim,

was an elderly man, thin and dark featured. His somewhat sallow face was decorated by nature with a grizzled beard, while more than an occasional grey hair might have been observed beneath the rim of his felt hat. Extremely dark eyes and heavy mouth revealed the fact of Indian ancestry.

His companion, scarcely more than a boy, was unmistakably English. The breeze stirred his fair hair at an altitude of over six feet above ground; age could not claim from him more than twenty-one years.

'Shot a bit too far back, though,' continued Sinclair the hunter. 'Don't say it wasn't difficult to kill from your position, and you took him on the jump.'

'Dead, isn't it?' said Winton, blowing down his rifle barrel.

The hunter laughed. 'No, sir. Get over there with your knife, and finish him. Don't leave the poor brute to bleed and sob himself to death.'

The other slung the rifle to his shoulder, drew a long hunting knife, then made across the open space. He knelt by the side of the panting creature, wound his fingers round a branching antler, and pulled the head round to inflict the *coup de grâce*.

Sinclair leaned up against a rock, his arms folded, a smug smile gradually widening across his features.

'You shouldn't mutilate,' he called out carelessly. 'Shoot to kill outright—specially deer. It's bad policy to only wound a buck.' Then he chuckled as he perceived the statuesque position of his companion.

With a necessary hardening of the heart—for the stabbing of a deer in cold blood makes the man of refinement feel strangely a murderer—Winton raised his knife and prepared to cut across the long veins swelling at the side of the palpitating neck. The blade descended, his grasp tightened, the steel flashed down—when suddenly the graceful creature lifted its head with a dying effort, and gazed with great, suffering eyes full into his face. It was then that the young man paused, while the dry chuckle broke out behind.

For in that seemingly unequal contest the animal won. All strength fled from the murdering hand when its owner beheld those dark fixed eyes of his piteous victim. They were large and luminous, while tear drops of pain trickled along and blackened the surrounding fur. The small black nostrils quivered pitifully in death gaspings. A heartbroken torture overspread the face, which reproached him for the cruel deed of his hand.

A minute later the knife fell unused to the ground. A sickening revulsion of feeling followed, sweeping over him with overpowering force, combined with weariness and a hatred of life. His eyes could not alter the direction of their gaze, for they were held and fascinated by that dark, reproachful glance, as a bird is rendered helpless by the snake.

'Got it,' muttered Sinclair. 'Got it bad. But it will be good for the boy.'

That strange malady, the deer fever, had a firm hold upon Winton. His entire body became seized with violent ague. He trembled with cold, though conscious at the same time that his hands and feet were burning. His quick breath stabbed him with hot gasps. Moisture broke out on his forehead as a horrible vision presented itself to the imagination. He himself was the victim, while the conqueror lay before him. His only chance for life lay in immediate flight, but his feet were chained together and fastened to the ground. He must therefore remain and die.

'It's what I looked for,' muttered Sinclair into his beard. Then he came forward across the open space, and picked up the knife.

As he bent over the deer, and as the animal resigned its life with a deep sob, the man in the trance revived and gazed blankly, first at the dead creature stretched beside him, then at the grinning face of his companion.

'What in the devil's name have you been up to, Sinclair?' he said stupidly.

'Up to, eh?' remarked the hunter slowly, with evident enjoyment, as he wiped the knife. 'What are you doing anyhow, lying around there half asleep? Good sort of buck killer you are!'

The young man pulled himself up. 'You've been fooling.'

'I'm a clever chap, then. Reckon I could knock you over in that shape? Well, well, to think of a strong young fellow like you being beaten by a harmless sort of half dead beast.'

'You don't say it was the deer?' asked the young man, still dazed.

The hunter laughed. 'That's what. You had the fever, and as strong as I've ever seen it take a man.'

'Well—that beats all,' said Winton, hanging on each syllable.

'Told you it wasn't well to wound and not kill. Guess you won't fix another for quite a time.'

'How's that? Lots of them around, aren't there?'

'I reckon,' said the other drily. 'Question is whether you'll be able to shoot when you sight one. It'll worry you a bit. I'm thinking.'

Winton stretched his long limbs. 'It takes me all my time to understand this. Course I've heard of the fever—lots of times, but I didn't put much on hunters' talk—'

'And now you've had it.'

'It doesn't last, though?'

'Won't with you, I reckon. I've known some taken with it when they weren't any better than boys, and as they got older it didn't show any wearing off. Whenever they'd start to shoot at a deer, the fever would come up as bad as ever.'

'But it doesn't happen to everyone?'

'I guess it's the exception. I've never had it. Some say it's no bad sign when a young fellow gets knocked over with it. For it's generally men that are good shots who get bothered with the fever. Another thing—if a fellow goes to knife the beast with any sort of pity—you had, I know, for I watched you close—he's gone. You're feeling right again, eh?'

The other assented. 'It goes off as quickly as it comes on, anyhow.'

'And leaves a man none the worse,' added the hunter. Then he hastened to change the subject, as he noticed the gradual blackening of the surrounding shadows.

'See here, Winton, it's getting sort of late. Alf will be bothering, if we're not back by dark. Suppose you wait here, while I make tracks for the horses?'

'There's an hour of daylight yet,' said Winton. 'Let's sit down for a smoke. There's lot of time.'

Sinclair glanced round a little uneasily. 'Make it half a pipeful, and I don't mind joining you. I'm sort of hungry for a bit of plug. But, I tell you straight, I'm not wanting to hang around here long after sunset.'

Winton chuckled. 'My turn now,' he said. 'It's my laugh on you. Why, you're a regular old woman to-day, Sinclair. What's the racket now?'

The hunter bit at his moustache. 'Well, it's this way—I'm a little scared of the *nitchies*.'

'Pshaw! That's about the tenth time to-day you've shammed fright. Don't see why we should want to bother, just because the breeds 'way down south are painting their faces and making alarming fools of themselves. What's wrong with your courage, Sinclair?'

'That's all right,' said the other sullenly; then paused, while a dim blue flame shot upward from his pipe. He seated himself on the white moss near his companion, then placed a hand upon his knee. 'Tell you, Winton, this rebellion in the Territories is going to be something worth jotting down in a book of history.'

'Don't think much of it,' said the other contemptuously.

'That's because you don't know the people. I do, because I'm descended from them in a way myself. And I know Riel. Have seen him, spoken to him, more than that—I've fought with him knife to knife before to-day. Nothing's going to stop him, except a chance bullet, or the few yards of rope your countrymen are fond of allowing any poor devil who tries to get the better of them. Give me a match.'

Winton complied, while the hunter continued, 'You don't think much of the rebellion, eh? Still there's a pretty thick crowd of half crazy Indians and breeds. Darn me if I know what the opposition consists of.'

'Well, I do,' put in Winton. 'What's the matter with the militia and the police? They're good enough for you.'

'Yes, they're first-class bullet stoppers. Fine, targets, with their red coats, for the boys to drive their bullets into. Pshaw! The soldiers can't begin to save the country. I've not a bit of use for the farmers and settlers. But I allow it can be done, Winton. There's one man—a single man, with an almighty lot of power, who can swamp up the whole rebellion as I'd swallow a dram of whisky. Question is whether he'll do it.'

'Who are you talking of? Not General—'

'Pshaw! Not that sneaking coward. The man I'm thinking on is general of the Church, not the army. I reckon, Winton, that Archbishop Taché is the only one who can put a stopper to this rising. What?'

'Well, if that's so, Sinclair, what's it got to do with us 'way up here?'

The hunter pulled strongly at his pipe, then spat violently on the moss. 'You don't see it, eh? I'll show you, then. I'm as darned sure as though he'd told me himself that Riel means to stamp the whole crowd of whites clean out of the land. Course he can't be around every place himself, so he just sends round messages all over this country.'

'Telling the tribes to rise?'

'And clean out the whites in their district. They're bound to obey, for they look upon Riel as a sort of nickle-plate god. Besides, they're scared of his vengeance if they refuse and he comes off victorious. They're all dead sure he can't be beaten anyhow.'

'You think we shall have some sport round here?' asked Winton, lazily.

'I don't know anything for certain; but it's likely enough.'

'I don't think so. The *nitchies* around here are not well armed. We should be able to beat them off easily enough if they did attack the fort. Your pipe's gone out.'

Sinclair leaned forward. 'Give me a match.' Then he continued in a changed tone, 'You wouldn't talk like that if you knew everything. You only see Riel. You don't know a darned thing about anything behind—who's stirring him up, who's supplying the brains to run this rebellion, and all the rest of it. I tell you, I know more than any man living, and when the time comes—by God, I'll use my knowledge.'

He drew the match savagely along his breeches, and relighted his pipe.

'You're a lot safer up here than you'd be down in Manitoba.'

'I'd like to be back,' said the hunter; 'and I'm going by next boat, whether the hunting's good or bad. I'd no right to leave the wife and children in these bad times. How can I tell what's going on while I'm away up here? If they were all dead and planted, I'd be none the wiser.'

Winton stretched himself, accompanying the action with a subdued laugh.

'You're a terrible croaker, Sinclair. Why don't you look on the bright side? It's just as easy, and a lot pleasanter.'

The old hunter rose. 'Don't know how it is, Winton, but I feel sort of low-spirited just now.'

'That's something new. What's wrong?'

'Uneasy, I guess. Well, I'm off. It'll be dark presently.'

He picked up his rifle and prepared to move. 'I've no use for fooling around in the forest at this time. It isn't healthy. There's too much mischief drifting up, and a fellow never knows when it's going to break. You'll wait here till I'm up with the horses, eh?'

'I'll watch the meat and finish my smoke.'

'That's it. Guess you know which way to steer for the fort, eh? Make north-west till you come to the big fir that the *nitchies* call the death tree. You can just catch the top of the flagstaff from there, if you get up before the light goes out.'

'I know,' said Winton, quietly. 'But what are you telling me for?'

'So as you'd be all right if we got parted. Wouldn't do for you to get lost in the forest if anything happened to me.'

'What in the devil's likely to happen?'

'Nothing, I reckon. Still, it's good to keep on the right side. Well, don't fall asleep over your smoke; keep the rifle handy.' The next minute his spare figure disappeared amongst the bushes.

Left to himself, Winton pulled at his pipe and reflected upon the words of his late companion.

On ordinary occasions the old hunter was never accustomed to suffer from any such lack of courage, therefore his parting words became the more significant. Then there was another thing to remember: Sinclair, himself of mixed blood, understood the native character thoroughly. On his own confession, he possessed more knowledge—and that of a secret nature—than most, so after all it might be advisable to attend to his warning.

Winton settled his broad back firmly against a tree trunk, and reflected. For a small quarter of an hour he was left to himself in the dreary forest, at a time most productive of sentimental thought—when light was gradually merging into night. This was a solemn time, when a man was induced to think by the nature of his surroundings, and half unconsciously review the action of a past.

This young man was, without being aware of it, a type of civilization. He had not much to look back upon. Merely a schoolboy career, in which he had won a reputation of being the finest athlete and the most unprincipled character of his time; a year at Oxford, productive of more laurels, combined with disgrace for many a daring escapade; then the crowning act of foolishness, the expulsion, a hurried flight abroad, because he dared not face the wrath of parents, or the sad reproach of a pretty, petted sister; lastly the burying of his identity in a strange land.

There were many such characters in the country. At home they were considered superfluous beings of uselessness. Here they were the foundation of a new society, the pioneers of an incoming tide of civilization. Such men—not the stay-at-home successes of the schools—have often turned the wavering balance to their country's profit in such a world's crisis as a Waterloo, a Trafalgar. That recklessness, that daring—once labelled as viciousness by scholastic guardians—then become England's glory and shield at time of need.

Somewhere in the neighbouring bush a twig snapped with a sharp, dry sound. Winston glanced round quickly, while the fingers of his right hand closed mechanically round the rifle as he remembered Sinclair's warning. But no other sound reached his ears, while nothing unusual appeared before his eyes.

He began to wonder whether Sinclair's fear had communicated itself to him. This weakness was excusable, for the forest was growing very dark—lonely it always was—and full of strange sounds. Solitude works strangely upon the imagination.

His hand released the rifle, and roamed idly along the ground. Presently fingers came in contact with certain matter, which was thick and sticky to the touch. With a slight shudder he withdrew the hand, and when his eyes fell upon the red fingers he involuntarily uttered a sharp cry of astonishment and fear—but the next instant he laughed.

He had forgotten the dead animal, which lay stiffening at his side.

'Lucky old Sinclair isn't here,' he muttered. 'It would be his turn to have the smile.'

He wiped his red fingers upon the white moss, then began to pace up and down, listening anxiously for the tramp of horses, or cheery cry of his returning companion.

The minutes fled past in silence. The sun had fallen beneath the black tree line, which fringed the northern shore of the Saskatchewan. Glistening dew was settling softly, while a shadowy presence of evening stirred along the forest.

Winton grasped a bunch of foliage; the leaves were cold and slimy to the touch. 'Past the quarter hour. The horses must have strayed, so, like a fool, he's gone after them. I'll give him ten minutes more. If he isn't here then, I shall make tracks before the darkness gets any thicker.'

Ah! That sound was no work of the imagination.

He wheeled round sharply, with ready rifle to his shoulder. The sharp rustling of parting bushes brought the heart to his mouth. But he saw nothing.

Then a branch waved ominously, and he felt it was not caused by the wind. He strained his eyes to pierce the gloom which surrounded the mass of interlacing boughs.

Surely that was a dusky face of one who had sworn destruction to his race. Fierce eyes of hatred were glaring upon him; a mouth was set in thin line of determination; hands were raised, perhaps preparing to point a heavily charged muzzle-loader; he was the object of that aim.

Sinclair's words came back, as he sprang aside in a bath of fear. His one idea just then was immediate escape. Once he slipped in the thickening blood, then reached the bushes opposite. Once behind the thick leafy screen, he would be safe for the time.

But, as the clammy leaves swept upon his face, there was a loud, vibrating report.

For a second, the darkness round his head surged in a red glow. That Indian face had been no work of the imagination. The echoes thrilled through his head; a fearful stab, like a hot breath, glowed along his body.

He was shot. The charge had passed through his chest, and the blood was trickling forth sluggishly.

The wound might not be mortal. So he staggered forward, every moment dreading the shock of a second report. He clutched at a branch, which swayed up and down restlessly. His heart was beating furiously, his brain was burning, yet he seemed to grow no weaker. Then, with equal suddenness, there came to his ears, from the surrounding bush, the gasping cry—the voice of a man in pain, followed by the stamp of strong, hurrying hoofs.

He knew that the cry had been uttered by his hunter friend.

This brought him back to reason. So he was not shot after all; *but Sinclair was*. It would be his turn now. The dark enemies were closing round him to complete their work. There was still beating in his ears the horrible, dull sound of a shot body crashing through small bushes towards the ground of which it was then part.

Should he go back in the direction of that sound? What help could he hope to render a corpse? Besides, the whole bush was alive with threatening voices and vengeful faces. There was hostile movement everywhere along the dark, awful forest.

Then these noises increased tenfold and rose louder. A panting, mad struggling, a furious crashing, with sparks shooting upward from rugged stones, bridle reins flying and catching, while before sped a mist of smoky breath. Such was the vision of the grey monster, which loomed suddenly from the darkness and stumbled heavily almost at his feet.

It was the grey mare he had ridden that day. But where was the dark horse, and where was Sinclair? Dead, and in that death lay the most convincing proof of the truth of the last word he had spoken.

Goaded by fear and the desperation of the moment, he had sprung forward. He was mounted, and dashing furiously through the forest, ignorant of direction, feeling only the great and terrible fear of the pursued. Branches cut and bruised his face; small twigs bent and lashed him angrily;

the night wind hissed with menace upon his ears; while behind, around, in front, the great forest shrieked and raved.

Onward crashed the horse, the white breath streaming away, the flecks of foam dashing to each side. He bent down and shrank together, his single idea being to present as small a target as possible. Every second he expected to hear the crash of muzzle-loaders, to hear the screech of shot, to feel the sharp sting of lead in his back.

Still on, heading he knew not where in that terrible fright. Sparkling dew dashed off the leaves; long bushes streamed past his legs; red sparks shot madly upward from the iron-black rocks beneath.

CHAPTER II

MENOTAH—HEART THAT KNOWS NOT SORROW

Ne-ha-hah! Drip, flash, gurgle. Down from rock to rock—splash, tinkle—soft, softer, with a long, peaceful swirl of bubbles, as the lone rushes by the bank shivered again. With a gleam beneath a dancing ray of sunlight, with a beauty spot of white foam here and there. Min-ne-ha-hah! Splash, drip-drip—splash! Then a quickening run of black and silver bars, a long, golden line of light—with a bright singing voice, and with a peal of music like the chime of distant bells. Ne-ha-hah!

The place of the laughing waters. Here the sun quivered for colour music, while wind and water met and kissed with the whispering caress of an ever endless song. First came the wind, with deep, long sigh through the bushes, then the sunlight. After this overture, one might listen to the melody of the waters.

'Ne-pink, ink-ink-ah. Min-ne-sot-ah-hah. Ha-hah-ne-ah-ah! Ne-ha-hah-ah! Pink-ink-ink. Ne-pink. Ne-ah. Nepink-ah-hah. Min-ha! Ne-ah-ink-ink. Min-ne-ha-ink-ink! Ne-sot-ah! So-tah. So-tah-ha-hah-ah! Min-ne-ha. Pink-ink-ink. Ne-ah! Pink-ink-ink. Ne-ha! Ne-hah! Ne-ha! Ne-sot-ah! Ne-ha-hah-ha! Ne-ha-hah! Ah! Hah!'

Then the wind swelled louder for the great wordless opera. The sunrays grew whiter and stronger to light up the great rugged stage of Nature.

There was a mighty slab of black rock, which the waves lapped listlessly, at one side of the river pool. This appeared to shoot straight from the heart of the forest—part bathed by the water, part shielded and hidden by a tangle of bushes. To a pendulous branch, projecting over the black stone, had been attached a coloured streamer of cloth, which rose and fell gaily with the wind, like the guiding beat of a conductor's bâton.

Then the voice of Nature was broken into, yet not disturbed, again. A clear, thrilling cry came from the forest, the careless, happy cry of a young life.

'There will be full moon to-night, and a south wind. Then the evil one will steal from the marshes, for there will be war and fire. War and Fire!'

That same voice again, but now the speaker was nearer and approaching. In such a place, at such a time, it might almost have been Wasayap on her way to meet the Heelhi-Manitou at the Passing Place of the Spirits.

The music of the waters swelled a little higher into a louder, purer burst of melody. The departing sun streamed slantingly across the so-far empty stage, where a few white grass stems shivered.

'Min-ne-ha! Pink-ink-ink. Ne-ha! Min-ne-ha. Ne-ha! Ne-hah! Ne-ha! Ne-sot-ah! Ne-ha-hah-ha! Ne-ha-hah! Ne-ha! Ah! Hah!'

The clinging bushes hung around and above without motion. Suddenly they parted, with quick swish and rapid rustling of leaves, and the next moment appeared a wonderful vision.

'Men-ha! Ot-ah! Me-e-e-e-ot-ah. Ah-ha! Ha-hah-ha-ah! Me-ot-hah. Ot-ah! Ah-ah-ah! Ot-ah! Ot-ah! Ah-hah! Men-ot-ah! Ot-ah! Menotah!'

With a noisy, petulant fluttering of foliage the bushes sprang back to their former position. The vision finally resolved itself into human form and shape, as it sprang down to the rock with the agile bound of a young deer. Then the waters smiled into the laughing face of a young and lovely girl.

With a soft, gurgling laughter, suggestive of sheer happiness and exuberance of life, she deftly balanced her dainty body upon one tiny foot, then, with quick clutch, snatched at and captured the overhanging bough, which bent itself barely within reach of her hand. When she had pulled this to a level with her forehead, she swung herself airily backwards and forwards, her feet softly caressing the hard rock with the beating motions of a gentle dance.

She had thrown her head well back, and thus revealed the delicate moulding of her velvet neck; her long hair was rippling unbound along the bright rays of intermittent sunshine; the liquid song-notes of a native ditty trilled from her red, smiling lips.

She was admirable; she was perfect; she was adorable.

Her skin was dark, yet by no means swarthy. Soft and delicate in its purity, she resembled more the refined Creole than an Indian girl of the forest. Her dress, which reached a little below the knees, was of a coarse material dyed red, while her arms and feet were bare, or, rather, clothed in their own perfect beauty. Entwined round her temples, twisted in careless profusion through the cloud of her flowing hair, wound a festoon of emerald leaves and glowing berries, snatched from some forest bush as she sped lightheartedly amongst the trees. Radiant as were these berries, Nature had not painted them with the rich scarlet of Menotah's cheeks, nor with the deep carmine of her parted lips, through which came the pearly glitter of the teeth. And above, the dark eyes flashed and shone, spreading the happy contagion of mirth as they passed, with the hovering action of the swallow, from one object to another.

So, unconscious of evil, insensible to suffering, she swung herself from side to side upon the black rock, while her face shone with rapture, like the laughing water which bubbled beneath her feet. The sun dropped down to the uneven line of a long ridge opposite, while a fine glow shot into the sky. Again she swung on tiptoe, and sang in a clear voice a sweet voice with a thrill in it that sounded through the forest and over the water, light and sparkling as the tinkling of raindrops upon the leaves.

In her youthful, ignorant passion she sang to the Spirit for understanding of life, for knowledge of human secrets, for unending joy and eternal love in the years to come, while the wind and the water played her a wonderful accompaniment.

She stopped suddenly, with a musical cry of sheer happiness, then sprang, lithe and supple as a squirrel, from the higher ridge of the rock, in mid-air releasing her grasp of the branch. Upward it darted, with the force of a steel spring, striking down upon the dark tresses a shower of brown fir spines with many small green cones.

Lightly as a snowflake the girl came to the lower platform of stone, which lay almost at a level with the water. Her step was sure, for her young limbs were strong and yielding. She made a dancing step; cast her arms delightedly above her head, accompanying the action with a merry burst of laughter; passed two shapely hands beneath a dark mist of hair, which had streamed forward over her face, and threw it back with a graceful gesture.

She gazed around and upward, finally fixing her eyes upon the branch she had lately clung to. It seemed as though she searched for something not at once discernible. Presently she clasped her hands together with a short cry of pleasure.

'The Spirit is pleased,' she cried, with a sudden catch to her rich voice. 'I am always to be beautiful; I am always to be happy. The Spirit himself has waited here to tell me.'

For the coloured steamer had disappeared. Probably it had been shaken away to the neighbouring bushes, when the bough had sprung back into position; perhaps it had then been unsecured and the wind had since removed it. At all events it had vanished, and this knowledge brought her happiness.^[1]

She paused for awhile, as though in thought. Her soft forehead fell into little, curved lines, while the beautiful face grew grave. 'It might have been the wind,' she said doubtfully, speaking slowly to the rippling waters, 'but, if it was, the wind is a spirit—yes, a good spirit. Now he has spoken to me. I am beautiful, and I shall be happy.'

A dull roar from the distant rapids beat down ominously along the evening wind. With the wind that bore the sound came a wave, which broke itself against the black rock, casting a tiny cloud of spray upward.

The girl's face altered its expression at once. The thought lines vanished, while others appeared to bend round her mouth in the shape of a smile.

'Beautiful,' she murmured, alone, yet half bashful; 'the water has told me so often, and now it calls me again.'

She inclined her head forward, while the smile deepened. 'Listen!'

The waters splashed, rippled, flashed, swung round in a long gurgling eddy, then splashed again. Out of this rose a low, musical tinkle, with a soft lap-lap upon the rocks which sounded like a kiss.

'Yes. That was a name. Listen! There it comes again—Menotah! Heart that knows not sorrow.'

She timidly came to the extreme edge, then fell to her knees. As the sun disappeared behind the grey-dark ledge opposite, she bent her dainty head over and down, until the long black hair divided and fell in two glossy strands, the ends of which floated like seaweed upon the foam patches.

The river pool commenced to blacken, while flowering rushes tossed their shivering heads and murmured. The Spirit of the waters called her. So she leant over—down, nearer, closer, until her fingers curved over the stone amid the moisture and green slime.

For a moment or so she was motionless, in a set posture of watching and wonder. Then, with the darting action of a bird, she was up to the higher ridge of rock with a single bound. Another spring, and she was upon the grass track at the side. An invisible frog awoke his water-side

orchestra into sharp chirpings with a gruff note. It was time for her to desert the quiet river pool, for evening was pressing down, and there was much on hand.

But, as she was about to flit away, a guttural cry proceeded from the bush behind, while the stroke of a thick staff tapped fretfully upon the rock platform she had recently abandoned. Casting a glance back over her shoulder, she perceived an old man, with long hair and scrubby white beard, emerging from the bushes.

'So, I have come upon you, child. I have found you at length.' Such was the manner of his greeting.

She turned back, and placed a curling foot upon a point of stone. 'And what has led your footsteps into the forest, wise Antoine?' she asked lightly.

'You, child—you.' He spoke slowly.

'What! You wish to borrow my eyes? You have come forth to pluck berries and gather strong medicines. Come! I will help you.'

The old man fixed his keen eyes upon her laughing face, then drew his coarse blanket of a gaudy yellow more conveniently over his shoulders. Then he came forward and said, 'Girl, I have been seeking you for long. I watched you dart like a sunbeam into the forest, so I followed with my slow speed to give you warning.'

She tossed back her head. 'Warn me! Of what, and why?'

'The white man,' said the other impressively. 'He is abroad in the forest. From this time he is our foe. Perchance one might meet you in such a spot as this, and—'

She interrupted him scornfully, with a proud movement of her head. 'Let him find me. I am stronger than any man, since I can disarm him with a woman's weapons.'

The old man raised a reproving hand. 'You speak, Menotah, with the folly of youth. Now will I answer you with the wisdom of age. For who are you that you should know the cunning of the white man? He feels not the emotion of love, for his heart is made of ice, while his dark mind changes as the waters of yon river. Mayhap you might be captured by him. Then, what darkness would settle upon the tribe without its heart of joy? There would be no music in the song, nor passion in the dance.'

The girl laughed with a long musical burst of happiness.

'Child! I have warned you. Listen to an old man's words. Follow his advice, and keep the heart to yourself.'

For answer, Menotah snatched a long tendril of bright green from a neighbouring bush. She cast this wreath around the old man's neck, then danced back, clapping her hands in delight.

'Now you are young again,' she cried joyously. 'You are to forget that the frost of age has ever stiffened your limbs. You must now cast aside all your wise sayings, which always fall like cold water upon my ears. Come! Take me by the hand. Then we will wander forth together. If you are mournful, I will sing to you. I will dance and laugh, that you may forget your infirmities. For where I come, sorrow may never be found.'

The red glow on her cheeks deepened, as the light in her eyes leapt into a flame. The ruddy berries dropped over her temples and kissed the eyelids when she stirred.

But the old man only shook his white head, and gave back no reply.

Then Menotah stepped to his side, and bent her graceful figure down. She held her face near his, while the soft mouth twitched in the effort to restrain its mirth.

'Wise Antoine,' she said, with an attempt at carelessness. 'You have travelled over much land and water. You have seen many people. Is it not so?'

Wonderingly he replied, 'It is so, my daughter.'

'Then tell me'—and there was a slight tremor in her voice—'since you have seen so many women, tell me, have you ever looked upon one more beautiful than I? Have you seen any more perfect?—more graceful?'

Her face was quite solemn as she finished her question.

The old man frowned, and pulled at the falling blanket with a claw-like hand.

At length he spoke. 'It is true that I have seen many women. I have looked upon the daughters of white men, and some of these are fair. I have watched, also, generations of my own people, as they passed from childhood to maturity, growing and ripening like green berries in the sunshine. Many of these were very good to look upon.'

'But I—' she murmured, and then stopped short.

The old Antoine smiled feebly, displaying a perfect row of teeth. Then he would have turned aside, but she touched him with light, eager hand.

'I stopped your words, old father. What more had you to say?'

'Let us go back,' he said. 'See! the night comes upon us.'

But Menotah only laughed again, while the roar of the great rapids beat down upon their ears with sound of sombre menace.

She bent her beautiful head over his shoulder, and asked, 'The daughters of the white men are fair—you have said so?'

'But you are more beautiful than all,' broke forth the old man, half fiercely. 'Surely. None, on whom my eyes have rested, have owned such flow of life, such health, such gladness of spirit. These things are beauty. You are as straight as a young fir, and as fair as the evening star.'

In an instant her assumed gravity had disappeared. Laughing merrily, she darted back, with black hair streaming cloud-like behind. But the old man pursued her with a searching question,—

'Child! Menotah! What dream spirit has whispered into your brain, as you slept beneath the moon? What is that which has told your mind that you were more beautiful than others—that you were even fair at all? You have learnt from me, yet on such matters have I given you no knowledge.'

Menotah was singing gaily, unconcernedly, and for the time appeared not to notice his quick questionings. But suddenly she sprang aside to the bushes, and parted them with eager hands. Then she glanced back, and commenced to chant in loud, distinct tones,—

'Old father, you have taught me much, yet, being a man, you might not read a woman's heart. You could not tell her all—not that she wished especially to learn. So she has searched for that knowledge wherever it might be found. Behold! she has succeeded.'

The Ancient would have spoken aloud in wonder, but the bright girl gave him no opportunity.

'One day, near the setting of the sun, I came along this way. The river-pool was already growing black, while long rushes bent and murmured when they saw me approach. Then, when I stood upon the black rock, I heard the echo of a soft voice, which arose in music at my feet, and crept up until it touched my ears. So I knew that it was the Spirit of the waters who was calling me. And he had knowledge for my ear, and mine alone. Do you still hear the soft voice calling beneath us, old father?'

She raised her dainty figure, then uplifted a small hand, inclining her head forward with a graceful gesture. The waters lapped and whispered against the slime-green base of the rock.

'Men-ha! Ot-ah! Me-e-e-e-ot-ah. Ah-ha! Ha-hah-ha-ah! Me-ot-hah. Ot-ah! Ah-ah-ah! Ot-ah! Ot-ah! Ah-hah! Men-ot-ah! Ot-ah! Menotah!'

'Do you hear, old father?' she cried joyfully. 'Can you hear the voice of the laughing waters? Each night they call me, and bid me come.'

Then the old man frowned, and raised a crooked hand to point upward over the rock-ledge opposite, where a cold ray of white light struggled through shadows.

'Hear also the voice of the great rapids, daughter. They shout, and they call, also. Would you hasten to their bidding?'

She shuddered slightly, then replied, 'Not so, old father. I would not obey the summons to death and silence.'

Antoine shivered also, as the night chilled his body. 'We tarry past the sun-setting,' he muttered. 'It is not well to be abroad at this time.'

'Ah! But listen first,' she pleaded. 'Here what the Spirit of the water had to show me.'

Again he paused, while she wrapped the cold bushes round her waist, and bathed her fingers in the dew-wet foliage. Then she spoke,—

'I came onward to the rock-brink, yet I trembled. For I feared lest the Spirit might stretch forth an angry arm to draw me down, and claim me as his victim.'

'So I came with hesitating footstep, and leant with hidden dread over the great stones, whereon the brown reeds beat their flowering heads. I looked, yet saw nothing, but the drifting clouds and bright pictures of evening sunset, for the waters swirled and bubbled, as though in anger. Again I looked, but there was still nothing, save the shadow of the bright sky.'

'But then a dim mist formed slowly and rose with gradual motions from the bottom. As it came nearer it gathered together, and took a wonderful shape, while my heart beat loudly as it rose to the surface, which was now calm and smooth, for the white foam and curling ripples had fled beneath the rock. And as I bent down—lower—nearer, until the ends of my unbound hair kissed the face of the waters, that shadow lay upon the surface, and held its lips up to mine.'

'Then I looked upon a being of beauty. There was a maiden, with eager, parted lips which were curved into a smile. I saw also eyes, happy but determined, and thick waves of hair enclosing a blameless face. At the pleasure of beholding so much beauty I smiled. And, behold! the vision smiled also, while the waters broke into ripples of silent laughter. Then I frowned, creasing up

my forehead into long wrinkles, and forthwith the waters moaned with storm breath, while sunshine departed from the valley. So then I laughed aloud, bringing again joy to the Spirit, with adornment to the face of the waters.

'For I knew that I was beautiful—beautiful—beautiful!'

She bent her happy face forward, with a small shake of the head at each repetition of her final word. Then she liberated the bushes. They closed behind, and she vanished. But her happy song was still borne through the forest as she glided, bird-like, amongst the trees.

The Ancient was left again to himself. He pulled the blanket over his scanty white locks with weak motions, while his thin lips parted in unspoken words. His deeply furrowed face was pinched and frowning.

Then he turned, also, and went his way.

- [1] It is a native custom thus to hang streamers to some bush after a prayer. The disappearance of such is a sign that the Spirit is pleased and will grant the desired favour.

CHAPTER III

THE BUDDING OF A PASSION

Nearer the outskirts of the mighty forest, where between the tree trunks might be caught, when the bushes sometimes parted beneath a slight gust of wind, a silvery flash of the sun-kissed river, two men stood side by side in earnest conference. Very dissimilar were they in every particular, save in the one important distinction of race. One was much bent by time's heavy hand; the other enjoyed the full vigour of early manhood.

This latter was tall and finely shaped; his arms were like strong wire ropes, and swelled with blue muscles as he moved with the unconscious animal grace of the native; his dark-skinned face was clearly cut and set in firm lines of determination, while the keen eyes flashed and the nostrils expanded as he listened to the words of the shrunk figure at his side and gave him back reply.

They were completely alone in this great solitude. Close behind there spread a thick tangle of bush, which gradually merged into the dark forest line, a luxuriant growth, which might readily have concealed many an invisible foe. But these men had no fear of their own, and as for the hostile white—well, there were but very few of them, and these harmless, since they could not be suspicious of approaching danger.

The old man slowly turned himself from the glowing face of the setting sun, and raised his wrinkled countenance heavily towards the powerful features of the young warrior. His cheeks were thickly painted with a lurid stain of carmine; the effect of the unnatural colour upon the dried up flesh was ghastly to an extreme. His form was doubled together almost by infirmity and time, for the weight of over four score years was pressing him down to the grave.

He extended and spread an almost fleshless hand upon the warm flesh of the other's rounded arm.

'You have finished all preparations, Muskwah? The young men are now ready, and each has weapons for the fight?'

'All that I can accomplish as leader of your children has been done, Father.'

The old man was chief of the tribe and therefore regarded as the titular father of all.

'But the warriors understand their duties Muskwah? I would have no sad scene of women lamenting in the encampment. I would not listen to the low chanting of death songs.'

'I have done your bidding, Father. I have made all things clear,' replied the young man.

'There has been nothing left undone, Muskwah? I am old, and have often seen the brave conquered, not by greater strength or skill, but by the thing unlooked for, the one thing forgotten. This is that which causes the defeat of the brave. Tell me now the words the wise Antoine spoke into your ears. Repeat to me the orders you have given to my children.'

He wrapped the cloak round him and bent again in close attitude of listening. The wind whispered in the pines behind, while the sun went out and the colours slowly faded into greyness. Then the young warrior cast out his long arms, drew his figure to its greatest height, and in clear, sonorous voice declaimed aloud the following spirited apostrophe,—

'Warriors! O, Warriors!

'Ye, who are brave, ye, who have earned the glad approval of women, draw round me, and listen to the words of your Father and Chief.

'The Spirit has whispered into his ear, "Destroy now the white men, for they are wrong-minded and have offended me. Cast them forth from this my land in death." Your Father and Chief will

obey the great command of the Spirit, lest black sickness come upon the tribe, lest the hunters be caused to return empty-handed to the tents.

'Warriors! O, Warriors!

'Ye, who speed forth with the great strength of the winds, ye, who dart over earth like shadows when the moon shines, listen to the voice of your leader. When the night light casts silver upon the fir tops, and the spirits crawl from the marshes to their deeds, ye shall be ready and await my signal. Then shall ye hear thrice repeated the cry of a horned owl. When the last echo has died, gather ye yourselves round the sad death tree, where ye shall find me awaiting, and there will I separate ye into two bands. Those who are young and strong upon their feet shall descend the valley along by the way of the river-pool, and these shall wait at the foot of the cliff beneath the fort of the white men. And at the sound of the first report of a gun, ye shall ascend, each man bearing dry branches of the fir. These shall ye place around the walls at the cliff side and apply the fire. And, as for the other band, these shall advance with stealth upon the open and hide behind the rocks. When the red fire shoots upward, ye shall fire upon the door. Then will the white men come forth, driven out by the hot fire behind, and when they appear they must be killed, nor must one escape to carry away the deed. For the white man knows not how to pardon.

'Warriors! O, Warriors!

'Ye, who fly over the ground with the swiftness of deer, ye, who laugh with joy when the hot blood flows, listen to the words of the Spirit.

'Destroy and spare not. Avenge, as ye have been wronged. Spare not your strength. Lose not your courage. And while ye fight, the women around the tents will dance, and call upon the Ghosts and Skeletons of the tribe. Then, also, will the Father's daughter come forth to greet ye with a smile, when ye return, laden with victory and the glad spoils of war.

'Warriors! O, Warriors!

'Ye, who are brave, ye, who have earned the approval of women, heed and obey the words of your Father and Chief.'

The young warrior paused and lowered his arms, while the fire in his eyes died out. A feeble impulse of passion spread itself over the Chief's half dead face as he listened with rapt attention to the recital. Then he spoke in his thin voice,—

"'Tis good, Muskwah. You have spoken well. Tell me now, are the hearts of my children full of a warm courage? Do their eager hands reach out for their weapons? Do their eyes gleam with thoughts of slaughter and vengeance? Have they well oiled the body and painted the face? Are they withal hard to restrain, like our dogs on the clear day of winter? Is it so, Muskwah?"

The young warrior's brow grew sterner as he shook his head. 'Nay, Father, 'tis not so. The courage of the young men is faint. This is what they spoke in my ear, "What calls us to the fight? At this place the white men have done us no wrong—"

'False, Muskwah!' cried the old man shrilly. 'They have robbed us.'

'Only the old Antoine thirsts for the blood of the invaders,' said the other quietly.

The Chief struck his staff in anger upon the ground. 'The young men know not all. Did you not remind them, Muskwah, how the base white man has deprived us of our land and food?'

'And their answer still comes, Father, that here we have been deprived of naught. The hunters take their skins, and the wives carry oil to the fort. In return they bring back to the tents food for the body, with tobacco and clothing.'

'There are others, Muskwah,' pursued the old man solemnly. 'There are many of our brothers far across the great water. These have suffered to the bitterness of death, and their wrongs still lie unavenged.'

'This did I tell to the young men,' continued the warrior. 'They listened to my words, but still replied, "We know none of these. If they have been wronged, let them look to their own. When they rejoice, what part do they offer us in their joy? Now that they have cause for grief, what duty calls us to take part in their voice of mourning?" There is wisdom in the words of the young men. Father.'

The old man but turned at him angrily. 'There is also rebellion,' he cried, with fierceness. 'It is their duty to obey, and not seek a cause. Tell them, Muskwah, make known to each one of them, that he who shrinks from the battle, let the cause be what it may, that man shall be beaten openly by the women of the camp. I have said it.'

Muskwah bowed his stately head, but replied in defence of his underlings. 'There are no cowards among the Children of the River, my Father. Their wish is only for no strife with those who have done them no wrong.'

The Chief cast his bleared eyes round suspiciously, and finally rested them on the tall figure at his side. 'But you, Muskwah, what are your inner thoughts?'

'I obey my Father,' came the instant reply. 'It is not for me to reason.'

The Chief was satisfied. 'Obedience is a sure footway to power,' he muttered. He tore apart his shirt with tremulous fingers, to display many a long black scar crawling across his brown chest.

'See, Muskwah. Obedience gave me these life marks. Still I obeyed, until that same gift made me Chief of my tribe.'

The young man listened, while the shadow of solicitude gathered slowly upon his face. Presently he exclaimed his thoughts aloud.

'Is it well to thus provoke the wrath of the white man? Should we not rather dwell ourselves in peace, and leave those who have suffered to carry out the work of vengeance?'

The doubts thus expressed aroused the old man, and his answering voice rang forth loudly,—

'Has the foolishness of my other children touched your brain also, Muskwah? What did the old Antoine tell you beneath the quiet of the tent, when the moon was young. Have you no memory for that story? A man came across the great water,^[1] up the river, and along the forest trail, to pause at our encampment with a solemn message. He commanded me, in the name of the friend of the Great Spirit, to attack the white men who dwelt in our land, and to destroy them all. How should I refuse to listen to the command of Riel? For when he has conquered the white men and made himself great chief, he will turn to the punishment of those who have refused to listen to his words. To such he will show no forgiveness nor pity.'

The young warrior stirred his limbs with a mute gesture of resignation.

'If the Father of the tribe says to us, "Fight," surely we will strive until the enemy is swept away, or our own feet have been tripped up by death. Yet methinks the storm will arise when the battle is past. For then must we face either the vengeance of Riel, or the fury of the white men. But now is there little boldness in the minds of the young men, for their hearts have not been warmed by the song, nor has passion been thrust into each limb by the madness of the dance.'

'True—'tis true,' muttered the Chief, regretfully. 'There has been no dance of the Ghosts. Yet will the Spirit not for that desert us. The shrill cries of warriors, as they leapt along the measured circle, and the loud beating of music must surely have warned the white men. Then would they have made themselves ready for fight, and perchance have escaped or defeated our efforts. Our prayers to the Spirit must ascend in silence, until the fight is over, and victory comes to the Children of the River.'

At the last words Muskwah picked up his antique gun, and placed it in the crook of his left arm. Then he pointed ahead with steady brown fingers. 'The light of the sun has sunk beneath yonder tree tops. The night comes. Shall we not return?'

The Chief gave no heed to the remark. He but fastened his sunk eyes upon a bunch of dead leaves which rattled in the wind.

Suddenly he spoke abruptly, and with forehead creased up in a frown, as he put a question which touched his heart closely,—

'Hast seen the heart of joy, Muskwah, since the sun crossed the centre of the heaven?'

The young warrior shifted with an awkward motion before replying. 'Nay, Father. These eyes have not rested upon her beauty since the drying of the dew. Perchance she wanders in the forest.'

'Too often is she absent,' said the old man fretfully. 'She passes from place to place like a bright ray of sunlight, and none may stay her. Often does she forget me and my needs; yet I cannot speak to her in the voice of anger. Dost think her fair, Muskwah?'

The question came with unexpected suddenness. For a time the young man's quick breathing was plainly audible.

'Father!' he cried at length passionately, 'what am I, that you should ask me whether the heart of joy is beautiful? Surely there is none made of the spirit to compare with her. There is no flower on the earth, nor star in the night sky, that is so beauteous. And when she speaks, a man may hear the laughing of waters. Which is he of the tribe, who would not give life to save Menotah from sorrow, or win from her a smile? When she is happy, all the Children of the River rejoice; should she see the shadow of grief, then shall not be found a glad eye or a light heart.'

He paused and panted, while his sinewy chest rose and fell.

The Chief watched him from beneath shaggy grey eyebrows. 'So, Muskwah,' he muttered slowly, as though in thought, 'the passion flame has burnt your heart also. A man may not so speak, when the cause moving him is but some idle fancy of the mind. What, Muskwah, is there more to tell? Has she cast the glance of favour towards you? Has she ever smiled upon you as she came across your way? Has she dwelt upon her pleasure, when you have done the service of her wish?'

The young warrior sought in vain for words with which to fashion reply. But the old Chief laughed aloud with the feeble sounds of age, and spoke further with many a sidelong glance, 'Closely have I watched you, until I came to understand the hidden secrets of your mind. You would be chief after me. I know it. But first must you win scars and spill the blood of your foes, that all may learn to fear the utterance of your name. Higher still does the ambition of the heart lead you, for you

seek to make the fair heart of joy a bride. Who may speak on the future, Muskwah, and learn that which lies in the beyond? What gifts the Great Spirit may stretch towards us in his clenched hands we may not know. Yet you are young, and much lies in front. For me all is behind, save a few poor shadows.'

Muskwah would have spoken, but the old man drew away with the uncertain motions of weak age. 'The night comes upon us,' he said, as he drew the coarse blanket to his chin. 'There is toil ahead, and we must make ready.'

Leaning heavily upon his staff, the aged Chief advanced slowly along the sinuous trail, while in his footsteps came the young warrior with head erect. There was that within him which words might not express, so his heart beat wildly with the hot passion of his years, while it seemed to him good to live.

So they both passed on, the young and the old, until the evening shadows closed round them at the point ahead.

But the solitude was soon to be again invaded. Scarcely had the two natives disappeared, when the green tangle of dew-besprinkled bush in front of which they had made their stand became suddenly agitated, as though some imprisoned animal held therein, then sought to free itself.

Presently the long sweeping tendrils lifted, small scrub bushes parted with a sharp hissing of leaves through the air, while the next instant a young man—he who had listened earlier to the musical voice ringing through the forest—came forward and stood alone in the open.

He stretched his well-formed limbs and smiled in a self-satisfied manner. Then he bent, groped among the thick undergrowth, and finally extracted a rifle from the bush. Quickly he glanced along the sights, passed the sleeve of his coat along the dark barrel to remove a slight smear, afterwards looking up again, along the dim trail that wound round towards the distant point, where the wreathing smoke of the camp fires lingered.

Then he laughed softly to himself, and spoke aloud, addressing the weapon which his white fingers caressed lovingly.

'Good business that, though those rascals kept me tied in an aching knot longer than I'd bargained. So they're going to make a raid on the fort to-night, are they. *Bien!* Let them come. It's going to be a fine, clear night, with full moon into the bargain. Lucky stroke for me—I can now redeem part of my lost character. As usual, I go to the best side.'

He laughed again. 'I reckon it might surprise them to know who has overheard their plans. The best shot in the Dominion—likely enough, in the world. It's something to boast of, having escaped the white chief's aim.'

Then the smile disappeared, as memory stirred within, and he frowned. At once a deep line broke along each side of his face, running past the corners of the mouth to wander away indefinitely along the chin. During that moment the finely-cut features wore a hard and ill-favoured look, which disappeared in an instant when the lips were again parted.

He flicked away a savage and belated bull-dog, which had settled upon his hand. 'I've scored another point,' he muttered complacently. 'My friends, who are few, have combined with my foes, who are many, to swear that it's impossible to play the spy on a *nitchi*. Bah! it's as easy as hating. What if those two had turned me out? The old man was no better than a child. The other would have dropped for the coyotes before he could have stirred a finger.'

The rising darkness reminded him of duty to be performed. He fastened his coat and pulled the felt hat down over his forehead. 'And now for the fort; I've a good enough passport now.'

He waved his hand lightly in the direction of distant fir tops, where many branches had been lopped away, where many long shadows formed and hung. Then he prepared to depart, with the knowledge of such importance which had unwittingly been imparted to him.

One step away he made, then his foot halted, as the whispering sound of a quick footstep came from behind through the bush. His senses were very keen. Round he started like a well-drilled soldier, with a hand to his side. But the next instant the fingers released their sure grip on the revolver which lay there concealed. He started, with a sudden exclamation, as his eyes fell upon the outer fringe of the forest, then stood again motionless.

For here surely—he felt it instinctively—was the author of that happy passing voice.

Standing opposite him in the dim light, and at no great distance, appeared the vision of a perfectly beautiful girl. She was bareheaded—indeed, she required no artificial covering to that wealth of hair, which flowed in luxuriant masses down her back and trailed in confused tresses over her dainty shoulders. A long wreath of red berries shone jewel-like from the thick of these black coils.

She stood there, for the time, scarce without motion. Her shapely head was tilted slightly back, as though soliciting a caress; two radiant eyes flashed across to those of the young man a bold challenge of love; a pair of red lips were divinely parted in a smile, half mischief, half passion, beneath which lurked the covert invitation prompted by desire. In her slender hands swayed a long red-willow wand, plucked by the side of the black rock platform.

Thus did Menotah, as she passed from the river-pool to the encampment beneath the evening, present herself to the young Canadian.

And he stood spellbound, completely over-mastered by a new power of fascination. As he kept his gaze fixed upon this lovely apparition of the summer forest, all his anxiety for the present, all the necessities of the present, fled away forgotten.

She was wonderful with the rich colouring of her perfect health, in the glorious line moulding of her fully matured figure. It was happiness of itself to stand and feast the eyes upon such a triumph of Nature's handiwork, and if the stronger was satisfied to gaze, the weaker was equally delighted to be admired. Yet it was the latter who gave the first intimation of the monotony of such a pleasure.

So she commenced with those dainty alluring wiles, irresistible yet dangerous, in which the graceful woman of beauty, whatever her blood or race, excels. She gave a slight nod of her pretty head, accompanying the coquettish movement with a wonderful smile. Then she raised the red-willow wand, and pettishly struck at the tall flowering head of a plant before her.

The young man felt as though his senses were yielding beneath the subtle influence of an anæsthetic. In a dreamy mood he watched the curious evolutions of the beheaded bunch of bloom, as it darted upward, then settled softly and without sound to the ground.

But this mood changed when she looked across at him again. Then there surged over his entire being an irresistible impulse, which prompted him to spring forward and clasp this lovely being in his arms. Menotah, with the quick skill of her sex, read the keen desire of his mind at a glance. So, after the manner of women, she but hastened to add fuel to the growing ardour of his inclination.

An erratic firefly wandered down from the overhanging branches, then commenced to dart from side to side near her head. She followed its shining course with her bright eyes, and twisted her little face into a charming expression, which revealed a sudden glimpse of two gleaming lines of pearl-like teeth. Then, as the insect tumbled near her, she made a quick snatch at the glowing point of fire. She missed, of course. In disappointed resentment, very pretty to watch, she endeavoured to cut short its career by means of her willow twig, but failed again. Then she glanced across at the watching eyes opposite. The following second the silence was broken for the first time by her clear burst of light, melodious laughter.

Nature has set a varying limit to all human endurance. One extra turn of the tormentor's screw, and the spirit, so dauntless the moment before, yields in abject submission. This young Canadian was very human indeed. Menotah's laughter exceeded the extreme limit of his self-control.

So what happened during the next minute he hardly knew. The forest had melted away, drawn back as it were into the mysterious night; his eyes saw nothing but the alluring loveliness beyond his body felt nothing, beyond the strange warmth of passion. Memory, duty, danger, became empty words that had no meaning.

He felt that he had moved forward with a sudden motion, and maddened by impulse. He was conscious of a lovely face with red, curling lips upturned to his, of liquid eyes, and a soft mouth wreathed in smiles.

So near, so close, he could feel the warmth emanating from her young body, with the fanning breath playing like a summer breeze around his neck. This was a gift reserved for him, and sent to him alone.

Then his eager arms darted forward, but met nothing save cold, dewy bushes. His hot, excited lips came only in contact with the keen air of a northern night, while the melodious echo of a clear, departing voice mocked his ears.

So, when understanding returned to his brain, he found himself alone, standing beneath the gloomy trees, with the night shadows falling thickly round his head. In the neighbouring bush great frogs were chirping derisively. The air became suddenly chilly, while life seemed a burden.

There was something in his hands—his eyes became fastened upon a trailing festoon of green leaves studded with bright red berries, which flickered from his fingers irresolutely beneath the breeze.

[1] Lake Winnipeg.

CHAPTER IV

THE FORT

Before a low fringe of willow undergrowth, which gradually led up to the first thick bank of firs, spread a narrow strip of turf, not more than fifty feet in width, and terminating in the broken cliff line of the Great Saskatchewan River.^[1] Scattered irregularly along this undulating grass expanse appeared great rocks, deeply imbedded for the most part in the soil, some, indeed, not exhibiting more than an iron-grey splinter, which protruded aggressively from the turf in the

shape of a grotesque nose or elbow.

At one side of this small clearing uprose a single-storey hut. This was built of unshapen logs, whitewashed, the crevices being filled in with mud; while, not more than a dozen yards distant, another equally incomplex building stood close to a lofty fir, which had been denuded of all branches and converted into a natural flagstaff. Here two flags indolently whipped the air. Above flew the ever-victorious ensign of England; below, that of the Hudson's Bay Company.

In a southerly direction, lying between the forest line and cliff brink, were dotted small huts at long intervals. These were all grass-roofed and innocent of windows, other than a square cut hole at one side of each dwelling, while occasionally the smoke-begrimed apex of an Indian *tépee* forced itself from the thick of a separate tree clump. Yet, for all this, no human being appeared in sight; no canoe sped bird-like over the waters of the Saskatchewan; no sounds of human activity uprose on the breeze.

In the principal room, or office usually styled, of the log fort, which was the whitewashed hut situated a few yards from the cliff brink, and beside the flagstaff, two men were creating conversation by a simple process of mutual disagreement. A dilapidated sofa, minus legs, supported on two boxes; a deal wood table, well chipped with knives; an aged writing desk, and small bookcase crammed to overflowing with all kinds of literature, ranging from a translation of Homer and yellow-covered narratives of sanguinary impossibilities to a treatise on the parables, and a deep work of Hooker's—such were the chief articles of furniture in the room. Behind the door, unmethodical hands had piled a stack of dirty boots and empty bottles, while hard by an assortment of guns and rifles stood supported by the log wall.

Behind were two other apartments, used respectively as bed and store room, while, running from the centre of the building, a passage had recently been erected, which led into a diminutive kitchen, where at the present moment a half-breed cook was preparing supper for the garrulous mouths within.

From a small window in the back room the great river could be readily scanned. At this point the stream of the great Saskatchewan was unusually wide, being divided by a long, though somewhat narrow island, thickly covered with vegetation, and rising to some height above water level.

Conspicuous in the centre appeared a tree-environed hut. This rough habitation was the property of the H.B.C, and had been erected some years back to afford a harbour of refuge for any officers of the Company who might be compelled to retreat from the fort on the main bank, owing to Indian hostility.

Into the office a subtle aroma of supper stew crept insidiously, while the two disputants became refreshed into other differences by the pleasant anticipation of a satisfactory meal. Chief Factor McAuliffe rose from the box on which he had been seated, and having opened the door gazed up and down along the river bank. This representative of the most powerful company in the world presented a strange appearance. His was an average height, yet he was broad and strongly built, of great strength and activity, in spite of his age, which hovered in close proximity to the three score. His immense head, posed on a bull-like neck, and the determined set of every muscle in his face, betokened an obstinate character, which would never allow itself to be thwarted by even a superior—either in argument or actual fight—whether he were in the right or wrong. His black beard and moustache, plentifully besprinkled with grey, had recently been clipped into short lines of bristles, evidently by the amateur hand of one of his companions, while the same inquisitorial agency had ruthlessly reaped the hair on his scalp as close to the skull as scissors could touch. His costume was primitive and economical.

The other occupant of the room was a tall, ungainly man, who moved with stiff motions, and swung his arms with the mechanical action of semaphore signals whenever exacted. This was extremely often, for he and McAuliffe were generally bickering over some question, raised by the one, merely for the sake of argument, and as warmly refuted by the other. Externally there was little remarkable about Peter Denton, as this individual was named. He owned a yellow moustache, coarse hair of the same complexion, and watery-blue eyes. Internally he was complicated and extraordinary.

The Factor stood at the open door, watching the slowly gathering shadows lengthening upon the trees. At length he remarked abruptly, 'Don't catch any signs of the other boys, Justin. Time they were back, for it's bad travelling in the forest after dark.'

The half-breed was arranging the table. He turned his head, gave a low grunt, then spread out his fingers in the air. 'Moose,' he ejaculated.

'That's so, I reckon. They're on a fresh track, and don't feel like giving up.'

'Let boy look,' said Justin, pointing a crooked forefinger. 'His eyes good.' Then he moved towards the kitchen with a dull chuckle.

The Factor wheeled round, his great face aglow. 'His eyes! I could make better ones out of a toad's body. They're like a potato's—only fit to be cut out and chucked away.'

Denton's hollow voice sounded from a corner, where he sat mending a coat. 'Make use of your eyes in searching after righteousness, as I've done, Alfred. Perhaps then there would be still a chance of escaping the lake of fire which yawns beneath your feet.'

'I'm glad you allow you haven't found righteousness, Peter. By the way you're searching, you can go on until they want you 'way under. I never found any use striking north when I wanted to get south.'

Denton wagged his head mournfully. 'The time must come when you will be cut down and perish in your sins.'

'Don't take trouble, Peter. The good are taken early, mind; so there's a pile of years ahead for you after I've gone.' And McAuliffe chuckled loudly.

Denton was ready with rebuke.

'I'd like you to listen a few hours to the preaching of our pastor, Dr McKilliam. But that holy man would refuse to cast his pearls before such swine.'

The Factor was more interested. 'None of your ministers could knock spots off my hide. Talk of preaching! Why, I've heard our Dr Bryce preach on hell-fire, until everyone in the congregation was fairly sweating.'

Denton groaned and cast his eyes upward. 'Well you might sweat, with your sins staring you in the face. But if you come to preaching, I've heard our minister talk for three hours without a break, except to tell a stranger to quit throwing orange peel around the church. When he'd finished, the congregation clapped so loudly that he had to bow his acknowledgments three times from the pulpit. I tell you, we advertised that in the papers, and filled our church to the doors within the month.'

'With a lot of bummers who hadn't any comfortable place to sleep in Sunday nights. I heard one of your ministers preach once, and 'twas worse than chloroform. They might have taken a leg off me without my knowing it.'

Here Justin entered with a steaming bowl of stewed moose meat and prairie spinach. This he set on the table, then pointed maliciously at Denton. 'Boy preach,' he said. 'I hear him.'

The Factor at once interposed. 'You're right, Justin. This fifth-rate specimen of humanity the Company's burdened me with, used to be a minister in the summer and a bar-tender in the winter. When it was hot, he cursed fellows for drinking cool-eyes, and reminded them there was a sultry place all ready for their whisky-black souls. During the cold weather, he put in his time making fellows drunk, and getting full himself.'

Denton fired up instantly. 'Whoever told you that is a right friend for you. He's as bad a liar—'

'Then you must have converted him, Peter. He was straight enough when I last came across him,' said the Factor. 'I suppose you'll say next you never ran that menagerie?'

'I do,' said Denton, sullenly. 'My only dealings with menageries were to denounce them as sinful pleasures.'

McAuliffe whistled. 'Better get outside, Justin, before the roof tumbles.' He glanced admiringly at Denton. 'You're wasting good talents, Peter. If I could lie like you, I'd expect to make my fortune in a few years as newspaper correspondent. See here a minute, Justin, while I show him up. This spot of dirt turned up one Sunday evening at his church, so full he couldn't see straight. He started in to work by cursing all the black sheep that had come to hear him. Of course they couldn't take that. They'd got to obey their natural instinct of hypocrisy, though they might envy their minister's power of language. So they took Mister Man, and fired him out of the place, which is the only good deed they're ever likely to have to look back upon. Then he makes off with another deadbeat, and starts a kind of show outside the town—this was in Port Arthur, mind. He used to stand on a chair by the door of the tent, with dollar bills stuck in his hat brim, trying to catch the people's money. I tell you, what with the menagerie by day, and with shooting loaded craps by night, these two blacklegs looted a pile of dollars out of the pockets of decent citizens.'

Denton raised his head from the half-mended coat, and said sulkily, 'You're a shameless liar, Alfred! It stamps a man for life to be seen in your company.'

'So it does, Peter,' said the Factor, heartily; 'let's shake on that. If you're seen along with me a few more months, some folks may begin to think of trusting you. Don't lose heart, lad. There's hope even for the worst.'

'Not when a man gets to your state,' retorted Denton.

The Factor laughed. 'That's a sharp answer for you, Peter. You're learning fast under me. If you keep that pace—steer clear of brain fever and such diseases—you'll perhaps be able to give an answer to a ten-year-old child in another five years. Can't promise all that, Peter; but it's wonderful what perseverance will do.'

Denton extended a denouncing and dirty forefinger at the Factor's broad chest. 'Stop your wicked judgment of fellow creatures!—you, who walk through life with the mark of Satan on your knee!'

McAuliffe's nether garments were fashioned out of sacking originally used for packing liquor cases. Consequently, on that portion of the garment indicated, a lurid red star was visible above the stencilled letters—'Old Rye Whisky.'

'We differ again, Peter. It's better having it on the knee than the forehead. You're wonderful jealous to-night. It's the minister talking, instead of the bar-tender.'

'I never was a bar-tender,' said the other sullenly.

The Factor glanced at the heavens. 'It's going to be a fine night, with full moon. Don't get spoiling it by bringing up a thunderstorm. Were you ever a minister? Let's have a bit of truth. You're getting monotonous, Peter.'

Denton was about to return an angry reply, when the half-breed again appeared and pointed significantly to the waiting supper.

McAuliffe paced to the door with the exclamation, 'Say, Justin, I wish those fellows were back.'

'It's near quarter to nine,' muttered Denton.

'And your insides are aching for grub—might as well say so right out.' The Factor turned back into the room. 'Well, if they must stay away half the night, they can't expect us to keep a look-out. Come on, Justin. Pass me over that sturgeon steak before Peter gets his teeth against it.'

The three gathered round the crazy table, and for a few minutes there was silence of tongues.

Thus quarter of an hour passed. Then the Factor cleaned a greasy hand upon his beard, and stretched himself with a sigh of satisfaction. He drew out his pipe, and had just commenced to shave a plug of T.&B., when Justin raised his hand and whistled in a manner peculiar. McAuliffe understood the signal. He listened, and presently there came dull, distant sounds from without.

His face grew very grave, while the knife in his hand tapped gently upon the table. An ashen hue crept over Denton's sallow features. Nearer came the sounds and louder, as they spread towards the fort through thickening shadows and the white dews of night.

Then McAuliffe spoke. 'That's Kitty. I know that gallop of hers. Goldam! how she's tumbling through the bush!'

The night was fearfully still—not a breath stirring the tree tops. Above, the stars were lit one by one.

Justin pushed back the door, and listened stolidly to the crashing of green boughs, the snapping of dead branches, the sharp click of hoofs against rock splinters. Inside—no sound, except the Factor's deep breathing, and an irregular tattoo, produced by Denton's heels tapping upon the floor. Then he turned, and, without altering a muscle in his heavy face, began to load the rifles and lay them out upon the table.

The Factor peered into the darkness, for the moon had not yet risen. 'She'll be clear presently,' he said carelessly. 'Reckon young Winton got switched off from Billy. Then he got bothered by a touch of forest fright and lost his herd. What the devil you doing, Justin?'

The half-breed was methodically counting out shells. He glanced up and said laconically, '*Nitchies!*'

'Pshaw! you're crazy, boy. There's no rebellion up here.'

Justin grunted. 'You wrong. Riel send message. They paint and fight. You see.' Then he coolly fell to oiling his rifle, while a fresh wave of fear passed over the shivering Denton.

The Factor swore quietly. The next moment a grey mare dashed furiously from the darkness. At the door she pulled up panting, with blood-red nostrils, her sides covered with foam-sweat, while a figure tumbled helplessly from the improvised saddle.

McAuliffe caught him as he staggered forward, and half carried him inside.

Justin stood by the mare, with his rifle at the ready, and his bead-like eyes staring into the gloom, but there was no sign of pursuer. The black trees whispered solemnly in a light breeze.

'Fetch my whisky keg along!' bellowed McAuliffe. 'Give the boy a good dram, and damn the water.'

Denton shuffled off to obey, while Justin's voice came rolling inside with weird effect. 'Billy!—be gone!'

The Factor's great hands shook as he administered the liquor. Winton gasped and clutched at him.

'Don't claw me; I'm not a *nitchi*. Now, then, you're right again, eh?'

The young fellow struggled up and glared round wildly. 'So it's you, Alf?'

'That's what. Old Billy's coming on behind?'

Winton shuddered. The words rattled forth like shot upon a hollow wall. 'They've fixed him.'

Justin entered in time to catch this. The long hair at the sides of his face shook solemnly. 'I tell you; *nitchies* fight. See, boy?'

McAuliffe was wiping his massive forehead with an oily rag the half-breed had recently employed

for gun-cleaning purposes. 'Mix me a glass, Justin—a stiff one to straighten my nerves out. Goldam! this corks me.'

Winton blinked his eyes like an owl in the sunlight. 'He's dead. Plugged by those devilish *nitchies*! Then he briefly told his tale.

'You didn't see him corpsed?' cried the Factor, eagerly.

'Next thing. The shot, groan, the fall—all the rest.'

'This fairly sets me on the itch,' said the Factor, pacing up and down. 'Poor old Billy. Goldam! I'd like to get my axe alongside the skull of the skunk who did the lead-pumping business. I'd set his body to pickle, I tell you.'

'Vengeance will fall upon the wicked man who striketh his neighbour secretly,' came in a weak voice from the corner. 'Let us watch and pray.' Denton became himself again when he understood that Winton was unpursued.

'Never mind him,' said McAuliffe, generally. 'He's only a crazy kind of fool, anyhow. He don't know what he's talking about.'

Again Justin's dark hand shot upward, and the warning whistle sounded. He set his head forward, then remarked, as though it were the most natural thing in the world, 'Boy coming.'

Denton's heels recommenced their tattoo, while the others caught up their guns. The moon was rising now, and some silvery rays slanted through the window. Suddenly a heavy knock fell upon the door.

'Ho!' cried the half-breed through a crack.

'Open up,' came back the answer in pure English.

'Goldam!' shouted McAuliffe, 'it's the devil, or a pal of his.'

The door creaked back. On the threshold, with the night behind, stood a young man, a rifle swinging from his hand.

'Chief Factor McAuliffe, I reckon?' he said smoothly, entering the fort.

'That's so,' the burly Factor replied. 'The devil bless me if I know who you are.'

'*Benedicite!*' laughed the new-comer, a strange smile crossing his handsome face. 'My name is Hugh Lamont—at the service of the Hudson's Bay Company,' he concluded.

'I guess the Company can hustle along without smashing your shoulders,' returned McAuliffe, who was absolute despot of the district.

'I'm not so sure,' came the cool answer. 'This is a bad time for modesty, so I'll hurt my feelings to the extent of letting you know that there isn't a man in the Dominion who can down me at any range with rifle or revolver. Like to try?'

This was an unfortunate challenge. McAuliffe was accustomed to boast of being the worst shot on the Continent. It was, however, a fact that he was perfectly useless as a marksman.

'You've just come from the Lord knows where to tell me that,' he shouted angrily. 'Just you quit your shooting toy, and get your arms round my body. I tell you, I could throw your weight from here to the forest.'

Lamont laughed contemptuously. He glanced through the window at the Saskatchewan burning beneath the moon, then remarked, 'I guess you'll be hearing an owl pumping out hoots round here presently.'

'Let them hoot,' said the Factor, hotly. 'Goldam! the derved old owls don't have to ask your permission—'

'These owls don't grow feathers on their skins,' continued the young man, unmoved. 'The kind that'll be hooting presently are just now laying paint on their faces, and fixing up their shooters.'

Then the others gathered round him at once.

'What's that?' cried the Factor. 'Never mind my crazy talk. What are the *nitchies* after?'

'They're going to clear you out at midnight,' replied Lamont, nonchalantly.

Quarter of an hour later, the position had been discussed and plan of action determined on. There was only one course open, namely, a retreat to the island on mid-stream, where they would be fairly safe against a small attacking force. It was then two hours before midnight, so they had ample time.

Angry and excited, McAuliffe paced the narrow floor, his great voice booming forth like a bull's bellow. Lamont took a seat at the table, and coolly attacked the remnants of the supper with the hearty appetite of hunger. Winton stood upright, refreshed and ready to meet the men who had

cut short the career of his hunter friend. Nobody noticed Denton squirming in a dark corner.

'Boys, we must be shifting. Say, Justin, the York boat lies right below, eh?'

The half-breed grunted, while the Factor continued, 'Let's get. Don't make more noise than you want to. We'll fix up and come back for you, Lamont,' he concluded, with the easy familiarity of the country.

The three men left the fort, and followed a winding path along the side of the cliff. Drawn up on a narrow sandspit, like some antediluvian monster, lay a black York boat, which was dragged by concerted effort to the water's edge. Then burdens were disposed of, Justin left on guard, while the others climbed back up the stony pathway, talking in loud tones, as though there were no such things as Indians in the world. McAuliffe, who had given the warning, was of course principal offender. Yet it was difficult to be low-spirited on such a night.

There was no wind—no sound, except a soft sighing over the waters, and a whispering through scarce quivering leaves. The moon, rising in her silvery glory, cast over the lonely forest and glittering river track a gorgeous mantle of light, investing all things with mystical shadow of unreality. The shimmering foliage of the bushes, agitated by the bodies of the men as they passed, appeared bathed in a flood of radiance, while from the point of each jewelled leaf small dewdrops fell like pearls in a shower of silver. Across the river a broad ladder of light lay shivering and burning. Little gilded serpents wound their phosphorescent coils from wave to wave, darting to each side of the glowing road into blacker water, then casting tiny lamps of fire and points of beauty upon the curling crest of each murmuring ripple. Again they darted back, to receive new energy, while in a breath the eye was dazzled anew by fresh wonders.

Above, in a clear sky, the constellations glimmered faintly, their beauty somewhat dimmed by the nearer glories of earth's satellite. A few fragile *cirri* floated, like dream spirits, beneath the blue expanse, while, in the distance, long auroral streamers, indistinct cones and spindles of vapour, shot upward from an arched smoky cloud, rising a few degrees above the northern horizon.

'Wonder they didn't make off with the boat,' said Winton, as they struggled along the difficult track.

'The devils are too clever; it would have given us fair warning. They couldn't have dragged the old ark far without bringing Justin down. The old chap can see everything.'

'Grand night, isn't it?'

'Fine,' agreed McAuliffe, slapping his mighty chest. 'Just the time when a fellow feels like devilry of some sort. Give me the night, a good moon lighting up the trees, a clear sky and soft wind, and I'm fit to throw a dozen men one after the other. Time of day makes a lot of difference to me. In the morning, I feel sort of weak, and want to knock around doing woman's chores. Noon, I'm for eating; while in the afternoon, I'm bound to stretch out my legs and pull at the pipe. But when the darkness comes round, I begin to feel good. I want to use up my spare strength on anything handy. The night's the time, I tell you. When you're tired, there's always a glass of whisky and bed waiting. What more can a man want?'

'Only home and friends,' muttered the other, in a low voice.

Lamont, in the meantime, was left to himself, as he thought, in the fort. So, as he satisfied the cravings of man within, he speculated upon the possibility of danger for man without. For that night he would have his hands full. The Factor was useless as a rifle shot, so they were very short-handed. Still, his own aim was unerring.

He smiled to himself, as he lay back in a bright ray of moonlight. A scene of blood, burnt powder, shrieking bullets, and cries of agony rose before him. He saw again that desperate struggle at Fish Creek. A gallant, though straggling, line of the 90th, Manitoba's pride, came charging recklessly up the flowery slope—there were brave boys in the 90th, but they lacked good leadership. Young boys from the Red River Valley, with sterner fighters from Fort Garry. Up they came, their beardless faces red with determination and heat of battle. But many of them were dropped silently at long range, and fell upon the soft bed of prairie grass, bleeding from a mortal wound.

Lamont's smile grew crueller, as he saw again a lithe, graceful figure stretched along a declivity in the ridge, with cheek cuddling a rifle stock. Every time that weapon spoke, one of the 90th boys grabbed the air and tumbled. Riel had at least one powerful auxiliary at the Creek.

Shuffling movements in an opposite corner brought him back to the present. He uttered a quick exclamation, then snatched up the lamp and held it above his head. As a dark body stirred slowly, his brow grew damp and his face white. But the blood returned slowly to his face, when the feeble rays smote upon the abject countenance of the miserable Denton. 'I thought I was alone,' he said, with a short laugh. 'Are you one of the crowd?'

Denton crept up to the table, with shivering limbs and ghastly eyes.

'You're looking sick,' Lamont continued. 'What were you doing in that corner?'

'I was asleep,' came the shaky answer. 'My eyes were weary from much searching of the Scriptures.'

The young man laughed openly. 'I guess a rifle will be of more use to you than the Scriptures to-night.'

The other grabbed his arm. 'Say, this is just a job you're putting up on McAuliffe, eh?'

'You keep your ears fairly active when you're asleep. But it's true enough, siree. The *nitchies* are on the red-hot jump for us.'

'We shall be killed,' quavered Denton, with hands shaking like river reeds.

A hearty roar of laughter burst from the doorway as the Factor's burly figure blocked the aperture. 'The *nitchies* are after you, Peter, so you'll be killed sure. Never mind, lad. You're all the time saying you can see the gates of the heavenly city open before you. Kind of anxious now whether you haven't switched off on a side track, eh?'

Lamont sprang to his feet, passing his fingers caressingly round the rifle stock. 'I'm ready to shift, Factor. The sooner we're over the better. There may be spies around.'

'They're dead sure we're trapped,' said McAuliffe 'Anyway, we'll be as easy there as here. Get a gait on, Peter. We're going to stick you up the end of the island, same as we used to fix up a pole with old clothes on it, in the fields at home, to scare away the crows.'

'Choke off, Alf,' interposed Winton. 'If you chaps start that chin music, we sha'n't get away before sunrise.'

'Well, I'm not delaying you. Peter's mismanager here. Goldam! listen to that, will you?'

His face grew stern again, and he held up a great hairy hand.

'The half-breed's whistle,' said Lamont. 'There's danger around.'

'Shut the door!' shouted the ex-minister, wildly.

'Quit your blasted noise. There it comes. Goldam! listen to it.'

Again the weird conflict of sounds proceeded from the forest. There was a great crashing of branches, the sharp striking of hoofs upon rock, the heavy plungings of a frightened animal. Up from the river came the second warning whistle.

The moonlight poured into the room; the Factor dashed outside, with weighty axe in his hands; the next minute a loud oath rolled off his tongue.

A black horse was pawing at the turf. At every sound he flung up his head and trembled, while his eyes glittered savagely.

'You tell me old Billy's been fixed by *nitchies*?' shouted McAuliffe. 'If anyone says that, it's a dam' great lie. There's been filthy work around here to-night, boys, or I'm talking through my hat.'

Then Lamont came forward, with his usual grace of motion. 'You're right,' he said slowly; 'the rifle's strapped to the saddle yet. No Indian would lose such a chance.'

The Factor bit at his moustache, and glanced round towards Winton beneath heavy eyebrows. Midway his gaze was arrested by Lamont, and the two stared at each other in the white light. McAuliffe was the first to lower his gaze.

Kitty, the grey one-eyed mare, came and rubbed her nose against the black horse. Then an owl hooted loudly from the edge of the bush.

A weird shriek came from the interior of the fort.

'It's the signal!' exclaimed Winton, excitedly.

'That's the genuine moper,' said the Factor, sullenly. 'Come on, boys, let's get across the water. I reckon the devil himself's among us to-night.'

[1] The less known Little Saskatchewan empties itself into the lake on the opposite side, about forty miles further south.

CHAPTER V

THE FIGHT

A long hour had dragged away. The moon, then a glowing disc of radiance, had reached the centre of the heavens, and cast over the northern land a shivering mantle of white light.

On the long, wooded island, round which the mighty river hissed and murmured, five men were stationed at various points. Sheltered behind the efficient rampart of the black York boat, which had been drawn up on the shingle beach, Lamont knelt, nursing his rifle. He had taken off his coat to sling over head and neck, for protection against the mosquitoes that swarmed in malignant numbers between river and under growth. Before him a delicate green poplar branch waved from the boat. This concealed the gleam of his weapon without interfering with his sight.

Not far distant Winton lay stretched along a fir-shadowed rock, the slime-green base of which was washed by the lipping waves. He kept a watchful eye on the opposite shore, while pulling strongly at a short pipe.

In the dark shadows behind, the comedy of a melodrama was being rehearsed. McAuliffe, self-appointed leader of the defence party, having placed his crack shots, paced up and down before the log hut, drawing ghastly pictures of a probably impending fate for the benefit of the terror-stricken Denton. As his mercurial excitement increased, he swung his only weapon—a keen-edged bush axe—over his head, while at each flash of the metal the quondam bar-tender shrank back with a fresh shudder. Reproof came at length from young Winton.

'Say, Alf, that axe shines like lightning. You're raising an awful racket.'

The Factor quickly lowered his weapon. 'You're right. I'm just explaining things to Peter, though. He wants to know which is the position of danger, as he's dead set on getting it. There's a lion's heart under Peter's modesty, I tell you.'

Winton chuckled softly, and carefully struck a match. With huge relish, the Factor continued, 'See here, Peter, when the *nitchies* get hold of you they'll start to work and strip you bare as a shell-fish. Likely then they'll fix you up with a tight suit of paint trimmed with atmosphere. Wonderful playful they can be when they set their minds to it. Shouldn't wonder if they didn't pour oil on your wool and touch it up with a light; just to see how you'd dance, or hear the talk you used preaching. They've got lots of fun in them, Peter. All they want's a fellow with humour, one that could see the point of their jokes. You'd do that fine. Might stick skewers into your stomach to try your digestion, or—'

Here the rifle Denton had been grasping gingerly fell with a crash. Small sweat-beads stood upon his white forehead.

'Hold on!' cried McAuliffe, with more concern, 'we haven't got too many rifles as it is. Pick up that shooter, and just come along with me. Don't point the derved thing at my stomach.'

'It's not loaded,' stammered the ex-minister.

'Not loaded!' shouted the Factor, in a voice that might almost have been heard at the mouth of the Saskatchewan. 'You old doodle-now! I reckon you think that when you point it at a *nitchi* he's going to tumble dead just to oblige you. Here, hand over your shells, while I pack the thing for you.'

'I haven't any,' quavered Denton.

'I'd like to know darned well what you have got, outside a lump of pigeon heart and chunk of white liver. Justin!'

The half-breed appeared at the low doorway.

'Give me some shells,' continued the Factor. 'And—Goldam!'

After his favourite oath, the agile tongue became silent. From the distant forest came the solemn hooting of an owl. The dreary sound hung solemnly over the water. Again it screeched forth, then a third time.

Lamont shifted his position slightly, while a light glittered in his keen eyes. Winton slipped the warm pipe into his pocket, and nervously rubbed at his arms, to remove a suggestion of stiffness. Justin handed a fistful of shells to the Factor, then proceeded unconcernedly to the water's edge. Squatting on his haunches he wrenched a large tobacco-wad from a black plug, then leaned over towards his neighbour and grunted.

Winton looked across inquiringly. 'Tobak?' queried the half-breed, extending the greasy plug.

The young man shook his head.

'Good,' affirmed Justin, touching his right eye and raising the rifle to his shoulder.

'No good to me,' came the answer. So Justin grunted again, while his jaws moved faster.

McAuliffe dropped his axe and vigorously forced the shells into the rifle chamber. Then he shoved the weapon into Denton's hand, and hurried him over the shingle with the remark, 'Now chuck off the fleece, Peter. Be a ravening wolf, and worthy of the Company. We've got to fight, and there's no flies on it. You do your biz to-night, and I'll let you hold a prayer meeting in the fort when everything's over. Think of that, Peter.'

Then he passed to the others, with axe under arm, kicking up the wet sand and muttering, 'Darn it, why can't I shoot? I'd give my nose and ears to be able to send a bullet straight.'

The minutes dragged heavily after the signal had been given. McAuliffe stood in a deep shadow, leaning forward on his axe. He fixed his gaze upon the low, whitewashed walls of the fort—where his best years had been spent in isolation from the world—showing ghastly in the moonlight; he looked on to the open space, with the black rocks and long forest shadows, then at the motionless bank of trees, which concealed the approaching foe. Casting his eyes higher, he beheld the majestic flag of England swaying listlessly from the denuded fir; yet higher—he saw the pale stars, and for the moment wondered what lay beyond.

Justin's small eyes were keener even than Lamont's, for he it was who first perceived dark forms, half concealed by bushes they were carrying, winding in single file round the base of the cliff. He gave his low whistle, then deliberately glanced an eye along his sights.

The Factor was sprawling along the shingle, watching the Indians as they commenced to climb the cliff face, led by one man particularly agile. He muttered softly, 'They're fooled by the light you left burning, Justin. Goldam! I'd like to be on top of that cliff now. This old axe of mine would rattle among their jawbones!'

Then Lamont turned himself and called, 'Say, boys, I want you to give me first shot.'

A word, then a grunt, came back by way of assent, but there was no third voice.

'Wonder what Peter's doing,' resumed McAuliffe. 'Hope he won't play monkey tricks with us, anyway. If he aims this way, we're right enough; but if he shoots at the *nitchies*, there's a fair chance for one of us to damage a bullet.'

That unearthly silence still brooded over the great river and lonely forest. The northern lights crept higher up the sky with a stronger glow. A few sounds, which intensified the solitude, beat the air—the sharp chirping of frogs from the white muskegs behind, the sullen roar of great rapids miles up stream, the piercing refrain of the chief of insect pests.

The tall leader crept up the cliff front, followed by his companions, their bodies flattened against the rock. On the island shore lay Lamont, rifle to shoulder, his cheek caressing the stock, head leaning over as though in sleep. He might have been a stone figure. Another minute, and the leader came up to the summit. He shot forth a long arm to seize the overhanging rock cornice and drag his body over the ledge. But, as he did so, two or three pale blue smoke rings circled peacefully from the island, to float down with the murmuring river. Afterwards came a whip-like *crack*, which set the wild northern echoes shrieking.

The leader flung up both arms with convulsive action, then crashed backward, down amongst his followers, sweeping them to the cruel rocks and sand beach beneath. Then Lamont aroused himself and looked round for criticism.

McAuliffe shambled up from his bed of loose stones with ungraceful motions. Up and down the beach he went, laughing and bellowing, bull-like, in his excitement.

'Goldam!' he shouted again and again. 'That beats all! That's the daisiest thing in long shots I've ever blinked at! Goldam, Lamont! you're a peach! Brought them all down, by the almighty Jerusalem! Every dirty, lickspittle squaw's papoose! Here they are again. Pump away your lead, boys. Goldam! Goldam!'

The attacking party from the forest appeared out in the open. Some ventured round the corner of the fort, and these discovered the fate of their companions. But directly they showed themselves, three shots rang out sharply.

The Factor narrowly escaped wounding his leg with the axe in his evolutions. He puffed out his beard, while his great red face glowed and shone. 'I tell you, you're doing fine, boys. You picked off that big fellow as though he'd been a chicken on a fence post, Justin. Hope he isn't dead, though; he owes the Company for a pair of blankets. Look at that, would you?'

Small shot whistled through the air, pattering against rocks, through leaves, and dropping like hail into the river. The natives had fired a volley from their old muzzle loaders, which were almost useless at the distance. Then the attacking party, evidently disappointed and mystified, withdrew again into the forest.

The defenders left their post and came round McAuliffe, with the unimportant exception of Denton. A sharp query at once arose, 'Where's that derved skunk, Peter?'

The half-breed jerked his head towards the trees, and muttered, 'He no good.'

'The mean devil. He can shoot well if he wants. I'm going to track him up, then tie him down to his place.'

'What's the good, Alf?' said Winton. 'Let him alone. He won't be any good if you do find him.'

The other yielded. 'Well, well, I guess you're right. Now I wonder what scheme the rascals t'other side mean working.'

'Get canoe,' said Justin, abruptly.

'I reckon. Then they'll try their dirtiest to land. I shall have my chores to see to soon as they cross the Jordan. How many boats, Justin?'

The half-breed held up a hand, then replied, 'Canoe; one boat.'

'Five canoes and a York,' said McAuliffe, interpreting the sign language. 'That's rough. There's not another tribe in the district with a York boat. This is an old one; used to belong to the Company. It may be leaky, still I reckon it'll do the trip.'

'How large is the tribe?' asked Lamont.

'Small. Not more than sixty males, counting the old 'uns and boys. We should be able to hold

them off.'

'Hope they'll soon come,' said Winton, stretching his long arms.

McAuliffe passed his thumb across the axe edge. 'I reckon this is an interval for refreshment,' he observed. 'There should be a bottle in the hut, boys. Let's turn in for a nerve-straightener and a bit of plug. Justin'll whistle out when we're wanted.'

Then they disappeared within, while the night silence grew again.

About half an hour had slipped away, before the half-breed's whistle gave warning of danger. The men were quickly back in their places, to see a couple of canoes working up stream, hugging the opposite bank closely.

Lamont knelt for a time at the side of the half-breed, talking and explaining. Justin nodded and grunted as a sign of understanding, then took a fresh wad of chew, and, without the least outward show of interest, watched the progress of the enemy.

McAuliffe now wore the axe strapped to his back, and appeared with a huge breech loader, which he had loaded with No. 2 shot and a heavy charge. This was for close quarters.

But as he scanned the moon-lit prospect, his peace of mind was considerably perturbed by a slight, yet sufficiently significant omen. The rope might have been tampered with by some Indian, or the slight wind might possibly have loosened the rings, but it was certain that the two flags, which recently had fluttered in their proper places, were now hanging at half-mast.

The Factor was superstitious, like most northerners, so the sight troubled him. It did not appear as though the others had noticed the change—Justin would not have understood the meaning of the sign—and this was perhaps as well.

A gaunt, flat-bottomed York boat came suddenly round the bend in mid-stream. Six paddles flashed on either side between water and moonlight. Even so, progress was slow.

'Ready, Justin?' called Lamont, quickly. A sonorous grunt.

'First canoe.'

Brief silence, then a double report. Two Indians, one at each end of the leading canoe, staggered and fell over the side. Immediately the birch-shell overturned, and cast its occupants into the river.

But the black York boat came steadily on. In vain Justin crashed his bullets through the thick sides. In vain Lamont skilfully pierced the planking beneath water line. The gaunt bulwarks of this floating castle grew nearer. Even Justin shook his head and muttered, 'Bad!' McAuliffe swore and laid a brawny hand upon his axe. The boat was not more than a stone's throw from the end of the island, when a canoe, just launched from the opposite bank, came cutting a white line through the water. It had already reached mid-stream, when a strong cry rose from Winton's corner.

'What is it?' called McAuliffe, hurrying up.

'A canoe coming down stream. Not fifty yards off.'

'Attacked on three sides,' groaned the Factor, as he came to the young man's side. 'Half a dozen in it. Anything would send it over. Winton, boy, you must tackle it.'

'Right, Alf,' said the young fellow simply.

The Factor turned away heavily, but the voice behind called him back. 'Here, Alf, you've been square to the deadbeat.'

An oily, powder-stained hand was extended. McAuliffe clutched it in his great fingers, then hurried along the loose shingle.

He soon came up with the half-breed, who was firing steadily, but without apparent success, at the black boat. The Indians reserved their fire for close quarters. With them reloading was a lengthy process.

For the time Lamont's skill seemed to have left him. Shot after shot he aimed at the speeding canoe, but with no decisive result. At length his nerve was restored, and he disabled the Indian in the bows. The next time his rifle cracked, water poured through the birch bark, and the frail canoe settled at once, not fifteen yards from shore. Then Lamont pulled out his revolver, and coolly picked off the dark heads bobbing among the waves caused by the furious struggles of desperate swimmers.

Hard by, young Winton toiled single-handed. With the speed and coolness which had won him his football blue during that short 'Varsity career, he aimed, fired and reloaded, though his boyish face grew pale at the odds against him. If Lamont had only been by his side, as he so easily might have been! Opportunities were narrowing down rapidly—the canoe was perilously close, and so many of his bullets went astray.

Ah! that was a good shot. The canoe had overturned, but there were still three men uninjured. One held his weapon above water, and clung to the inverted canoe, which he steered towards

land, employing it as a life-buoy and shield. Also, he could rest his gun on the birch bark, and take fairly deliberate aim. The other two reached shallow water, and were making for the bank.

Winton pressed his lips fiercely, as, with a hand that trembled for the first time that night, he fired at the approaching foe. The tension was fearful, after the attack of deer fever and the fright of Sinclair's end. If Lamont would only come! From the other end of the island came the loud yells of Indians, and over all the roar of the Factor's deep voice.

For McAuliffe's opening had arrived at last. With the imperturbable Justin at his side, he 'lay for' that York boat. Hurriedly he explained, 'We must empty their guns, boy. When I call "down," flop for your life.'

With jerky motions the black monster drew down, the water rippling and gurgling along the sides. Paddles flashed in the moonlight, while drops rained from the quickly moving blades in fiery points of light.

Not more than a dozen yards distant, and a head appeared. Justin's rifle flashed from the crook of his arm—a paddle dropped, and floated away down stream. That was a shot Lamont might have envied. Three more strokes, and a dozen pointing guns flashed within sight, as many painted faces glared defiance from the stocks.

'Down!' roared McAuliffe, in a voice that set the leaves trembling.

Before the echoes threw back the sound, they were sprawling against the wet sand. Literally at the same moment a thrilling report shrieked over island, up river, across distant forests. Small boughs and bunches of leaves rained from surrounding trees, while each trunk bled from a thousand wounds. The shot crashed, like the bursting of a hurricane, against the rocks, while the air was thick with fluttering wads, and foul with powder.

A wild shout of triumph burst from the black boat. There were two lifeless figures stretched upon the beach! So the paddles worked faster, while the keel ground sullenly on fine sand. There was no thought of concealment. Every warrior leaned over the side, laughing and howling in foolish joy.

But as the smoke collected overhead in one large cloud, and commenced to drift away, extraordinary animation visited one of the supposed corpses. It sprang to its feet and rushed into the water, pointing a heavy gun. At a merely nominal distance it levelled a great gun, then pulled the trigger, with a result that it fell floundering backwards with the force of recoil. It was up directly, spluttering and jubilant. 'You skunks! I've fixed your dirty racket. Goldam! if I haven't made a straight shot this journey, call me Ananias.'

Justin stood behind, stolidly chewing. He grunted and expressed his feelings by the monosyllable, 'Good!'

The attacking party were quiet enough now, for there was hardly a single man unwounded. True to their nature, all had emptied their guns together. Now the foremost idea was immediate departure; so a couple of men sprang overboard to push the boat off.

But McAuliffe threw down the gun, and swung round his axe. 'I'll spoil the first man who starts shoving,' he said cheerfully.

The half-breed fired again, and a man who had been endeavouring secretly to load his gun fell forward in the boat.

This robbed the Indians of their last vestige of determination. They all cried aloud for mercy.

The Factor was now in his element. 'Throw up your hands! Come ashore one by one, and fling down your fixings!'

This injunction was obeyed. The warriors threw knives and ammunition to the beach, then stood with uplifted hands.

'Bring along that new rope, Justin!' The half-breed disappeared within the hut, while McAuliffe, with the air of a general, reviewed his prisoners. 'First that makes a break gets a bullet in his liver! If any want to commit suicide, all he's got to do is move out of his place!'

When the rope was brought, Justin cut it into lengths, while his superior, with considerable zest, fastened the hands of each warrior behind his back. To each he addressed a few conciliatory remarks. Such as to the leader,—

'Well, Muskwah, my boy, you've gone to work and made a derved fool of yourself to-night. Now I've got to use a good bit of new rope to decorate your arms; but see here, boy, I shall notch it down to your score in the store books. You'll have to bring along a gallon of fish oil to get square.'

However, it was not reserved for Justin to fire the last shot of the fight.

His share of the work completed, Lamont exchanged rifle for pipe, and began to chop at a plug of T.&B. Thus employed, he suddenly heard a rattling of footsteps along the shingle towards his left. He turned, expecting to see Winton; but it was a native, speeding along stealthily, with a long knife in his hand.

Lamont dropped smoking materials, and with quick movement jerked up his revolver. He was

lying in a perfectly opaque shadow, so was safe from the hostile eyes, which, indeed, never glanced in his direction. Probably this man had some personal grudge against McAuliffe, and meant now to settle it. How he had managed to elude Winton was a question Lamont could not attempt to answer.

He crouched lower, and brought the muzzle down, until it finally rested at the crook of his left elbow. His hand was like a rock. In the dim light he could see his victim's head through the sight.

'Poor devil!' he muttered to himself, with a smile. 'I'll give him a few more seconds to enjoy life in.'

The Indian slackened speed, then began to crawl towards a bush. Half a dozen movements he made, then every muscle in his body tightened with a strange agony. For a second he knelt, as though turned into stone, then dropped over noiselessly, with right side pressing the sand, and head supported on his bent arm, as though he had suddenly been overcome with sleep. And a sleep it was—yet one which leaves the body for ever silent.

CHAPTER VI

THE BREAKING OF THE DAWN

The prisoners had been secured to the last man when Lamont came slowly along the beach. Then Justin tapped the Factor's arm, and said in his usual direct manner, 'Chief coming.'

The last navigable birch bark was crossing the river in their direction. When it came closer, the victors perceived two old men huddled together in their blankets, like a couple of dreary crows. The paddle was wielded deftly and gracefully by a young, slender girl, who knelt upright in the centre, with her dark hair streaming and tossing behind.

Along the east, red light was waving and breaking. Misty clouds crept over the forest, to burst in a soaring dew. Damp air crept from the bosom of the Saskatchewan and made the men shiver. The night was merging into a new day.

McAuliffe rubbed his hands briskly, and peered through the shadowy gloom.

'It's old whisky bottle, sure enough. He's going to tumble to his knee bones and lick my shoes.'

Lamont was gazing too—but not at the withered Chief. 'Who is the girl?' he asked, with slow intonation.

The Factor laughed. 'She calls herself his daughter. How the shrivelled old hulk can claim to be her father, darned if I know. She's a daisy, I tell you. If she comes pleading for these fellows with her pretty face held up, and the tears shining in her eyes—well, I shall likely make a fool of myself.'

'What are you going to do with them, anyhow?'

'Let 'em go, soon as they've sworn not to fight against us again. They're all heathens here, so will stay by their word. I've just fixed them up to scare the old chap, and bring him to his senses. Here they come. You watch me give old whisky bottle a good rubbing down.'

Justin came up with the two old men, not speaking but occasionally tapping his rifle with a significant gesture, and grunting loudly. Ahead, Menotah tripped gaily, full as ever of life and happiness, though she had that night seen her tribe more than decimated. She was safe enough in the hands of white men, who might be cruel, yet who always fell down to worship beauty. Therefore she had twisted a fresh wreath among her black tresses, and volunteered to lead her father with Antoine to sue for pardon.

The girl's bright eyes were, however, quickly attracted and held. Lamont, as he stood leaning against a fir, among the shadows slowly turning from black to grey, was a sight good to look upon. He was bareheaded, with the cool morning wind passing through his wavy hair. The excitement of the fight still lingered over his refined face, while a self-satisfied smile round the mouth and a certain tired look in the eyes were both singularly adapted to that clear style of masculine beauty he possessed in no ordinary degree.

To her it was as if the sun had just descended from heaven and taken the form of a man. For the first time in her short life she found herself conflicting with nervousness. This was of short duration, however. Then she gave him a smiling glance, lightly touching with dainty finger tips the bright wreath which twined along her thick fringe. He recalled the scene of the previous evening, and smiled back.

This was McAuliffe's opportunity for asserting his power. Before him stood the Chief, pleading and gesticulating, throwing the blame upon the shoulders of the conveniently absent Riel and his associates, making abundant promises for future obedience. Close by, old Antoine, the real sower of strife, stood wrapped to the chin in his yellow blanket, malevolent and silent.

The Factor listened with what he flattered himself was a frown of judicial severity on his genial red face. Then he made a lamentable effort to deliver himself of fulminations after the manner of

the Chief's grandiloquence.

'You've just gone to work and made everlasting moon-heads of yourselves,' he thundered. 'You've tried to play monkey with the Company, and fix its representatives. You've gone a peg worse, for you've rebelled against the Great Mother.^[1] She's not going to stand your fooling, I tell you.' He shook a great fist in the direction of the captives. 'Listen here, now. These fellows are all going to be shot under the hour. As you two are bosses, and might feel sort of hurt going along with the crowd, I'm going to let you down soft. All I'm going to do is just string you both up to the big fir 'way side of the fort. May you jump easy!' he concluded, with a dim sense of being called upon for commendatory words by way of peroration.

The Chief shook like a jelly-stone, while Antoine began to display feeble signs of interest. Then the former trembled to his knees and wailed, 'Great Sun, from whom we receive light and food, have pity upon your miserable servants. The wicked rebel Riel, who has dared to fight against the Great Mother, commanded us to rise and destroy, and who am I to disobey his word? Pardon us, friend of the Great Spirit. Then I and my children will ever be your slaves.'

'Can't do it,' said McAuliffe, winking towards Lamont.

We feared the vengeance of Riel,' continued the old man, his wrinkled hands beating upon the shingle. 'His warriors are many, while the white men are few. Have we not received our punishment? The best of the tribe are already cold with death. To-night, round the tents will be heard the voice of weeping; maidens will mourn for lover or father; old men, who bear the scars of life trouble, will lay their white hair in the dirt when the pride of their age is borne to the tent. Instead of music and the dance, there will be beating of death knells, and the belabouring of breasts. Is not the white man satisfied with such vengeance?'

'Can't be helped,' said the Factor, stubbornly. 'Nobody but the Great Mother can forgive you.'

'But has she not placed you here to rule over us? The white man is mighty. He can give pardon to his enemies without fear. The host lies in his path, and he breathes on them. Then no man may tell where that host is.'

McAuliffe had no wish to continue argument, as he was tired and hungry. He had asserted his dignity, which was all that could be required of him. So he replied, as sternly as natural advantages would allow, 'I've heard enough of your gas, and now I'll tell you what I've got a mind to do. I'll let these fellows go, after they've all sworn that they won't fight again against the Hudson's Bay Company. You two will want to chip in as well. There's generosity for you! Goldam! don't you think you'd have slipped out of Kiel's hands like that. He'd have hung first, and let you off afterwards.'

The Chief would have burst into triumphant thankfulness, but he was speedily choked off. 'Now then, I'm waiting here for your curses. Justin, unfix the crowd.'

The half-breed passed behind the captives, and passed a knife blade across each binding rope. Then they fell into line, the Chief leading, and filed before the grinning Factor, each with right hand held aloft, and left spread upon the heart. They swore by Light, by Darkness; by Sun, by Moon; by the Great Spirit, the Totem^[2] the River, never to fight against the Hudson's Bay Company, nor to break the laws of the Great Mother. McAuliffe knew that, if occasion arose, they would seal such an oath with their lives.

Permission was then granted the survivors to reclaim their weapons and carry away the dead.

'I've a good stock of blankets in the store,' said the Factor, grimly. 'Guess you may be wanting a few to wrap up the corpses with. The store'll be open about noon. Ten dollars' worth in trade'll buy them. Oil for choice, as I'm short.'

It was remarkable what little concern Menotah showed for her father's fate. She certainly listened to the pleading, and had watched the Factor's glowing face with a satisfied smile, which betokened her certainty of the result. In her vivacious light-heartedness she imitated him as he launched his thunderbolts at her crushed parent. She drew up her slight figure with an injured dignity when he swelled with virtuous indignation; she frowned, though two sparkling eyes gave the lie to the soft forehead lines, when he attempted sternness; she threw back her little head and folded her arms in patience of resignation when he paused to hear the petitioner.

She was only an ignorant girl, whom Providence had strangely endowed with beauty. Her one idea was to charm. She could not know that across success lay the shadow of a life's sorrow.

Lamont stirred from the fir with a soft-voiced remark of flattery. The young man spoke the melodious Cree with native ease. By way of answer, Menotah plucked a berry from her hair, and threw it at him. It struck him on the nose, and she laughed. The tuneful sound was infectious, and the next minute he was at her side. The over-ripe berry had left a blood-like stain upon his fair skin. She turned impulsively, and wiped away the mark with a lingering, caressing touch of her small fingers.

It was then that Lamont's gaze fell to the other shore, and perceived in the raw light the altered position of the flags. The quick eyes, watching his movements, noticed the sudden start, so the red lips parted in a request for explanation.

He looked into her happy face, upturned trustfully. 'The flags!' he exclaimed, pointing.

'What! You have seen them before, haven't you?' she asked.

'They should be hanging from the top of the fir,' he explained.

'Oh! I did that,' cried Menotah, joyously.

'You!'

'I was pulling at the ropes—it was only for mischief—when they came tumbling down. They stopped half way, and then I left them alone.'

With careless hand and ignorant heart of happiness, she had set the sign of mourning for the dead.

'Have I done any harm?' she asked wistfully.

'Of course not,' he replied lightly. 'At least not with your hands.' He looked at her in a new manner. Again she felt that sudden strange timidity, which she did not know was the birth of love.

The dawn was scattering rays of light across forest and river. Red and golden bars stretched along the eastern sky, through which peeped a glory of the imprisoned sun. The birds shook the dew from their plumage, and flew from brake and bush in search of food; frogs sank in the slime of the muskegs and ceased their night song; locusts whirred sharply in the long grass; Nature shook off the passionless mantle of sleep, and rose with the smile of opening flowers and balmy odour of earth's incense. It was the season of new life.

Wiping his massive brow, McAuliffe came up to Lamont and took him by the shoulder. 'I'm proud of you, boy. You've put in good work to-night all right, and saved this old hulk from drifting into harbour. Yes, you're the best shot in the Dominion, sure as I'm the worst. Queer us two fellows should have come together, eh?'

'Extremes,' said the other, yawning. 'Anyway, you made the shot of the fight.'

McAuliffe puffed out his beard in a grim smile. 'Goldam! you mustn't spin shooting yarns before me now. I should chip in and cap the best. But, say, where's Winton?'

'Haven't seen him.'

The Factor's satisfied smile disappeared. He called at Justin, who was launching the heavy York, with Indian assistance, but the only answer he received was a decided shake of the black hair.

'Pshaw! he'll be keeping the bottle company. Come away into the shack, and fetch him out. He's only a boy, and played out with the work.'

But Winton was not inside the hut. Then the Factor laughed gruffly. 'He's too good-natured a young fool for this world. Tell you what; he's gone to work and set out to find Peter, just to tell him to keep clear of me for a while, the dirty rascal. He'd always sort of stick up for him, when he thought I was laying it on too thick. Goldam! Winton's a fine boy. You believe me, Lamont.'

'That's so,' said the other carelessly, glancing towards the kanikanik bush, beside which lay the corpse of the last killed.

The Factor continued, 'I've got a bit of a scheme in this old razzle-pate. There's a neat pile of shin-plasters getting bigger and mounting up all the time. When I'm given long leave, I'm going to blow 'em out by taking the boy back to the old country. Got into trouble at his University, he did, fired out, and came right on here. Derved silly thing to do, anyway, but he was scared of the folks. He's an only boy, so I reckon the people wouldn't want to come hard on him.'

'Lots of his class around,' said Lamont, thinking of the heated faces and desperate struggle at Fish Creek.

'And they're darned sight better-hearted than the good ones that mope at home. Mind you, Lamont, not a word to the boy. Not a word, or you'd spoil the racket.'

Justin called to them from the slime-green rock which the big fir shadowed.

Lamont waved his hand. 'I reckon he's found,' he said shortly.

'What are you driving at anyway? Why should he want to stay out there? Goldam! you're not making out—'

The sentence unfinished, he hurried away over the loose shingle. Lamont followed more leisurely, and presently they both stood at the half-breed's side.

Winton was still at the post of duty, clutching his cold rifle, with face turned towards the colours of the dawn. McAuliffe stooped, panting, then burst into a hearty laugh.

'Just as I said right along. He's played right out, and gone off to sleep. Well, well, I hate to wake him, but we must be getting across.'

Still laughing, he knelt and turned the young man over by his shoulder. But the sleeping figure was of a board-like stiffness. Then his red face became grey tinted, and settled in fear.

For the eyes which looked up at his were unclosed and covered with light film; the forehead was

like marble, over which the hair trembled in the raw air of morning, like grass on the dry rock; but the ears heard no sound of McAuliffe's deep cry, the stiff and parted lips gave back no cheerful word of welcome.

Young Winton had done with life and the troubles living brings.

[1] The Queen.

[2] See Glossary.

PART II

THE HEART'S GRIEF

CHAPTER I

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

The presence of death, which casts so powerful a shadow of sorrow, and imposes so profound a silence, brooded along the smiling shores of the Saskatchewan. In the fort on the cliff summit, Justin had prepared food, and the two men had eaten, then sought sleep for a few hours. About mid-day the Factor appeared outside, swinging the store key, while Lamont stirred himself and began to chop tobacco in the outer office.

On the pure air came distant sounds of lamentation for the dead, shrill voices rising and falling in monotonous cadence, with dull drum beatings. Nearer there were different disturbances of the atmosphere—McAuliffe's deep voice, swearing angrily at some natives, alternating with the funereal strokes of a spade. The half-breed was preparing a grave for the cold figure lying in the other room.

The door swung open—no mosquitoes were stirring in that white heat—and the sun slanted inward with long dazzling rays. Presently a soft, hesitating step pattered along the planking outside, a shadow crossed the hot beams, then a face timidly peeped within.

Lamont called out lightly, and Menotah slipped inside. Warm colour shone in her cheeks, her bosom heaved slightly, while the radiant eyes were moist. Her red lips parted in a quick little sigh of surprised pleasure.

'I did not know you were here,' she said, the soft fringe dropping over her eyes. '*He* said I might come—to say good-bye.'

Lamont bit his lip. 'He is inside.' Then she flashed a sudden look upon him and disappeared.

Sitting with the smoke rising to the log roof, he presently heard the sound of a kiss. He started and shuddered. It was a horrible idea for one so young, so warm, so beautiful, to press a kiss with ripe lips on the cold blue features of a corpse. When she appeared, somewhat more solemn and less smiling, he asked, 'Did you like him, Menotah?'

'Yes. He was nice, and used to kiss me; so I have kissed him, now that he has gone to the shadow land.'

She made a light step onward. Her heart was too happy to feel grief for long.

At that moment Lamont was almost glad a possible rival had been removed. This girl was such an entirely perfect piece of nature.

'You may come with me if you like,' she said artlessly, holding out a small brown hand. 'I will talk to you. Perhaps, if you are nice to me, I will kiss you.'

Her colour deepened as she made the innocent promise. She had never felt this warm, elevating desire before. For her it had no name, yet she was certain it was a thing not to be lost lightly. Somehow she imagined a contact of lips would intensify that feeling, might bring it nearer consummation. That the awakening desire was a threatening danger to the 'heart of joy' she did not guess, she could not know.

But he was by her side, and they were walking through the cool of the forest, soothed by the whisperings of the leaves.

Beneath the spreading fir known to the Indians as the 'death tree,' they paused, while Lamont noticed that Menotah's long lashes were fringed with tear dew. 'You are crying,' he said quickly.

She laughed up at him gaily. 'No, I am not. But I am so happy.'

He smiled back at these innocent words, which contained a latent flattery. Then he looked with a growing tenderness at the dark clusters of hair and wonderful health bloom on the delicately

curved features. This beautiful girl would obey the natural impulses of inclination. She was ignorant of life—more, could scarce recognise the first emotion of love birth. Certainly he must teach her.

It was a strange spot for the meeting-place of lovers. At every breath of wind overhead branches rocked with a weird sound of bone creaking. For there were many brown-ribbed skeletons swaying airily among the chafing boughs. Sometimes the breeze would fan aside a leaf cluster to disclose a jocund skull secured to the bark behind. They were surrounded by relics of the dead, for the ground and bushes were plentifully besprinkled with bones, which had decayed away, and been swept aside during dark nights when the storm howled through the forest.

'You are happy,' said Lamont almost enviously. 'Have you no wish—'

'Yes,' she interrupted joyously. 'I should like to be wise and know much, more even than old Antoine. Then I would go over the Great Water to the City of the Wind.^[1] I would show the white chiefs that the poor Indians, though not great and powerful, are yet beings of flesh and blood. We see with eyes, hear with ears, speak with tongues and life breath. The Indian's body casts as good a shadow as the white man's. Oh, if I might only be wise, and do what I wish!'

'What gives you such a wish?'

With true native reverence for the unknown, she replied fearfully, 'The Dream Spirit whispers in my ear when I sleep. I do not forget.'

She stopped abruptly, so he added with a laugh, 'Your friends?'

'I could not,' she said simply. 'By forgetting friends you rob yourself of pleasure; by forgetting enemies you make yourself coward.'

Lamont gazed at the small face eagerly. 'You would seek for revenge, then?'

'It would be duty,' she returned, with new sternness. 'If it is right to do good to a friend, it must also be right to punish an enemy. If anyone should kill my heart with sorrow, I would give life and strength to the cause of vengeance. I should never turn back.'

A gust of hot wind sighed through the dreary tree. The branches shifted with sullen movements. But, as she ceased speaking, a brown object bounded through the rustling leaves and lay on the grass before them, gazing upward with ghastly mirth.

Lamont started back with white face, and crossed himself hurriedly. But Menotah only laughed. 'The Wind Spirit is throwing skulls at us. But why are you frightened?'

He pointed at the symbol of death. 'It is a bad omen,' he said huskily. 'It means approaching evil.'

'To me?' asked Menotah, astounded at this fresh wisdom.

'Or to me—perhaps to both.'

She smiled and shook her small head. 'Ah! but you are wrong; I should only despise a God, who could only warn me by rolling a skull at my feet. My heart has always been happy; I know the God would never harm me.'

'Trouble comes to all at some time in life.'

'No, not to all; never to me. I have been born that I may laugh and be happy. I must not try to teach you. Yet, when you have made something with your own hands that you think beautiful, you could never destroy it, unless you were mad. You would feel you were cutting away a part of your life. So the God could never destroy my happiness. For he would have to spoil the work of his own making; and the God is never mad.'

She picked up the skull and ran her bright eyes over the mouldering symbol. Then, as she perceived, high up on the bony forehead, a small, rounded fissure, she gave a sad little cry of recognition.

'This is the skull of a white man. But his story was a very sad one.'

'Who was he?' cried Lamont, in surprise.

'I never saw him alive. But when he lay dead, I washed the dry blood from his face. That was eight years ago, when I was very young. See! here is the place where the bullet passed.'

'Who was he?' repeated Lamont, in lower tones.

'He came from the Spirits' passing place.^[2] His name was Sinclair.'

'Sinclair!' he muttered to himself. 'Pshaw! it's the commonest name of the Province.' Then to the girl, 'Who shot him?'

'He had an enemy who was a coward. He tracked him down through the forest as you would follow a moose. One evening Sinclair was resting and smoking his pipe. Then this other man crept up and shot him through the bushes.'

Lamont moistened his lips. 'Did he escape?'

Menotah shook her head gladly. 'They caught him, and the warriors tied him to a tree, then shot at him with arrows. Some day I will show you that tree. But he was a coward. He cried for mercy when the women tied his arms.'

'But he was only doing his duty,' argued Lamont, with his careless air. 'You say that vengeance is necessary.'

'But I would never steal upon my enemy and shoot him down. That is the act of a man who fears to fight. I would meet him face to face. Perhaps Sinclair had never done this man an injury after all.' Then she laughed in her happy manner, and set the skull carefully in the cleft of a stunted kanikanik bush. She turned to him and laid a small hand on his arm. 'You would not act as he did,' she said.

He looked at the little fingers curved upon his coat sleeve. Then he placed his hand over and held them. 'Then you do not think me a coward?'

'You!' she said slowly. 'No, you are a brave man, who would fight until death for any you loved.'

'For you?' he said, bending his head to the soft, waving tresses.

'And even after death; your soul would protect me.'

He drew a little back and laughed scornfully. 'Do you believe in such a thing?'

She lifted her face, which was animated with belief. 'You may see it; on the winter's day the shadowy vapour rises to the lips and escapes in breath. You cannot tell where it goes to. But it is the soul.'

She stopped and glanced half shyly. 'Go on,' he said.

'In the summer we do not need to see it. Then everything is alive and happy. But in the dreary winter the Spirit shows itself to our eyes. Then we may know the higher life stirs within us, though the world is dead. Shall I tell you any more?'

She stood like the child repeating a well-known lesson. Her fingers twisted within his, and she lowered her eyes. He passed his arm round the slight figure, and drew her from the shadow of the death tree.

'It is gloomy here; let us go out to the sunshine.'

'Then I must go. I have to bring the old Chief to mourn at the grave.' Her manner changed quickly as she continued, 'I don't think you believe in me.'

He laughed outright. 'Have I said so? Don't you think I would keep any promise I made you?'

They stopped in the dimly-marked forest trail, and he drew her to him. She looked up quickly, sighed, then passed her right arm impulsively across to his shoulder. Her long hair, floating unbound, caressed the hand that held her waist. 'Yes,' she faltered, with a strange little laugh, 'for you are brave.'

The light darted into her lustrous eyes, and her small mouth twitched. He placed his hand beneath her chin and raised her graceful head as he bent his own down. Her quick breathing fanned his face. 'Your promise,' he whispered. Then the sunlight disappeared.

Later, a strange procession started from the fort. Winton's body lay uncovered on resinous pine branches, the ends of which were sustained by the shoulders of McAuliffe and the half-breed. At a short distance behind walked Lamont, smoking carelessly.

The grave had been dug about fifty paces from the door. Arriving there, they placed the body upon the grass, while the Factor mopped his forehead and remarked upon the weather. He was grinning broadly, as a necessary covering to his real feelings. Subsequently he confided to Lamont that he had been compelled to recall the most humorous incidents connected with his past career as a preventive to foolish signs of grief. Justin stood by stolidly, and spat into the grave.

'Shouldn't wonder if we didn't get an electric storm presently,' observed the Factor. There was no reply to this attempt at conversation. 'What'll we do now?' he continued, smiling expansively.

Justin grunted, then pointed expressively to the dark hole surrounded by fresh grass.

'Plant him, eh? well, I guess so. Got any ropes?'

There were none handy, so the half-breed went off to the store for some. The Factor filled the interval by relating a ludicrous anecdote for his companion's benefit, and chopping a pipeful of plug. When Justin returned, ropes were passed round the leafy bier and the body was lowered by concerted effort.

Then McAuliffe lit his pipe, and knocked his great boots together clumsily. He looked across at Lamont, leaning against the tree which shadowed the open grave. 'How are you on the prayer racket?' he blurted forth.

The young man shook his head and muttered something unintelligible.

'Seems kind of hard to cover the boy up and get off without saying a word, don't it? Say, Justin, can't you do something that way?'

The half-breed chewed and grunted a negative. Then there was unpleasant silence, which was finally broken by the rustling of bushes. The old Chief appeared, leaning on his daughter's arm. They both paused, silent, at the brink. Menotah's arms were overflowing with delicate, half-opened buds of the forest rose, and these pink and white blossoms—recalling faded life pleasures of the past—she commenced to drop softly upon the body beneath.

'Goldam!' muttered the Factor, 'I wish I knew what to say, and how to put it.'

Suddenly his reflection was broken by the pure music of a young voice, which rang sweetly out upon the air. An ignorant soul poured forth a message to the unknown God. The heathen girl performed an office which the Christian men shrank from.

Menotah was kneeling, her fair face raised to the clear blue of the sky, her chin resting lightly upon brown finger tips.

'Great Spirit, listen to the words of a daughter Thou knowest not, and grant her that for which she prays. The evil one has stolen the life from this body and has carried it to the cold shadow land. Do not Thou permit him to harm the body that we loved. If Thou hast the power to conquer the wicked spirit, take away that body and place him in the wide fields of summer, where the devils may not live, and where the souls of the mighty sweep over the flowering grass, like cloud shadows on a bright day. Perchance Thou art not able to hear my prayer, for I am but the child of another god. But if Thou canst hear me, I pray Thee hearken to my words, and grant him happiness for ever in the Land of the Sun.'

McAuliffe scratched his beard nervously; Lamont smiled; Justin commenced to fill in the grave.

But the old Chief shuffled aside, and muttered slowly, 'It is not well to call upon the God of the white men. He has conquered our gods in the fight. Perchance he may now turn the blood to water in our veins.'

Towards evening Justin paddled across to the island to bring off a miserable figure, who had long been sending forth a loud but ineffectual appeal for rescue. The half-breed delivered himself of but a single opinion, and that was when Denton lurched nervously into the birch bark, half upsetting it. He crossed his wad to the opposite cheek, and remarked, 'You no good.' Then he wielded his paddle and shot the canoe swiftly across the river.

The ex-minister had plenty of cool assurance when he knew his body was in no particular danger. Also his courage was stimulated by hunger, so he walked to the door of the fort, and at once came upon the Factor and Lamont, who were seated within. The former raised his head and said indifferently, 'It's you, Peter, eh?'

'I've come back again, Alfred,' said the other, composedly. 'And—'

'Quit your dirty noise, now. You can swear in churches, if folks are fools enough to let you, but darn me if you play double face here. If you begin to talk, I shall start fighting. Then I reckon you'd wish you were back in your hiding-place. You're a cowardly devil, Peter, if ever there was one.'

Ominous red streaks appeared on Denton's sallow face. He prepared to cast back a reply.

'Not a word. I tell you, if you talk back at me, it'll go bad for you.' He started up and dragged the wretch to the door. Then he pointed to a dark mound of soil ahead. 'See that? that's where we've just planted young Winton, who was as much a man as you're a hound. They fixed him last night when you were skulking in the bush.'

He pulled off Denton's hat and threw it on the ground. 'You're a murderer, Peter, and darned if I care who hears me say it. If you'd had the spirit of a woman, young Winton wouldn't have been lying out there.'

Then he took Denton by the shirt collar and pulled him outside. Here he turned upon him again. 'See here, now, there isn't room for the two of us in this fort. One's got to get, and I reckon that'll be you.'

Denton's watery eyes grew malevolent. 'You can't turn me out—'

'Quit your row. I don't care where you get, only don't come round here again. Just take your fixings and lift your feet out.'

'I'm in the service of the Company same as you,' cried Denton, showing his teeth. 'You've no right —'

'You talk about that, and I'll put my arms round you. I reckon you'd stand a good show then. You've done an almighty lot to protect the Company's interests. Anyway, I'm Chief Factor here, so out you go.'

Denton set his back to the door, with white, angry face.

'Your time of reckoning will come,' he muttered, falling into his usual fanatical mood.

'Yours is here right now,' returned McAuliffe, drily. 'Get, now!'

It did not take the ex-minister more than a few minutes to collect the few articles he could call his own. Then he reappeared in the office with his small bundle. Justin was bringing the supper. The other two were talking and sitting on the dilapidated sofa. Not one took the slightest notice of him.

But the outcast had no idea of departing without a final word, so when he was safely on the threshold, he paused to attack his old enemy. 'You've always been a tough sinner, McAuliffe. I reckon you can't keep it up much longer. Your sins will soon find you out.'

'Yours'll find you out, when they next call round here,' said the Factor. 'Get outside, now. It makes me tired to look at you.'

The ex-minister stepped over the threshold, but paused to deliver a final message. 'You are a bad crowd, a terrible bad crowd—I've never seen a worse. But it's my duty to pray for you. I will pray for you all.'

A shout of laughter followed his footsteps. Even Justin almost smiled. 'Well, well,' cried McAuliffe, slapping his knee heavily, 'I reckon that was Peter's last curse.'

[1] Winnipeg—then Upper Fort Garry.

[2] Manitoba. So called from its derivation, *Manitou-toopah*.

CHAPTER II

THE COMING OF DAVE

In the early morning there was excitement at the fort, for the isolated inhabitants were soon to be placed in contact with the outer world. The H.B. boat, which, in the summer season, made periodic trips from Selkirk to the Great Saskatchewan, had entered the river, and was steaming heavily towards the uneven and broken platform of logs which constituted a landing stage.

As usual, news of the arrival came through the medium of the keen-sighted Justin. The excitable Factor clapped a hand over Lamont's arm, and dragged him forth in shirt and breeches to where the white waves rushed and bubbled, covered with foam of broken force. Here they waited for news from the world and sight of other fellow creatures.

Spray dashed up the slimy logs, while a strong river breeze made the morning chilly. McAuliffe blew into his hands vigorously, always keeping his gaze on the green screen of firs, round which the boat might any moment appear.

'Goldam! I reckon the crazy ark's travelled to the bottom,' he cried lustily.

'The river's running strong. Listen to the roar of the rapids,' said his companion.

'Justin sighted her at the second bend, and she's not round yet. Us two could pull the lump of wood along in less time. Goldam! there she is! That's her old nose coming round.'

The black boat crawled round the bend slowly, with two lines of foam parting before her keel. Then the watchers distinguished the coarse features of a man standing in the bows. He held, and occasionally waved as an entirely unnecessary signal, a small and much torn flag.

The Factor rubbed his hands excitedly. 'It's Dave Spencer, making a fool of himself as usual. Now we'll have to get to work and pump the news out of him. Dave's bad on telling things, though it's in his head all the time. It's like dropping a bucket down a deep well getting anything out of him.'

He placed a hand to his mouth and shouted, 'Ho, there, Dave!'

The Captain grinned widely, but replied only by a more vigorous wave of the tattered ensign.

'Thinks a wonderful lot of his breath, don't he?' grumbled the Factor. 'Now, if it had been Angus, he'd have started in to talk 'way back at the mouth. He don't care if no one hears him. Talks just for the pleasure of letting his tongue work!'

The boat turned in mid-stream, slightly above the stage, then drew down cautiously, the captain bawling deep-toned commands, interlarded with epithets. Presently a rope swung uncoiling through the air. This was eagerly snatched at by the Factor. Then the boat was made fast and Dave stepped ashore, mail bag in hand.

McAuliffe gripped him by the arm at once. 'Now, then, Dave, let's have it!'

'What's the racket?' asked the other composedly, beating his legs. 'I tell you, Alf, it's ter'ble cold on the water this morning. The wind's a terror.'

'You derved old oyster!' spluttered the Factor. 'Open up your chin bag, and put us up to what's been going on.'

'It's wonderful cold for the time of year, sure. How's yourself, Alf?'

'Going to consumption for wanting to pound your head off. See here, Dave! What's been the latest south?'

'Quite a lot,' said Dave, imperturbably, drawing a big bundle of soiled newspapers from the buckskin bag.

'Let's hear,' cried McAuliffe, clutching the parcel hungrily.

Dave meditated, while he kicked up splinters from the rotting logs. 'There's old man Roberts. You mind him, Alf?'

The Factor nodded, while Dave continued carelessly, 'He's tumbled off the perch. All his truck went by auction. I bought up his white pony—one he used to ride every day, summer or winter. He was a queer old chap, warn't he, Alf? I'd meet him crawling along the fence of his half section, wrapped up in all the rags he could lay claws on, if 'twas winter. His old jaws would be shifting, and the brown juice freezing in solid chunks on his dirty bunch of beard—'

'Goldam!' shouted McAuliffe. 'Think I care whether old man Roberts's alive or dead, or gone up like Elijah? What have the *nitchies* been up to? Tell us that, Dave.'

'Coming to that. You're in an everlasting twitter, Alf; don't give a fellow chance to open his lips. Young Munn's dead, too—'

'Well, well, what did he die of?'

'Overdose of lead. Riel's slick shot fixed him at Fish Creek.'

'Bad for his old folks. How goes the Rebellion?'

'There ain't none to speak on—not now, anyway.'

'Not quieted down? You don't say it's over, Dave?'

'That's what. It's the Archbishop's racket. He told 'em not to rise, and, by the powers, they didn't.'

The Factor gave a long whistle. 'How did the old man do it, Dave? It must have been a fairly tough job.'

'Bet your neck upon that. He ran through the Province and over the Territories. He went miles by himself, and told the breeds he'd curse 'em if they jumped with Riel. Times he went horseback; times by canoe; often on foot. I tell you, Alf, he's straight enough, though he is chief R.C.'

'It corks me,' said the Factor.

'He's a Christian, sure. The Government's done nothing good for him. Now he's gone to work and saved them the country. Old Taché and Father Lacombe are names to swear by right now.'

'It knocks me over,' said McAuliffe, 'catches me right between the eyes. Tell you, Dave, I never thought there was any good in Catholics before. Seems queer, too, that fellows who keep little bits of painted images in cupboards to say prayers to, should be so right down white in the heart. I'll have a good word for them after this. But how about Riel?'

'He's fairly cornered. There's only one thing for Louis—a gallows and bit of rope at Regina.'

'The old man won't chip in to get him off?'

'No good; they wouldn't have it. Riel's sworn to fight till he crops. He'd stay by his word.'

Lamont, standing near, had listened to the conversation with intense interest, though he had not joined in it himself. The close observer might have noticed a sudden angry gleam in his eyes when the name of the Archbishop had been pronounced, also the nervous twitchings of his hands at the mention of the Indian leader's impending fate. When he perceived Spencer had no further information of definite importance, he walked to the end of the stage, as if provided with sufficient food for reflection. Half-breeds were dumping loaded provision barrels upon the insecure logs, while a couple of Icelanders carried an inanimate figure between them to the grass space beyond.

To this human bundle the Captain now drew the Factor's attention. 'That's a present I'm going to leave you, Alf,' he said.

'What sort?' demanded McAuliffe, shading his eyes.

'An Icelander. Ter'ble sick, he is. Can't take him on with me in the boat, for he's turning up fast. You can find some place for him, eh?'

'I reckon Justin can. Wish you wouldn't dump your dying carcasses here, Dave. This place isn't a derved cemetery. I allow, if you'd been here t'other day, you might have thought it was.'

'What's that?' asked Dave, eagerly. 'What's been going on here, Alf?'

'Lots of things. We've been fighting worse than wild cats.'

Dave was interested. 'You don't say scrapping?'

'It was a terror,' said the Factor. 'The *nitchies* were hot after our hides. We had a holy time.'

'What made them rise here, though?'

'Riel sent them up a message; don't know what it was. Anyway, it made them as crazy as bugs on a hot plate. But, Dave, they fixed young Winton.'

The other's dull eyes rounded. 'Well, well, that's a lot too bad,' he exclaimed, hanging on each syllable.

'Sinclair, too. You mind Billy Sinclair of St Andrews, Dave?'

'What! Not him? Never old Billy Sinclair?'

'That's what,' said McAuliffe, not without relish at being the imparter of startling information.

Dave wagged his head sorrowfully. 'You—don't—say! To think of old Billy hopping! Why, we've been pards ever since he could bite tobacco. Married the gal I was more than a little broken on, too. Now she's a widow with young children. Well, well, well. To think of how Billy used to walk her out Sunday evenings, while I'd hang round church door and tell the boys all gals were the same anyway. Here's old Billy gone, with her a widow, and me still a single man. I reckon that's not my fault, but gals take some suiting nowadays.'

'Haven't you anything else to tell, Dave?'

'Why, it's you that's got the talking. It makes me dizzy to take it in. Deaths and murders like a printed newspaper. Young Winton fixed, and poor Billy gone to the worms. But say, Alf, where's Peter?'

'You don't want to talk to me about him. I'm through with the dam' cowardly hypocrite. He skulked off in the bush before the fight, and if it hadn't been for the dead youngster and Lamont over there, I'd shouldn't have been telling you the truth now.'

'Peter ran off, eh?' chuckled the other. 'What have you done?'

'Fired him out by the neck,' said the Factor, with unction. Then, as a rapid change of subject, 'You've brought my brandy, Dave?'

'Dozen case of H.B. Good and black, I tell you.'

The Factor beamed. 'We'll have a good night, liquoring up and poker.'

A short figure appeared on the summit of a black rock in the distance, waving his straw bonnet.

'There's Justin signalling. Hungry, Davey?'

'I'd be a liar if I said no,' replied the Captain.

They turned away together, while Lamont still remained on the wet logs, despite the Factor's cheery invitation for him to join them. For some time he stood motionless, regardless of Nature's appeal for breakfast, troubled, be it said, more by fear for the future than reflection on the past. Indeed, he was only stirred by hostile interruption.

A tall figure glided quickly from the bush behind, and crossed the rock-strewn space. When he saw Lamont he paused, as though he had unexpectedly come upon the object of his search and doubted how to act.

For the young man's growing intimacy with the fair forest queen of the Saskatchewan could not escape the naturally keen eyes of her watchers. The aged Chief but shook his weak head, as he watched the light-hearted girl dancing along the sunshine with laugh and happy song. Antoine, gloomy as was his wont, limped from hut to hut, muttering low-voiced imprecations against all white men, and those around in particular. The youngest and most formidable—Muskwah, leader of the warriors, who looked upon the beautiful girl as his own life prize, yet with that reverential sense of ownership the dreamer might regard some glorious phantasy of his imagination—only awaited opportunity to strike at the pride of his rival; for surely the imperious white could never descend to the poor level of the Indian, nor choose a bride from the tents of the down-trodden race.

So, shadow-like, he had crept behind the young man to the meeting place, where the dry bones of the dead creaked in the night wind. There, with burning eyes and throbbing brain, he had listened to a soft-voiced conversation, yet one in which eyes and hands were more expressive than tongue. He had stolen away with madness at the heart, with wild desire to obtain her who was now slipping beyond reach on the ebb-tide of fate. He would risk his life to obtain its highest desire.

Lamont turned quickly when he heard a guttural exclamation at his side. With his usual contemptuous air he regarded the young Indian, who was unarmed, save for the sheathed hunting knife. 'What do you want?' he muttered angrily.

Then Muskwah raised a hand to point at the boat, rising and falling on the heavy river swell.

'The white chief will listen to his servant? For his heart bids him speak, and there is much to say.'

Lamont had started violently and turned pale, when the words 'white chief,' spoken in a tongue unpleasantly familiar, smote upon his ear. Then he repeated his question.

The Indian made a strange answer,—

'Is not this land lonely and vast to the white man? See how the black boat rides upon the waters. In he you may sail away, along the mighty river, and out upon the Great Water.^[1] So you shall come to the cities of the plain, and be again among the tents of your own people. Also, you will leave to the Indian the little he may now call his own. Then the peaceful air will lie like a bird in the sail, while the men's muscles will swell with rowing. The boat will leap over laughing waters and flit home, as the muskawk to its lair when the sun dies. In your own tents you may find happiness, and a white bride, whose face shall be as the blush of early morning.

'And I—I also shall know the beauty of life. For I may live beneath the sunshine of Menotah's smiles.'

[1] Lake Winnipeg.

CHAPTER III

THE RIVALS

Ignoring the presence of his rival, Lamont passed aside and entered the scrub bush which fringed the odorous forest. But, noiseless and agile as the overhead chipmunk, Muskawah followed in his track, scarce ever ceasing from his melodious and heartfelt appeal. Since he played the part of suppliant, he argued with his opponent without heat, though passion might not be denied. He invoked the higher sense of right. Surely only the Indian was fit mate for the Indian. Where would be the 'heart of joy' when the brain had been touched by fancy, the mind spoilt in imagination? Love was the choicest gift of the *Heelhi-Manitou*, a thing not to be lightly taken, and never to be cast aside as worthless. In such manner he pleaded, with all the native picturesque imagery of word expression and imagination.

At length Lamont turned upon him in anger. 'What about the night of the fight? Perhaps you don't know that my rifle was once sighted for your heart. A motion of the finger, and you would have gone to your fantastic paradise. But I spared you, for you were more of the man than your followers.'

Not a muscle stirred along Muskawah's stolid countenance. 'The gift which is unsought is no gift. Mayhap I might even now be happier, had you sent my soul to join those who fell in death. For with one hand you have held out life, yet with the other have you taken away its light.'

'So now you follow me with the request that I should give you that which is as much mine as yours. You seek Menotah's love—'

'Surely!' broke in the Indian, with a fury of passion. 'What other woman is there who can so stir the heart within a man? Who would not die for her favour, or fight for her love?'

A sneer crossed Lamont's face, while his eyes grew cold. The keen-sighted Indian marked the change. 'Let not the white chief mock at my poor words. It is the heart that speaks, and the tongue must obey the thought. The white chief knows that my love is for Menotah, that my life joy lies at the utterance of her voice. He would not take away the sun, the day shine, and leave only the black night of despair.'

'Wouldn't he?' said Lamont, coolly. 'Why not?'

'Because he is merciful,' cried Muskawah, clasping his sinewy hands. 'Every man may love, yet none may resign the heart already bound.'

Lamont laughed. 'What a sickly sentiment,' he muttered carelessly.

The eyes of the Indian flashed, while his bosom heaved. He raised his hands, with head erect, in a pose of proud defiance. Then in a soft monotone he poured forth the emotional phrases of his heart,—

There is yet the great truth, which is spirit sent, behind my weak words. Listen, white chief, while I teach you the power of love.

When I was a stripling youth around the tents, before I was of age to be made brave, often would I cast eye of longing on some fair maiden as she passed. So when her eyes met mine with silent message, the heart would bound within, and I called it love. Yet it was not so, since the pain would die down, while the wound would leave no scar. Then many moons grew round and faded in their light as the young Menotah passed from childhood to youth. Her beauty opened like the flower bud moistened by the softness of light, and painted with the coloured breath of morning. For those the gods love are beautiful, and the seasons bring them gifts. So was it with Menotah. To her, spring came with heart of joy, and summer with a smile; fair blush, gift of autumn, and

winter last with health.

'But as I watched her, with wonder that the Spirit could make anything so beautiful, my whole being fled away as the soul at time of death. Where the heart had once throbbled lurked a living flame, which burnt by day and night and grew ever fiercer. So I waited for that fire to burn out, as it had done before. During the clear day, when the strength rose high and I tracked the muskawk or snared the wolf, I thought I was once again master of my life. But as night rose and stillness crept through the tents, the limbs sank in weariness and the fire returned to burn away manly strength and courage. With it, also, came the loneliness and a great longing. So I knew that this was love, the sickness that knows not healing. I knew that the fire would burn, unless desire were satisfied, until there should be nothing left to consume, until life reason should have passed, and loneliness be satisfied in the silence.'

They stood together beneath the softly stirring pine branches, where the green-tinted sunlight stabbed down in narrow rays. Civilised and barbarian almost; cultured and the untaught. Yet surrounding Nature might have hesitated in choosing out the Man.

Lamont slunk away sullenly. 'I have no wish to hear your wild love songs. The feelings are things to be repressed, not blasted into the ears of those who do not wish to listen.'

The Indian turned too, and with growing passion caught him by the arm. 'I but follow the teaching of my own mind. A man must obey the love call, though the world rise to hold him back.'

Muskwah spoke from his own by no means narrow philosophy. The workings of the world were certainly beyond his understanding; the ways of Nature he was in close touch with. He was pushing dimly towards one definite aim in life. The Chief was tottering to his death. When the funeral smoke had cleared, he might well be chosen head of the tribe. Power he cared not for, except as a path which might lead to happiness. For none but the heart which knew not sorrow^[1] could be the Chief's bride, and she, Menotah, would surely give all that a man could wish for.

The Chief had placed his footsteps in the right direction, and, in the callous Indian sex love, had regarded the young warrior with special favour. Indeed, he had bidden him plead his own cause, but the lover's bashfulness could not be overcome. Whenever she passed, he trembled beneath the bright gaze. But then came the message from Riel and the subsequent struggle, where Lamont had appeared, surrounded most with the mystery of a god. Menotah beheld the skill and courage of the handsome white. Such things are pleasing to women. She had looked upon the one conquered and rope bound; the other victorious and confident. The latter had addressed her with the soft voice that maidens love; the former was ignorant of such love artifice. Moreover, she had cast at the white man smiling glances, for which the Indian would have dared the fire and mocked the powers above.

And yet the wide world course lies open to all. Prizes are set in the open, but they are few and the competitors many. The strongest, most eloquent, highest in skill, take of the best, while the multitude fight for the poor consolations remaining.

Muskwah still held Lamont back. His flashing eyes and passioned face were not to be safely trifled with. 'I love,' he cried blindly. 'Nothing can heal the wound, or soften that suffering. Were Menotah to strike me down in death, I should fall blessing her.'

Lamont tried to free his arm, but the Indian's fingers closed it round like steel springs. 'You are a fighter and hunter. Keep your strength, and do not waste it in the arms of a woman.'

'The white chief is also a warrior. When the blood runs hot, the heart may thirst for nothing but war and power. But when the fight is done, and darkness creeps around, he stretches forth his limbs in the tent and calls for love.'

Lamont feared lest the impetuous lover should again burst into his passion song. He made a quick movement, released himself, then stepped back.

'I am going,' he said coolly. 'But I will first tell you that if you would win Menotah, you must plead for yourself—and against me.'

The judgment was that of Nature. When the object of a careless affection is about to pass to another's ownership, desire becomes a passion. It is only the prize which seems irrevocably lost that remains a thing of perfect beauty; it is the realisation of an ideal that is an imperfect happiness.

Lamont had been attracted by Menotah's artless beauty, her joyous laughter, and caressing ways. Satisfied with the fact that she loved him, her favours yet failed to stir the fire of his heart into a higher glow than admiration. But now that an Indian rival breathed opposition, the smouldering flame leapt up into fierce heat, and Menotah possessed two lovers.

The ghastly pallor, which in the Indian takes the place of the red anger flush, altered the dark hue of his features. 'Perhaps the white man spoke without thought. For why should he leave his own cities, to choose a bride from the lowly tents of the Cree? For him there is the wide world to choose from. But I have only this one hope, and it is more to me than the beauty of the world. I will listen again for an answer.'

'I have spoken,' said Lamont, stubbornly. 'I have no more to say.'

Then the Indian started forward suddenly, with vengeance in his face.

'Yet there is something beside. There is an oath. Swear that you will never speak to her on the heart's pain. Swear by the Spirit. Swear that you will not enter into her life.'

Lamont stepped against a straight pine, confident in his strength. '*Diable s'en mêle!*' he muttered. Then to the Indian, 'Get back to the encampment, you crazy fool.'

Passion raged along every muscle of the grey-dark face. He cast aside control over voice and actions. 'Am I to lose Menotah after spending my life for her? You shall swear.' He came excitedly forward, with arms outreaching.

Two crows flapped heavily in the tree summits, with dismal croakings. 'Another step this way,' said Lamont, coolly, 'one more step, and the crows will have you. Your eyes will never see Menotah again.'

Yet he knew this threat was useless, for he understood the Indian character, which is a thing ruled by momentary flashes of strong impulse. The mental anarchy of the uncivilised mind is short-lived, yet overwhelming in consequence. The untrained body leaps from devotion to animosity, from obedience to open rebellion, in a moment. So with Muskwah, revenge was just then a higher passion than love.

As the anger-fire smouldered in his dark eyes, the long brown fingers worked towards the keen-edged knife, and he glided forward with the quick cunning of the grass snake.

Lamont smiled, while the sure right hand darted to his side. Half fronting he stood, with the left elbow crooked. But there was no descending flash of a bright muzzle, no sharp report, no dusky rival writing in death along the moss.

He was absolutely unarmed! At Justin's sudden entrance with the news of the boat arrival, the impetuous Factor had pulled him out without allowing time for complete equipment. Those weapons behind which he was a lion of courage were lying in the fort. He stood alone, confronted by a merciless rival, in the lonely forest of the Saskatchewan.

Still here was opportunity for displaying that vaunted courage of the all-conquering white before one of the defeated. He might stand up against him and fight with the natural weapons of despair, aided perhaps by the withered branch snapped from the near pine with strength of necessity. This Indian should be shown how fearlessly the white man could face danger or death.

With a shrill cry, Muskwah sprang at him. He staggered back a pace, blenching from the uplifted knife—then ran, with all the speed of his limbs, with all the white fear of the pursued.

The display of cowardice was needless, for the Indian rapidly overtracked him. Lamont turned suddenly, with the horror of feeling the cold slush of the knife in his back, and dropped to his knees. He was seized by the shoulders; he clutched his enemy by the body.

So together they fought in the solitude, while the sun revolved up the heavens, and the summer heat grew towards noon. Purple butterflies flashed unconcernedly in the greenish light over their heads; the blood-red kanikanik wands nodded; locusts whirred and hurled themselves strongly against the sweating bodies of the combatants. The beauty of Nature environed the hot human passions. On the extreme summit of a feather-pine, the carrion crows croaked and rocked in the soft breeze.

Muskwah's natural strength, aided by passion, which disregarded life safety, prevailed at length. His rival lay beneath his hands, pressed upon the white, flowering moss, his face rigid with increasing fear.

The victor's bosom rose and fell exultantly. 'The Spirit has given you into my power, and bidden me take revenge. Gaze for the last time on the world light, white man, before I draw darkness across your eyes with my knife.'

Lamont glared upward despairingly. The hands that held him trembled with the mighty flood of restrained anger. A knife quivered in hot white circles between his eyes and the furious face of his opponent.

All his subtle resource in emergency rose in a mighty effort for preservation of life. There was still a move to be made; desperate, but yet of possible success. He must pit his trained mind knowledge and power of will against the weak determination and brain of inexperience.

He was a splendid actor. So he nerved himself and laughed aloud.

Surprise partially disarmed the victor of his blind anger. Then came the words which caused his grip to loosen,—

'Pshaw! I will in a word take away strength from your arm. You dare not kill me.'

Muskwah stared upon the lively face of scorn, his own working in perplexity. 'Tell me why I should spare you,' he said wonderingly.

The answer came with a slow, cruel deliberation, 'Menotah loves me.'

He felt the finger clutch on his throat unfasten, as an overstrained necklet. He watched the light of knowledge dawning upon the heavy features. He had fired his shot, as at invisible foes under cover of night. Now he must follow up his words and make his advantage sure.

By his murder there would be nothing beyond the mere satisfaction of revenge. But Menotah would mourn and wear sorrow upon her 'heart of joy.' The Indian had declared entire devotion, yet he was now thirsting to perform an act which must surely bring suffering into her life. More, she might even learn, through the process of chance, whose hand it had been that had destroyed the life of him she loved.

'Kill me, you destroy your own happiness; spare my life—you may yet win her who has your love.'

Such arguments dashed against a weak knowledge to the overwhelming of desperation's anger. To the heart came well-nigh relinquished memories of self-pride and future hope. The dull brain spoke plainly. By satisfying longing for vengeance, he would banish into the impossible all life happiness. By extinguishing the flame of life he destroyed the light in Menotah's eyes. That which she approved was sacred, even though a rival. So he lifted his simple head, with the understanding that his opponent's words had brought *salvation* to three lives. It was again the triumph of the tongue.

Muskwah sheathed the long knife. 'Now you shall swear to leave this land, and return to your own place. Behold the black boat lies upon the waters, and in her you shall sail away, even as I said. You have stood at the outer door of life, while I was by your side ready to cast you into whirling vapour. Down you must have fallen, shadow amid shadows, while I might have gazed into the nether gloom, then stepped back to the life world. Will you swear not? Surely you shall return thither again. Then shall I come back alone. You are teaching me the ways of the world, white man.'

Sullenly Lamont struggled to a sitting posture. In the dim voice of hatred he muttered, 'I will swear to depart from this place, and never more speak of love to Menotah. That is the price I am to pay for life?'

'By the Great Spirit, the Totem of your being, the Light and Darkness, the River, and your own Gods,' chanted the Indian in his deep monotone.^[2]

So Lamont swore.

[1] Such is the literal translation of 'Menotah.'

[2] To the heathen Indian, an oath such as this is absolutely infrangible. The converted native quickly comes to treat a sacred promise with the easy elasticity of other Christians!

CHAPTER IV

WHITE WINS

A distant but threatening thunder murmur broke from the heart of a bank of sulphurous clouds beating closely over the south. The deep sound rolled over the water and seemed to bury itself in the trembling ground. Then a serpent of fire writhed along the fringe of the cloud mass and disappeared, followed by another sullen roar.

It was a strange evening of wild colour and intense calm. Nothing in Nature stirred, except the wide stream of tinted waves. Sound there was absolutely none along the stifling atmosphere. Even mosquitoes were quiescent, and frogs silent.

Lamont came slowly towards the fort, threading a sinuous course among the black rock shapes. Every slight noise, such as the swishing aside of kanikaniks, the scraping of boot against stone, the crisp crackling of dry grass, became abnormal in that profound quiet. There was something almost ghastly in this terrific silence which could only precede some unnatural tumult.

'An electric storm,' he muttered. The whispered words became a shriek, and echoed back from the dark trees on the opposite bank. On such a night one might well shrink from even thought; for the silent action of the mind seemed able to create a derangement in the atmosphere.

But as he approached the fort, there were no lack of disturbing sounds. The Factor and Dave were sampling black H.B. and playing poker. Such things were never intended to be performed in silence. The two within made no attempt to infringe upon the rule of custom.

The solitary man came across the open space, longing for a breath of air, which might alter, if even for a moment, the statuesque rigidity of the pines, and break the panorama into shifting life. He rounded a jagged spar, and suddenly came upon the two horses, pulling at long tufts of grass that shot upward from damp recesses at the roots of the rock.

His appearance brought animation to the scene. The grey mare started and shivered, then sprang aside, her ears back, her mouth fiercely open. Lamont came nearer, and she twisted her neck to bring the single eye to bear upon the disturber of peace. When she beheld who it was, she again wheeled and lashed forth violently with her ragged hoofs. He sprang aside behind the rock with a startled oath, while Kitty cantered to the forest with many a frightened snort. The black horse followed.

With a distinct feeling of satisfaction that no witnesses had been present, Lamont walked to the door of the fort. As he entered, McAuliffe's deep tones struck jeeringly against his ear,—

'Three solid old women and a brace of bullets, Davey! No, lad, it's no use your trying to bluff a hair off my whiskers. Fixed you this time, sure. Jackpot, Davey!'

Five sticky cards dribbled from the Captain's shaking hand. 'You're a teaser, Alf,' he muttered thickly, speaking down his pipe. 'I'm water-logged, right enough. So let's ha' a drink.'

McAuliffe's huge hand closed round the bottle neck. You derved old tree-partridge! You didn't reckon there was a full house this side. Can't fool me with your measly flushes.'

The black liquor fell with a gurgle and splash into cracked glasses. Then Lamont came inside and seated himself.

'Come and take the pictures,' invited the Factor, genially. 'I've just cleaned out Davey here, and spoiling for another draw. Davey can't shake cards worth shucks.'

'Your opinion ain't up to a monkey's grin,' returned Dave, dogmatically. 'There's too many words and not enough sense for me.'

'It's all too deep for you, lad. That's the blessed fact. Your chip of brain was only allowed you for a bit of a show. 'Tisn't for use, Davey, and don't you make any mistake. Maybe there's enough to hold you outside an asylum, but it's a narrow margin, and wants careful looking after.'

'I ain't no Solomon,' said Dave, after a hearty sip at the ink-like compound. 'Reckon it's safer to be a fool than a wise man, Alf. A moonhead can say a slick thing once in a while and be none the worse, but darned if a clever chap can cut didoes. 'Twouldn't pay him by a jugful.'

Lamont sat in a corner and absorbed his brandy with slow gulps. A subtle scheme was simmering in his brain, which the fiery liquor now awoke to full activity. Presently he rose, then began to clean his deadly rifle.

McAuliffe was in splendid humour. He puffed out his beard, and slapped his chest comfortably. 'Nothing like a few drops of real stuff,' he proclaimed generally. 'Bout an hour's time I'll feel like talking nice.'

'Mind old Captain Robinson?' chimed in Dave. 'Lots of whiles I've started in to talk with him. When he got to reckon he was in for a brain-squeezer, he'd sort of walk sideways, and say, "Bide here a while, Dave, while fetch in something from the house." I'd just creep after and hear the chink of a bottle and glass at work. He always works up his talk that way. Then he'd be back, with the words fairly dropping off his tongue like a dog-sweat, "Now, Dave, you're wrong, and I'll tell you how."

'Then he'd settle right down for the hour. Wonderful fond of his own noise, was Captain. Never gave anyone else a bit of a show.'

'I diddled him once,' chuckled Dave. 'We started in one day, least Captain did, till I fairly ached for a bit of chin-work. So I just pulled out a good cigar and handed it over sort of careless, 'though I didn't care if he took it or not. Captain can't ever refuse a cigar, so he stretched out for it, all the time talking for what he was worth. Then I brought out a match, pulled it along my pants, and held it over. He was a bit anxious and suspicious like, for he seemed to sort of think he was letting me in. Anyway he stuck his head up and tried to catch a light without stopping his bandy. 'Twasn't his racket that journey. A dose of smoke just travelled nice down his throat. Before he could swallow, I came right in and said, "Now, Captain, I'm going to show you where you make a mistake." I talked then till I got into a sweat, and my throat was dry as a hot pea. But I diddled him, sure.'

'You did so,' assented the Factor. 'Captain's a bad listener. He's got no use for doses of his own poison.'

Outside, the greyness which follows the deep colouring of the sunset was slowly assuming a darker hue, across which darted every few seconds a pale blue flash light. McAuliffe lit a greasy lamp with unsteady hands and replaced the smoked glass. Lamont sat silent, with the weapon lying across his knees, scarcely taking heed of the conversation going on beside him, until Dave suddenly struck a note of more immediate interest.

'No harm come to the gal, Alf?'

'Reckon you mean Menotah. Darn it, Dave, do you think we'd fix a woman?'

'Accidents,' suggested Dave. 'She's right enough, eh?'

'Course. I'd spoil the man who harmed her, I reckon.'

'She's a daisy!' said the Captain, fervently. 'Twist her hair up some crazy way, hang a fine dress around her, and she'd knock the spots off any at Garry. She's a peach blossom, sure! I don't mind telling you straight, Alf, I'm thinking of doing the gal a first-class honour. I tell you, I'm going to make her Mrs Spencer. She's worth the honour, and don't you forget it, Alf.'

Lamont flashed a contemptuous glance at the insignificant speaker, while McAuliffe burst into a lusty roar of laughter, and slapped his great thigh repeatedly.

'Don't see what you're quirking at,' said Dave, sulkily. 'Ain't she good enough, Alf?'

'She's eighteen carat, 'Twas something else bothering me, Dave. I tell you, Davey, she's a girl of taste.'

'Well, what's the matter with me?' asked the other surlily.

'A looking glass would tell you straight. There's one t'other room. You're not so bad, Dave, now I come to think on it. But you don't make much of a picture to look at.' He doubled up and laughed again, while the sickly light darted across the window.

Dave sat back with an injured air. 'Gals are too darned particular. Many a one I've tried to hitch on to, but they've always broken loose and gone after someone else with dollars, or a different twist to the nose from mine.'

'Never mind, Davey,' said the Factor, encouragingly. 'There'll be some old woman waiting on you presently, with a beauty show certificate.'

The Captain swore. 'There's no finding out what they're driving at. One gal now—Elsie they called her—I felt pretty well sure of. She seemed to kind of catch on, so I thought 'twas just a case of picking when I wanted. One Sunday I made up a few nice sentences, with a sort of poetry jingle. Chose a soft grass spot, I did, tumbled on my knee bones, and asked her if she'd hold on to me. Well, she thought, 'bout as cool as though I'd asked her to name her drink, then said she reckoned the investment wouldn't be profitable enough. That's the way they all go. I never gave her another chance, bet you, Alf.'

Then they fell back to their poker playing. The night drew on, while the power of the electric storm grew mightier and more awful. So another two hours passed.

Inside the fort, the yellow lamp light flickered dully within a soot-covered glass. Its use was superfluous, as the incessant lightning kept the room flooded in a wild radiance. Without, the stupendous silence was appalling—a silence amid the crashing and roar of the heavens, which but threw the dreadful intervals into more powerful relief. It was undoubtedly a furious storm, yet not a pine branch stirred, not a grass stem quivered, not a speck of dust travelled in airy course; a feather would scarce have found air to float it; the waters of the Saskatchewan coiled in sluggish circles like oil. Still, from a thousand points of the copper-coloured sky, lightning streamed and twisted in furious revelry, before disappearing in a flood of angry contortions as fresh fire darted into the dead wake. Then that fearful pause of silence indescribable. After, dull booming of distant artillery, or waspish whinings of kettledrums.

From the forest limit sped Menotah, with cloak drawn over her hair, hurrying for the shelter of the fort. She held a rough willow box, which she anxiously opened when she reached the clearing. The electric light darted down and converted the contents into a liquid flood of red light. From side to side the breathless life streamed, crossing and recrossing in waving threads of gold. This was safe, so she darted across the open, shrank from a descending flame, which hissed between her body and the door, then entered boldly, though half dazed and breathing quickly.

Sprawling across the table, his huge head lying upon his hands, she beheld the Chief Factor, mumbling in incoherent phrases. Opposite, bolt upright, balanced on an insecure box and sucking at an empty pipe, appeared Dave Spencer, howling in his coarse voice some unintelligible song and beating time with an empty bottle which dribbled down his arm. The girl's bright eyes passed from one to the other, while presently she began to laugh softly at the two unmeaning comedians.

Lamont, in the corner, with elbows upon knees and face hidden between his hands, she did not at first perceive. It seemed to him as though he had suddenly been forced off his own circle of life and been brought into contact with beings unknown, of different form and custom. His present environment was unnatural and visionary. Even Dave's mechanical expletives were insufficient to dispel the illusion. When the girl appeared, like a visible portion of the surrounding silence, he regarded her as some fresh vagary of Nature, or creation of the storm. He blinked his eyes, with the dim idea of seeing her disappear from vision. But when the cloak fell back and the softly cut features of Menotah were upraised in the blue light, he reflected,—first, on Sinclair's poor body, rotting in some thick tangle of bush; then on Muskwah, full of life, hope and vengeance.

When she laughed, he started at the sound of contrast, and overturned the cracked glass beside him. Then he rose, crushed the broken fragments, and came towards the girl with a low-toned question on his lips, 'Why are you here?'

She looked up gladly. Then he noticed her fingers closing round the willow box.

'I was in the forest when the fire was cast at my head, so I hastened here.'

The vagrant thoughts fled off on another tack. He kept his eyes fixed upon the girl's countenance. She drew back frightened.

'Your eyes are still and cold. Your lips move, yet there is no word-sound. You did not look at me so—in the forest, when the white moon peeped over the ledges.'

He cast off the glamour of illusion, and asked again, 'Why have you come?'

'I told you,' said Menotah, pettishly. 'You did not attend, for you have been drinking the strong

waters—'

'No, I haven't,' interrupted Lamont. 'I have scarcely tasted the stuff. Why are you out on such a night?'

'The spirits of the dead call us in the storm,' said she fearfully. 'They shriek in the thunder; their hollow eyes stare from the lightning; their cold breath beats in the rain. It is terrible to stay within, and hear them fighting. Yet it may be death to venture outside.'

'Why did you?'

She touched the box with light finger tips. 'I kept this buried beneath a forest tree; but I feared lest a Spirit might snatch it in the storm.'

Lamont laughed. 'Spirits could steal away nothing.'

'They breathe, and the substance vanishes; they touch, and it melts. Often have I seen the wind carrying a tree uprooted. I have also looked upon a tent borne on the storm. There is a Spirit in the wind.'

A furious roar of thunder convulsed the dread silence. As it died away, Dave burst into renewed howlings, and commenced an attack upon the table with the black bottle.

'You shouldn't have come here.'

'Why not?'

'Two drunken men—and you.' He shrugged his shoulders.

'But when a man drinks much strong water, he is helpless. Besides, you are here.'

Dave staggered to his irregular feet, dimly conscious that someone was speaking close at hand, and fell heavily into Lamont's arms.

'Come—have something—to drink, Alf. Haven't had good drink—with you—long time.'

Arousing to the fact that his name had been pronounced, McAuliffe uplifted a strange, shaggy face, to stare helplessly around.

'That 'ud be Dave—old Davey Spencer. Talking through his hat as usual. No good listening—what he says. He ain't of no account.'

Dave threw his hot arms around Lamont's neck. 'Alfy—you good fellow,' he slobbered. 'Heard boys run you down—say old Alf McAuliffe wasn't much good anyway. I've given it 'em straight. Your old pal, Davey, will stay right by you.'

McAuliffe stuck a bottle to the perpendicular on the sloppy table, and lectured it with wagging beard,—

'No use at all for chaps that have a lot to say for themselves—no derved bit of good, they ain't! There's Dave Spencer, now—he's one of 'em. Corks me, he do! I've been talking to him to-night—not a single sense-bug under his wool. Can't argue worth shucks. Sits sucking a glass and stares like a derved old owl whenever I talk straight—squirms like a pesky fish trying to get back to water. It's a terrible waste of time for fellow like me—lots of brains—to argue with a wooden chunk like Dave. Don't you forget it now. What I'm saying's the right thing.'

'Damn you, keep off!' shouted Lamont, throwing the unsteady Captain back against the wall.

'Not going back on friends, Alf—not on old Davey Spencer? Always drunk fair with you—never took lager when you had whisky. Just shake, Alf—show no ill feeling. Then we'll go for a walk and have something—ter'ble long time 'tween drinks. My treat, Alf.'

'Get a move on, then!' cried the Factor. He rose clumsily. 'Seems to be a bit of a storm coming around. Don't matter, though. Hook your arm in mine, Davey.'

But then Lamont caught the speaker and pulled him back to the inner room.

McAuliffe struggled like a bear. 'There'll be trouble here!' he howled. 'A fellow can do what he darned well likes in a free country!'

'You'll get twisted up by lightning first thing if you go out.'

'We'll try, anyhow,' hiccupped the Factor, smiling pleasantly.

'Can't spare you,' muttered the other. 'Come along with me. I'll stay with you, and bring along a stiff eye-opener.'

'You're the stuff!' chuckled McAuliffe. 'I'm right with you. Never mind Davey; haven't got much an opinion of him. Sort of chap to stand you a drink, then make you pay for it. We'll go for a stroll presently, eh? Sun shining nice and bright. I want to pick some pretty flowers for my gal.'

Lamont laughed cynically, and dumped the great body on the heap of clothes which stood for a bed. He stood by to check any inclination to rise, until he was recalled to the office by a sound of scuffling and an indignant cry. Then he remembered Dave.

Menotah had quickly commenced to ridicule her companion upon his singular want of graceful motion. The Captain recognised his persecutor, and smiled broadly with pleasure. 'You're a fine gal, and good-looking gal,' he declared. 'Come and sit on my knee.'

Which pleasant invitation was scornfully refused. 'I shall stay here, and you can sit by yourself,' she said. 'What have you been doing to-night?'

'Thinking of you,' replied Dave, effusively. 'Always doing it—first thing in morning, last thing at night.'

She regarded his wobbling figure with a laugh. 'It has been too much for your feet. If you think any more, your legs will give way.'

Dave whined at the imputation. 'I'm all right. See me walk the chalked line.' Then he commenced to gyrate towards her.

She doubled her little fist. 'If you come any nearer, I shall hit you in the face.'

The Captain chuckled happily, and made a fresh lurch onward. 'I know you gals—all the same. Never let a fine-looking man alone. Lots have tried to catch Dave Spencer—shook 'em off, though, every time. Always said—going to marry Menotah and settle down comfortable.'

The girl laughed. 'Why,' she cried frankly, 'you are uglier than a jack-fish, and as stupid as a tree-partridge! Don't you know that?'

The Captain was in a condition only to appreciate compliments. 'You agree to that quick enough. I know you gals—never let a good chance slip. Come, give me a kiss.'

Menotah turned to escape, but in doing so stepped upon a fragment of Lamont's broken glass. She cried sharply, for she was barefooted; but the next instant Dave had flung two unsteady arms round her, while his hot tainted breath struck against her cheek.

Yet, before he could put his amorous designs in execution, Lamont was across the floor, and had seized him angrily by the collar. He dragged him away, struggling violently, and shouting like a maniac.

'Unfix me. I'll pay you for mauling my carcass. You don't know Dave Spencer, I guess. Who the devil are you, anyway?'

Menotah nursed her foot upon the lounge, watching her protector with soft eyes. Dave slobbered along the floor, cursing and groaning, then turned his dull head round and looked up into Lamont's face. The same moment Menotah turned up the lamp flame, though scanty light could penetrate the blackened chimney. Still, the incessant lightning, across window and half open door, was sufficient by itself.

Suddenly Dave shot a shaking finger upward. 'I know you!' he cried madly. 'White Chief! Ho, ho! White Chief!'

It might have been the electric light that cast the livid hue across Lamont's features. Certainly he started wildly, then recollected in whose presence he stood, and laughed.

'Pshaw!' he muttered, 'if you weren't three sheets in the wind, I'd stuff you with lead for that.'

The Captain kept his strange dark eyes fixed vindictively. 'I saw you once,' he shrieked; 'saw you one evening without your paint. White Chief! I'll hand you over. You will swing along with Riel. You will be hung!'

The thunder rose from the heart of the great silence, and roared fearfully. When it died into mutterings, the thick breathing of the sleeping Factor within was distinctly audible. Lamont kicked the drunken body, and turned to Menotah with a gesture of contempt.

'Come,' he said, 'I will take you to your home.' She looked at him pathetically, almost as a wounded stag who expects the death blow. Then she silently pointed to a scarlet line across the little brown foot.

He fell to his knee and kissed passionately the spot indicated. Then he drew the silk scarf from his throat and bound up the delicate limb. While doing so, she bent down and pressed her lips fervently to the white skin at the back of his neck.

Dave had forgotten his accusation, and, still muttering upon the floor, was rapidly sinking into a natural stupor. The boat departed in the early morning, and in her Lamont had sworn to take passage. But much might be performed before the dawning. McAuliffe lay in a dead sleep; Justin tended the Icelander in a riverside hut; Denton was safely out of the way. Good.

'Shall I carry you in my arms, *chérie*?' he asked.

'I can walk now,' she replied. 'We must go before the wind strikes us.'

They stepped from the fort during one of the short, terribly intense periods of silence. Immediately there rang forth the sullen report of a muzzle-loader. It came from the opposite shore, and hung over the forest until dispelled by the thunder.

'It is Muskawah,' said the girl. 'He has hunted the moose since morning, and now returns. That is

his signal. The Chief would marry me to him,' she concluded indifferently.

They came to the edge of the cliff. The electric fire blazed with stronger fury, yet not a drop of rain fell from the copper sky to the parched ground, not a motion of air stole through the solemn pines. Beneath, the mighty Saskatchewan swelled away, its oil-like water converted into a sea of fire, overhung by ever-changing blood shadows.

Menotah released his arm with a little cry of fear, as a narrow ribbon of flame darted along his back and struck across the rock. 'Why have you the rifle?'

Lamont feigned surprise. 'I forgot,' he said quickly. 'I will cover it with my coat.' He did so, then turned to the girl again.

'It is not far through the forest, Menotah. I wish you to go to the encampment by yourself.'

She demurred, but obeyed. He made as though he would return to the fort, but she gave a little cry, and he turned, to find her standing beside him with uplifted face. 'You forgot me,' she said pitifully.

'No, *chérie*; I was only afraid of the fire striking you.' He kissed her many times, then she stepped into the bushes with a backward glance.

So he was alone. The rifle was again uncovered, while he knelt on the rocky headland, with eyes fixed upon the dark shadows beneath the opposing bank. Minutes dragged along slowly as he crouched, like a dark statue, until eyes dimmed with the strained gaze and, in the intervals of great silence, heart-beats rose in loud pulsations. But it was not for long he waited. A canoe shot suddenly forth from the dark shadows beyond. It carried a single occupant, one who headed the frail craft with dexterous paddle strokes straight for the point. He knelt to his work; the figure was erect, rejoicing in strength and manhood. It was the bearing of one who has secured the victory, who sees happiness before him on the life pathway.

Now he had reached the centre of the great river, and the white paddle shone like a glass beneath the fire. Then the stern-faced watcher perceived in the illumination the features, the swelling muscles, the proud might of the warrior Muskwah. Another stroke, and the canoe half sprang from the water like a graceful bird, to fall back and dart along, cutting through the sanguine waters and casting aside two wide lines of ruddy waves.

'He must not land. The time has come.'

Such words were spoken by an avenging voice from the heart of the storm. He raised and levelled that murderous rifle; the stock burnt his cheek: lightning confused the sights; then he settled himself like a rock, as the forefinger caressed the trigger. The reverberating crack was swallowed by the revelry above, the gleaming river received in its bosom the harmless missive.

'Again!' The single word circled from the red mystery of the tempest. The warrior approached the shore. Should he reach that dark shelter of the cliff, he must escape beneath the forest shadows, while another life would pay the penalty of failure.

The rifle came up, with the wild lights playing and leaping along its narrow length. A bullet darted forth and pierced the brown bark at the side.

'Again!'

He could see the Indian's frightened face, as he struggled madly towards the rock-lined shore, the friendly shadows, where he might creep away in safety; but there was no thought of pity, no compunction at depriving mortality of its best. Only he passed a hand across his eyes and straightened himself for a more resolute effort. Then the keen eye glanced again from sight to sight, while the storm fiend spoke for the last time,—

'The wind is coming. There will be opportunity only for two more shots.'

Half lifting the gaze from his glowing weapon, he perceived the heads of the most distant pines on the heaving sky line bend almost double, yet amid a silence most intense. That fearful calm could have no other ending. In three minutes the tornado must burst upon them.

An unearthly moaning shuddered over forest and river. At the same moment the heavens divided into a myriad fiery serpents, writhing and hissing to every point of the compass. As this avenging host convulsed the livid sky, a death bullet shrieked from the shore and savagely bit the warrior's left shoulder.

He dropped with a wild cry; the birch bark overturned, scarlet waters foamed and twisted like a furnace with the grim struggle. And after came the common end of all.

In the last interval of stillness, Lamont wiped the sweat from his forehead, and again covered the rifle. The wind approached. He prepared to move towards the fort, but the small bush behind trembled with motion. Then a figure crept forth and caught at his arm with soft fingers. He cried aloud, when the frightened face and wide-open eyes appeared in the strange lights.

'Menotah! You here!'

She pointed below to the fire-like river, while her lips moved. At length words dropped forth. 'Why did you kill him?'

There was time for a hasty reply, though the trees across the water bent and cracked. Flinging down the weapon, he caught her in his arms and pressed her to him, until heart beat with heart. Then he whispered against her ear, 'Because I love you.' Then the wind came.

With a mad fury it drowned the sonorous bursts of thunder. The Saskatchewan was lashed into white billows of foam; a drifting canoe was torn into fragments by sharp rocks. Trees groaned and tossed appealingly heavy plumes to the violent sky; branches and small stones hurtled on the wings of the tempest.

It was the murderer's storm, and for him alone. As he clasped Menotah, beneath the raging bush, it poured all its message of retribution around his head, and shrieked the red words of fate into his ears. His unworthy love was blood purchased. It was a thing accursed. It would end in blood.

And, after the wind, came the rain.

CHAPTER V

PACTOLUS

The following morning dawned with clear light in a radiant softness. Bright sunshine glistened joyfully upon dripping pine needles, drawing fragrance from the damp ground and dew-lined bushes.

Dave, sulky and forgetful of events closely preceding, partook of a greasy breakfast prepared by Justin, then slouched outside, where he might relieve his feelings by swearing at the slowness of his half-breed assistants. The Factor was abroad yet earlier. Half a bottle of black H.B. had little subsequent effect upon his vigorous constitution. He ate with Dave, continually disburdening himself of badly-received jokes at his companion's expense.

The Captain rose presently with a curt farewell, and blundered finally from the fort. But McAuliffe was not to be shaken off. He followed, borrowed a plug of T.& B., then walked along, peeling off thick strips and reminding Dave of several commissions to be executed prior to a next meeting. 'Shouldn't have taken so much liquor, Dave. You've got a sore head this morning, sure.'

The other mumbled an indistinct reply. Then they came down to the river's edge. Here the boat was lying, bales of furs for English shipment ready stowed, an Icelander waiting to cast off the last rope. Dave swore at this latter, then stepped on board. The next minute the black monster drew slowly away. The Captain took up a stolid position in the bows, and lifted the torn flag he was grasping in response to McAuliffe's parting shout. Then the unwieldy craft gurgled round the bend and disappeared. The Factor turned, to discover Lamont approaching him from the forest. 'Where you been?' he called, as the young man came up.

'Around early. Tracked a muskawk, but couldn't get in a shot.'

'That was the old bull's luck. Say, we had a bit of a jamboree last night, eh?'

'I reckon you did. What with liquor splashing and a tornado howling, it was a fairly wild night.'

'Don't often get off on a jag,' said the Factor. 'When I do, I'm a rocket. Bound to go off full rip. Guess you found me a bit of a teaser, eh?'

'Not so bad as Dave. I've no use for him.'

'He's not much of a chap. Told him that straight lots of times. I shouldn't have cut such an everlasting dido if he hadn't been monkeying around. Drank more than I did, too. Dirty mean trick that, for he can get lots across lake. Quite a little storm rustling most of the while, eh?'

Lamont smiled feebly. 'Just a bit,' he said slowly.

The Factor looked at him critically. 'Darn it, Lamont, a fellow might think you'd been on the jag stead of me.'

He was right. The young man's face was colourless and heavy; his eyes dull and deeply marked with black lines; his appearance thinner and older. The Factor, on the other hand, represented the perfection of health. His great face glowed with colour beneath a wide straw bonnet; his eyes shone; his step was firm and vigorous.

'I'm a bit played out. Up most of the night; out first thing without grub.'

'That's what,' returned McAuliffe, heartily. 'Come off now; there's a decent chunk of moose steak lying inside.'

They disappeared within the log fort, while the silence and desolation grew again.

Through the fresh dampness of the forest came Menotah, with her wonted happiness and joy of heart. Her hair was unbound as usual; she wore a tiny pair of beaded and grass-worked mocassins, with dainty leggings of fringed buckskin. Light notes of joyous music dropped from her smiling lips as she danced along with scarce a limp or a pause—for the old Antoine, with the miraculous native art of healing, had rubbed an ointment upon the wounded foot.

She passed along like a butterfly floating with the wind, threading an unmarked track for some distance, then glided through torn and rugged bush, to finally emerge at the edge of a gloomy swamp, where strange creatures croaked and crawled, where poisonous herbs reared fetid heads aloft.

Here an unmistakable odour permeated the air. A thick film coated nauseous puddles of silent water, where circles of bright colour curled and twisted beneath the bright sunlight. A colossal fortune, open gift of Nature, lay beneath that lonely wilderness, only awaiting someone to seize upon it. Yet neither the old Antoine, nor the light-hearted girl, the two who alone knew of the place, ever had the imagination troubled with the golden vision of an oil king's dream.

Black rocks pressed closely upon the limit of this slimy expanse, which spread away to the distance, broken by occasional solemn bushes, or gaunt stone masses like huge creatures of mythology. Between this cliff and the precarious edge Menotah picked her light-footed way, until she came to an open spot fronted by a thick bush clump, which seemed to bar all further progress.

She stepped across and pulled at a pliant bough. It came back, and she passed through a dark aperture, the branch closing behind her with considerable force, like a spring door. Ahead lay another smaller clearing, with three trees in the centre, growing to form an almost perfect equilateral triangle. These had been utilised as corner posts for a small hut constructed out of thick kanikanik rods, overlaid with white reeds plaited with red wands of the same bush. The roof was thatched in by layers of leaves and dry grass, the whole being sheltered by pendulous tresses of the overhanging trinity of pines. At the forest side a roughly-cut aperture did duty for a window, where a cloth was stretched across at night, to exclude, as far as possible, the noxious vapours and the no less unpleasant insects.

Menotah had reached her destination. She stopped and hooted thrice in soft cadence. Scarce had the low cry passed drearily over the swamp, when the reed door was pushed back, while a figure, bent and completely enveloped in a sweeping black cloak, crawled forth slowly. This apparition the girl regarded with every sign of complacent satisfaction.

'I have come early,' she began in glad tones, 'for last evening I could not find you. I came to the hut before the storm arose, but it was empty.'

The figure raised a thin, bearded face, and spoke in a weak voice. 'I went into the forest—to escape the stench of the swamp for a few hours. I thought I knew the way, but it gave me trouble to return.'

'You should not have left this place. Some might see you.'

'Don't fear, my girl. I shall lie quiet, till the strength comes. I sha'n't show my face till the proper time. No one comes here?'

'None can, but old Antoine, for they do not know the path. He comes but seldom, to gather foul plants and collect creatures from the mud. Then he makes great medicines and strong poison. Are you not satisfied here?'

The figure shivered, and drew the mantle more closely round his lean shoulders. 'It is an awful place at night—especially on a quiet night. Mists rise and hang upon yonder dark pools, while blue lamps shudder along the marsh.'

Menotah gave a fearful little laugh. 'But you should not venture forth when the cold moon shines.

[1] The *Mutchi-Manitou* is then abroad, and his home is in the swamp. He it is who lights those fires, that you may come to the edge and gaze upon them. Then he would drag you in to feed upon your blood, while your soul would make another blue lamp. But the dim shadows are powerless to harm, for they are only poor spirits who have been sent to the other world without food or light by the way. So they have lost the right path, and must search through the long night for it.'

The huddled figure, who already seemed overridden by superstition, bent still lower in a fit of coughing. Menotah, with her inborn knowledge of the unseen, had no idea of easing his mind.

'You have not seen that which the Spirit has shown to me,' she continued, in a half whisper. 'When I was younger, I would sometimes be very foolish, and would even walk by the edge of the swamp when the moon was cold and round. I wished to learn some of the mysteries of the future. So as the night grew older and the south wind blew more strongly, [2] there rose around me groanings, with louder cries of souls in torture. Fires darted from side to side, while shadow figures floated in such numbers that the sky became hidden. Sometimes, when I came by a black pool, where red patches lay without motion, a blue-veined hand darted upward, making horrible clutches with bony fingers at the life air, which the body might not reach from the bondage of death. Then a ghastly head, with starting eyes and awful features, would be cast up at my feet, only to roll back into the slime with fearful cries. I could see the agony in the eyes as the dark water closed around. Also, voices would call my name, and feet tread beside me as I trembled along. Invisible hands pulled at me, while hollow eyes rolled and burnt in the air at my side. Yet I kept to the path and never lost courage. Had I done so, one of those blue lamps which now frighten you at night would mark that spot where I had made entry into the other world.'

'You imagined this!' cried the figure. 'It was a dream. I have seen nothing like that—'

'Because the Spirit has not given you the double vision,' she said eagerly. 'Some may see more than others can even imagine. These have an inner pair of eyes with which they may look into the mysteries, to read the future and the fate of others, though we may never find or learn our own.'

'Have you the double pair?'

'I cannot tell yet; I am still so young. But I can see very well, and I know—I know—'

She stopped, then widened her lustrous eyes and gazed on him with a smile, in which there was certain pride.

'Now I must go,' she said suddenly. 'See how the sun is creeping up from the low ridge of cloud. Is there anything I should bring you?'

'No. Only keep your tongue as you have managed so far. Then everything ought to turn out well.'

She stepped back to the leafy wall. 'Last night there was a moose brought into the camp. I have cut off some nice pieces for you, and will bring them this evening. Do not lose yourself again.'

She nodded with a radiant smile, the bushes closed behind her flowing hair as a last bright note of farewell floated back to the stagnant swamp pools. Then her happy steps turned lightly in the direction of the dismal death tree, where she was to meet the one to whom she had dedicated her fresh young heart.

Quickly she came across him, stretched at his ease in the soft green shade beneath the tinted light. She came to him, full of that love and trust which is in itself a thing of perfect beauty, yet which so often proves a serpent to its owner. She knelt by his side, under the interlacing tangle of boughs, to throw her warm young arms around his neck in the passion of her innocent devotion. Her tantalising hair waved round his neck and fondled each feature. It intoxicated the sense, so he returned her embrace, drew her down beside him, whispering soft words into her ear, caressing the flushed face with the careless touch of a man who understands a woman's weakness.

Jealousy had awakened the love flame in his heart. Now the opposer had been destroyed, and no further obstacle stood in his path. Menotah was for him. He had but to put forth his hand and receive a bride—surely she was worth the taking. What mattered the stiff body drifting down an unknown reach of the Saskatchewan? That could no more interfere between him and desire. For the time he was sincere. This warmth at the heart *was* love; the beautiful being then caressing him with soft fingers had been the kindling of it.

Nor had she any great consideration for the dead Muskwah. He himself had explained the truth, when he said that none could think of the moon while the sun gave light. She breathed within a golden flood of ecstasy, in which time and season were empty phrases. The warmth and beauty of that summer day had been created for her alone, while she, in her turn, had been brought to the world that she might bring joy and satisfaction to another. Had not the heart been free from sorrow all the days of life? And now the happiness had been idealised. How magnificent, how wonderfully coloured, how fantastic and exquisitely enervating was this supreme intensity of heart joy!

She murmured to him softly, 'You have given me love. I know what it is now. And the more you give me, more I shall ask for.'

'You shall have it, *chérie!*'

'It is my life now. I should die if I looked for it—and it never came.'

He turned her face up inquiringly and gazed into it.

'Ah! You do not understand that. But, if I thought you had ceased to love me, it would kill me. You may not live without a heart. We are given but one, and we cannot part with our best more than once.'

'But when it is returned to you?'

'No; it is a different thing. You then offer that which belongs to another.'

Lamont looked long into her serious eyes. '*Ma mie,*' he said tenderly, 'all of your age and sex speak so. They mean it, when they give the thought utterance, yet in a short time they will gladly transfer affection, and call it again love.'

'I do not understand the world ways. I do not wish to, if such is custom. Such women cannot possess hearts, or know truth.'

'It is nothing,' he said carelessly. 'Husbands tire of wives, wives desert husbands. It happens every day.'

'But what comes after that?'

'Often they separate.'

Menotah shuddered, while her face grew very grave. 'When you speak such words, a cold pain passes over me. It makes me lonely and unhappy. But tell me more; when the wife is deserted for another woman, what does she do?'

Lamont shrugged his shoulders and laughed. 'Takes somebody else,' he said lightly.

Yet he was astonished at her manner of receiving his words. She pushed him away with a sudden impulse, while her bosom heaved and the bright eyes flashed.

'Surely she would seek after vengeance? She would punish him?'

'You do not understand the workings of the world, Menotah,' came the careless answer.

'No—I go higher. For I know the call of Nature. If animals seek to obey the will of the Spirit, why should men and women do less? I will tell you what I myself saw last spring. Many herons nested among the river reeds, and I would watch them often while they fashioned homes and brought up their young. But one day a female deserted her mate and chose another. What do you think happened then? The others would not allow themselves to be thus disgraced; for they were wiser than those men and women of whom you speak. They waited, until the female bird came to the encampment, then set upon her, and tore her body in pieces. After that they turned upon her mate and beat him from the camp. All this I saw with my own eyes.'

Lamont shifted uneasily, for this style of conversation jarred upon him. This girl of the forests possessed deep inner feelings, which he felt she would be better without. There were still things of importance he must teach her, chief of which was the error of perfect fidelity. To him, love was the pleasure of an hour; to her, it was the core of life.

It was easy, also delightful, to assure her of the foolishness of dwelling upon matters which could not concern her. She was willing to be persuaded, and soon smiled on him again with her customary brightness.

'I have a gift for you,' she said.

'You have given it already. You shall not take yourself back again,' he replied laughingly.

She patted his mouth with a soft palm and laughed back into his eyes. 'It is something nicer than me,' she said. 'I had it with me in the storm; now it lies in the hut. There are many beautiful stones, which were given to my father by the hunter who found them. That was before I lived.'

He saw she was referring to the willow box. 'What is your gift, *chérie*?'

'Yellow stones. They are wonderful as sunshine,' she replied.

This was a matter of far greater interest. He drew himself up eagerly to ask, 'From where did they come?'

'I will tell you how the hunter of our tribe found them long ago. He travelled far, tracking the moose, and struck in a new direction, until he came to a strange land, which no man had knowledge of. He went through much forest, then came out to a country of rocks, where great red hills overtopped the largest trees; and still he travelled on, down the rock paths and through the deep clefts. At length he stood upon lofty cliffs, and looked upon what must once have been a great river, like our mighty Saskatchewan-god. But then it was dry, while the bed of sparkling sand, overstrewn with small shells, showed no mark of footsteps. So he wondered greatly, and let himself down the cliff front, over rocks the like of which his eyes had never rested on. For they were white as snow. Then he came upon the ancient river bed and his feet sank amid the brittle shells. Into the warm sand he worked his hands, then, behold! bright stones lay there, glittering beneath the sun as though made of fire. Also he chipped fragments from the white rocks, and saw wondrous yellow patterns traced upon the heart of the stone. So he came away with many of the bright creatures in his pemmican bag. When he returned, after much wandering, he gave them to the Chief.'

Lamont had given this narrative breathless attention. 'Where is that river bed?'

Menotah laughed. 'Do you wish to walk along the soft sand as well? You cannot, for none knows where it lies. That hunter has long been dead, nor could he ever find his way there again. The Spirit brought him to it, and it was after many weary days of travel. No man could lead you there. Do you wish to travel through the lone land?'

'I will tell you after I have seen the stones,' was the somewhat mercenary answer.

'You will meet me to-night, when the moon tips the black rock ledge. Then I will bring the little box and give it you.'

He agreed; but as he kissed her soft mouth, he thought more upon the glittering sands, so jealously guarded by Nature, than the upturned face of sweet beauty and the trusting heart that throbbed so happily against his breast.

But Menotah had flitted among the trees, and disappeared with a glad song upon her lips. Scarce had Lamont reached the open, when a shrunken form approached slowly from the direction of the river. He stopped, and, leaning against a rock, waited for the old Chief to come up.

The latter had perceived his daughter as she passed at a short distance, with scantest form of recognition. He groaned and struck his staff upon the ground in the bitterness of his heart. The white oppressor had taken from him everything, save only the light of his eyes. And now, even the heart of his child had been turned against her own. Especially did the old man hate Lamont, who had dealt destruction in the fight, who, as he now shrewdly imagined, might have some

knowledge regarding the disappearance of Muskwah. So he would have passed without a word, had not the young man caught a fold of his blanket and brought him to a standstill.

Then he turned his bleared eyes and deeply wrinkled countenance to inject the question, 'Did you see her, who left me as you came up?'

Quickly the other found words. 'Can a man see the sun at noon? Who could wish for beauty when Menotah stands by?'

'You're right enough,' said Lamont, carelessly. 'She is—'

'What is she to you?' broke in the old Chief violently. 'No longer will she look upon those of the tribe as equals, no longer does she respect the needs of her sire. When I call for her, the answer comes, "She is absent; she has gone to the forest." When I search, failure but mocks my efforts. What have you done to her? Why have you turned her against her own people?'

'She is a good deal to me,' said Lamont. 'I am going to make her my wife.'

The old Chief clasped claw-like hands and trembled to his knees.

'Leave me this, only this,' he wailed pitifully. 'See, I would not bow myself to the white man for a small matter. But now I will humble myself for Menotah's sake. The white man has taken everything from me. He stole my land, driving me back to the forest, which is worthless to him; he killed the buffalo,^[3] and took away our life support. Now, if we rise to reclaim our own, he takes away our life. White man—give me back my daughter. Take not away the only gladness of my last days.'

'Get up,' said Lamont, scornfully. 'What are you grovelling about there for? I am as good a man as any of yours.'

'May the Great Spirit aid me. May he save my child from her fate.'

'I guess your god will listen, if you shout loud enough; but he certainly can't stop me from making Menotah my bride.'

The aged Chief rose in feeble manner, a strange picture of crushed humanity. 'What good can come from such a marriage?' he quavered. 'Does the crow mate with the gull? Nature herself teaches you to take a wife from your own tribe. Yet, I tell you this, should you treat her wrongly, an old man's curse shall follow you to death. The earth will hate you, and the wind shall blow poison through your veins.'

The other laughed cynically. 'Good!' he exclaimed. 'You talk well, old man; it is a pity you will not live to see my downfall.'

'I do not wish to. I have seen much sorrow, and now look for sleep. It is the great love for what I may call my own that speaks in me.'

'Well, I have told you—I love her, too.'

'With the white man's constancy. No true fire burns within your heart. I know the white man's fair promise and the white man's love. You change, as the day in early summer. At one time all is bright, but even while you gaze black clouds roll up, the tempest beats. So will the love sunshine turn to dark forgetfulness before another moon has grown round.'

The young man smoothed his fair moustache. 'Have you done?' he asked listlessly.

'The wind will receive my prayers and carry them to the Spirit. He will act between you and me. White man, for the last time I plead to you. Give me back my daughter, the warmth of my life, the pleasure of my failing eyes. This is all I ask.'

Lamont's lips curled into a slow smile. Then he leaned forward, until his face came near the ancient head. 'You ask for your daughter. Have you never thought I might be unable to return her to you?'

The old man breathed thickly. 'What is the meaning in your words? I am aged, and the sense is feeble.'

The smile grew deeper as the words came deliberately. 'Perhaps it is already too late.'

Then he burst into mocking laughter, and turned towards the fort with swinging step.

But the Chief lifted two dim eyes upward, while the great sorrow consumed his ebbing life. Pitifully he cried and wailed to the peaceful nature encircling him, 'The God has spoken. Be it good or evil, what matters it? Yet, when he makes known his will, what have men to do but bow the head?'

[1] 'Stay within when the darkness falls, for the night is bad. The evil one has his power.'— Cree proverb. The dogma is interesting, as to it the title 'Manitobah' (now Manitoba) owns derivation.

[2] Spirits may only travel on the south wind.

[3] Though it has frequently been denied, the Hudson's Bay Company are alone responsible for the extinction of the buffalo.

CHAPTER VI

DENTON'S DESCENT

Abandoned by Lamont, the Factor discharged a few duties in the store, made a selection of heterogeneous entries in his books, then set forth for the hut beneath the cliff. Here the Icelander, considerably left by Dave for 'planting,' was sheltered, watched over by the taciturn and skilful Justin.

The petty king of the district walked by the outlying scrub for some distance, then turned sharply and worked his great body with extraordinary agility down the almost perpendicular cliff. This was a journey he had often made before, chiefly for the sake of enjoying the breathless exercise of a somewhat hazardous climb. Presently he came to the bush-covered roof of the one-roomed hut. Here he veered off again, dropped from the overhanging ledge, and without ceremony kicked in the door.

Directly opposite the entrance lay the sick man, stretched upon a pile of sacking; Justin's stunted form moved to and fro; while, squatting on the floor, with an open Bible across his knees, and an odour of hypocrisy emanating from his very garments, appeared no less a personage than Peter Denton.

The latter was not anticipating a visit from his natural enemy, though he was quite prepared to act on emergency. Feigning complete ignorance of the Factor's presence—somewhat of an exaggeration in the restricted space—he bent over the book, and drawled forth in his nasal tones a portion of the Lamentations that happened to come handy. He could have done nothing, as he knew well enough, to more effectually arouse McAuliffe's ire. Nor did the latter lose any time in acquainting him of that fact.

'Quit that noise now, or I'll fire you outside; and darned quick, too. What are you doing here, anyway?'

The ex-minister droned forth his Jeremiads, swinging his angular body in regular motions.

'Do you hear? Quit it, or the river will have a drowning job first thing.'

Then Denton looked up, and closed the book mournfully. 'Did you speak, Alfred?' he asked smoothly.

'I just whispered,' shouted the Factor. 'You're a peach of a Christian, ain't you? Who told you to dump your carcass here, eh?'

'You turned me out of the fort without authority. I had to find a place for myself,' said the ex-minister, who was more afraid of McAuliffe than in the days previous to the fight.

'This shack's owned by the Company. I tell you that.'

'Well, and I'm one of their officers,' said Denton, sulkily. 'I sent a letter by this morning's boat to Garry. I've just put them up to how I've been used by the Chief Factor. The answer may bother you a bit, I reckon.'

'That'll be a sure thing,' said McAuliffe, rubbing his hands delightedly. 'But it's no good your going in for fiction. There's too many at it already. Mind you, lad, my report went along by same mail. There was some reading in it which would have made you fairly blush. I recommended you for promotion, hinted at a Victoria Cross, to say nothing of a pension when you were past lying. You're tough, Peter, and there's no denying it. I wonder that Bible don't burn a hole in your pants.'

Justin interposed. 'He no good. Make boy worse,' pointing to the Icelander.

'He's a waste of breath wherever he is. Fellows like him ain't a bit of good, until they're planted. Then they do keep a few worms going and enrich the ground a bit.'

Denton drew himself upright with poor dignity. 'I have my call, and I obey it. I am here to care for the soul of our sinful brother.'

McAuliffe burst into a lusty roar. 'Scuse me smiling, Peter. Think he wants you to trouble? Tell you, he'd be a lot more interested if you looked a bit after your own. How's the fellow, Justin? Going to snuff out?'

The half-breed gave a loud grunt of dissent, then bent again over the sick man, who was apparently asleep.

'He's not, eh? Well, you'll do fine, boy, if you drag him back.' He pulled forth a massive watch and continued, 'Bout time for my grub. Suppose you fix him up and hustle across to the fort. I've got a hungry sort of faceache on me just now. So long, Peter; it's made me regular tired seeing you again. Why don't you croak off, and make some of us happier?'

Followed by an indistinct reply to this gracious sentiment, the two left the hut and passed along in the white sunlight, taking the narrow shingle path which ran between the cliff base and low

ebb of the waters. The taciturn half-breed was kept at a short double by McAuliffe's long strides, but at the tree-covered headland the latter paused to get a light for his pipe. There was a cool patch of shade beneath the overhanging rock, so Justin stopped willingly and rubbed the heat from his wrinkled forehead. Then he bit deeply into a black plug, while McAuliffe swore at the pungent sulphur which had found its way up his nose.

The great river swirled along, with a lazy gurgling beneath the bright light. Sweeping kanikaniks bent over and lay upon the cool surface, entangling small driftings that occasionally came down on the stream. There was something caught in the red strands now, and the half-breed's keen eyes soon perceived it. He pointed with his usual sonorous grunt.

McAuliffe puffed blue smoke through his moustache. The sunlight was dazzling, so at first he saw nothing but the red lines crossing and recrossing foam patches. Then, beyond the small waves which licked the shingle, he caught sight of a shining surface rising and falling feather-like, fretting at the restraint. 'Goldam, boy!' he exclaimed, 'it's a paddle.'

Justin grunted and again pointed, this time to a fragment of bark twisted up among the pendulous strings.

'Looks as if a *nitchi* had been overset here,' said the Factor. 'There's been a canoe smashed, and it's a sure thing he didn't escape. He wouldn't have gone off without the paddle. Must have been in the storm, boy.'

Justin merely expectorated skilfully across the flat of the white blade.

'May have been monkey work going on,' continued McAuliffe. 'I was too everlastingly raddled to know anything. See here, boy, you were around best part of the time. Anyone cutting a crooked dido, you reckon?'

The half-breed shook his head slowly. 'Lightning, thunder, wind, rain.' He waved his hands towards the white rolling cloud masses. 'I in the hut—all night.'

'Did Peter shift his carcass outside any time?'

The decided shake of the half-breed's head was sufficient to exonerate the ex-minister.

McAuliffe pulled a deadwood stick from the bush, then brought the paddle to shore. 'One fellow gains by another's loss. It's a first-class paddle, boy.'

They continued along the shingle, worked up the cliff, and were already within sight of the fort, when the old Chief crawled painfully from the dim forest track and waited for the representative of justice to come up. With his great hand McAuliffe screened his eyes from the white stream of light, and presently observed the bent figure.

'Hello, whisky bottle! What're you after?'

The old man replied in his weak tones, 'I wish to speak to the white father. Now I have found him on the way.'

'That's what. No charge for talking to-day. Pump it out quick, though, for I'm wanting my grub.' He stopped, but Justin went on to the fort. Then the Chief came nearer, and stretched out a skinny hand.

'Muskwah answers not when we call. The leader of the young men has departed from us as the star before the light of day.'

McAuliffe whistled and grew interested. 'What's that? Quit your foolery about the sun and stars. Tell me straight what you're driving at.'

The young man went forth to hunt in the forest of the north. Then the Storm Spirit spoke and all trembled at his voice; but in the morning, when many of the tribe came for water to the river, there were portions of the canoe lying upon the stones. Then we knew Muskwah had gone to the unknown; also that there had been treachery in the manner of his death.'

The Factor shook his shaggy head slowly. 'That's bad; I'll have to look into this. We've no right to shoot down the boys, 'cept in self-defence. Besides, it's bad for trade.'

The old man feebly pointed with his staff. 'The father remembers the promise he made to his servants—they should no more be punished for the fight of rebellion. Also have we sworn not to fight against the white men. Yet none of my children could have slain the leader of the young men.'

McAuliffe was much perplexed. 'I'll have to think over it, boy. I'm derved sure I didn't fix Muskwah. Can show an empty brandy bottle, and prove an *alibi*.' Then he reflected; Peter wouldn't have owned the pluck to be round in the storm. That only leaves Lamont, and he's not likely to have done it. Why should he? He wouldn't want to be practising long shots, especially on such a night. Besides, a fellow doesn't go around potting others as though they were tree-partridges, just to see if he can hit them. Then to the Chief, 'Keep your old eyes awake, boy. Might have been someone in the camp who had a sort of feeling against him.'

The other shook his head. 'There is no such man.'

'Look around, anyway, and come to me if you pick up anything.'

He began to move, for a thin line of smoke was ascending invitingly from the stove pipe which marked the fort kitchen, but the Chief still detained him with the words, 'I would speak on another matter with the white father. Que-dane, the half-breed, has stolen the wife of one of my young men. He is not of us, therefore will not obey my word. The messenger whom I sent he beat with a heavy stick. My children fear him, for he is a mighty fighter. Will the father command Que-dane to give back the wife?'

'I'll go round this evening and fix things up with him. Glad of the chance, too, for he's a crooked lot.'

He walked off as he spoke, still holding Muskwah's paddle, which the Chief's dim eyes had not perceived. The latter turned back to the forest, and made his slow way in the direction of the camp.

Denton, in the meantime, left in charge of the sick Icelander, found himself situated in an entirely agreeable position. Justin had given him to understand that his patient was not to be disturbed, but the ex-minister had no idea of allowing a man to remain in comfort, when he imagined he could easily make him miserable. So, directly the door closed behind the two, he shut the Bible with unnecessary commotion and crossed over to his victim's side. Then he squatted upon a log of wood, aroused the sleeper, and commenced operations with an ominous groan. 'How are you feeling?' he asked, in a voice suggestive itself of a funeral procession.

Like most northerners, the Icelander could understand English perfectly, and speak it fairly. When he heard the sepulchral voice, he stirred and turned his blue eyes upon the speaker.

'You needn't bother to speak,' continued Denton, zealously. 'You are not half so strong as you were this morning. You're getting worse every minute.'

The man groaned and tried to speak, but Denton flowed on. 'The pain's getting duller all the time, isn't it? That's a sure sign of death.'

The Icelander shifted painfully, while his lips parted.

'Don't you know you're dying? You must go; no power can save you.'

Denton spoke in hollow tones, bending over the sick man, and shaking his cadaverous features impressively at each word.

The Icelander fastened two frightened eyes on the unpleasant face. 'No, no,' he said.

'But it's yes, yes,' continued Denton, now thoroughly happy. 'There wouldn't be any chance for a man not half so sick as you. I guess you'll live through this night. You may perhaps see the sun rise in the morning, though I tell you it's unlikely. By this time to-morrow you will be dead—likely enough under the ground. We shall plant you directly you turn up.'

'No, no,' came again from the patient.

'It's bad to think on, I know. Still, you've got to get accustomed to the idea. Mind you, the end is very near now. Its terrible to be like you, only having a few more hours to look for.'

'But Justin say—I live.'

'You didn't see him laugh at me when he did it. He thought he was doing you a kind turn telling you a lie; he knows you're dying fast. But it's my duty to tell you the truth; I'm a minister of the Gospel, and I must prepare you for the end. Do you understand?'

The Icelander lay back, with his mouth open and pale eyes staring.

'I reckon you've been a vile sinner,' resumed the weird voice. 'Now, you'll be wanting to know whether there's any chance of your being saved at the last moment. I'll just find out and let you know; but don't raise your hopes, for I'm getting afraid you're one of the poor lost brothers. Now, listen to me.'

He sat more upright and upraised a dirty hand. Then he half closed his eyes and groaned fervently. 'Have you always regularly attended your chapel and prayer meeting? Have you steadily helped towards your minister's income?'

The other shook his flaxen head. 'On lake in summer; bush work, winter. Not been near church.'

Denton's face lengthened in telescopic fashion. 'Have you ever joined with the immoral company of card players?'

Such a question aroused not unpleasant memories. 'Played poker nights at camp. Held a royal in diamonds one time. Diddled 'em all. 'Twas a jackpot, too. I won quite a bit that night.' He smiled, with more of the content of pride than sorrow of sinning.

'Perhaps you have even gone so far as to take part in lascivious dancing, or enter some hell of a theatre?'

But the ex-minister had quite defeated his own ends. This probing of conscience brought nothing but a flood of joyful memories of the past. In such a pleasurable review the Icelander quickly recovered from his fear, and replied, with an irreligious chuckle in his voice,—

'Had lots of good dances with the gals—best fun I've ever put in. When I was in Garry, would always take in the show when there was one. I'd like to see another, fine. Tell you, some of them gals could kick up!' He leaned back with the smile of reprobation, and rubbed his hands weakly.

Denton was distinctly frustrated, but, not being sensitive, he instituted a fresh attack. 'It is my duty to give such a wretched sinner as you every chance. Have you ever passed your time—the time for which you must now give account—in saloons, drinking with those equally vile?'

This mystified the Icelander, who did not know which way to take it. 'Always drunk fair, it that's what you're driving at. I've never dropped off a glass behind, then tried to make out I was level up.'

Denton rocked to and fro with deep groans of fanatical horror. 'Poor brother!' he wailed; 'for, miserable sinner as you are, I must still call you brother. You must yourself see that your damnation is assured. Nothing could save you, even if you do now repent—'

'But I don't,' broke in the sinner cheerfully. 'There's no harm in those things. They're right enough.'

'They are the wiles of your master, Satan. Poor dying brother. How dreadful it is to look on you! I must tell you where you are going to, and so complete my duty.' He opened the Bible, moistened a finger, then whipped over the pages, leaving a dirty impression on each. 'Here it is!' he cried in solemn triumph. 'The lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. That's where you're going to. They'll dump you right in, and won't care how much you howl or jump. It'll frizzle you. You'll jerk around like a hot pea. A sulphur match up the nose will be nothing to it.'

But the ex-minister, in his hypocritical zeal, had overshot the mark. His intended victim merely laughed stupidly in his face, then remarked, 'You've made me tired; I'm off to sleep. So long.'

Denton banged the Bible upon his misshapen knees. 'It will be the sleep of death,' he cried tragically. 'You may never wake in this world, and yet you will not listen to a minister of the Word. You will be damned, poor brother. Do you hear that? You will be damned.'

'Go away. You're a dam' fool to talk such truck. You're a dirty, mean liar, sure.'

After which, the Icelander turned towards the log wall, pulled the ragged coverlet above his shoulders, and sank placidly again into slumber.

CHAPTER VII

AN INCIDENT

The sun had almost reached the tree line along the horizon, when the Factor, accompanied by Justin, left the fort and switched off to the trail which led to the bigamist Que-dane's shack. McAuliffe was in splendid spirits, for the prospect of a tough wrestling bout—the stalwart half-breed was unlikely to obey command without persuasion—suited him to the finger tips. He could use thews and muscles to good advantage, even though the eye and hand steadily refused to work together whenever there was any shooting to be done. By his side trotted Justin, dog-like, his jaws working as usual, and a secret satisfaction lurking at his heart. For, an hour or so earlier, he had forcibly ejected Peter Denton from the riverside hut. The Icelander's condition on his return had inspired suspicion, and upon questioning, he discovered who was the guilty cause of the man's prostration. Thereupon he had furnished himself with a cudgel and bestowed attention upon the ex-minister, who, with his unflinching discretion in time of danger, had promptly evacuated his former position, and wandered forth to seek other shelter.

Justin had sufficiently trespassed upon taciturnity to jerk forth this incident for the benefit of the Factor, who but expressed sorrow that Denton had escaped the 'pounding' he was legally entitled to. 'I'd have gone to work and kneaded him up if I'd been around,' he said, then inquired who was tending the sick man.

'Rosalie—she look after him.' This lady was wife to a friendly Indian, who could be trusted.

They proceeded for some time in silence. Strangely enough it was Justin who re-opened conversation with the question, 'You going to fight Que-dane?'

'Bet your life,' returned McAuliffe, promptly. 'Going to give him a first-class hiding. You'll see some fun, boy.'

A feeble interest spread over the other's dusky countenance. A light crept into his small eyes. 'He great big man, and strong. No man beat him yet.'

The Factor laughed loudly. 'Don't trouble about that, boy. Tell you I shall knock the spots off him in short order. He's never had a fellow around him who could wrestle before.'

'What you beat him with?'

'Goldam. I never thought of that.' He stopped in the centre of the rough trail and scratched the thick hair at the back of his head for inspiration.

'Say, boy, who lives in the shack yonder?'

'Old wife—by herself.'

'That's good. Hustle over there; scare the old woman into lending you her axe. If she don't want, I'll forgive you if you steal it.'

The half-breed was very nearly astonished. 'Surely,' he exclaimed, 'you not going to kill the man with the axe?'

'My racket, boy. You hump along and fetch it.'

Justin obeyed, and presently returned with the implement, followed at a distance by the inquisitive old wife herself. He came upon his master standing in a thicket of young oaks, which had sprung up in a small fire clearing. The Factor grabbed at the axe and severed three saplings at the roots, then rapidly trimmed them down to a four foot length. This accomplished, he took each stick—they were about three inches in diameter—placed his big foot on the large end, and twisted violently, until they were like ropes. Then he grimly handed them to Justin, the two continued their journey, and later halted before the closed tent of Que-dane, bigamist and robber.

McAuliffe pulled aside the hanging flap, and immediately came upon his quarry within. Indeed, he had taken him red-handed, for the half-breed was seated on the ground in the centre, between his two wives, clothed in nothing more pretentious than a small breech-clout. He had just been oiling his body. The limbs shone like dull copper, emitting an odour evidently not displeasing to a waving cloud of mosquitoes, which hovered around and filled the hot tent with their thin note of defiance.

The malefactor, who was not entirely surprised at the visit, stared heavily at the Factor, while the two wives followed his example. The stolen one appeared perfectly contented with her wrongful owner; the lawful wife seemed to be untroubled by any qualm of jealousy; but McAuliffe had no compunction about destroying the peace of this domestic circle.

'Guess I've caught you all right,' he said, with unctious.

Que-dane had no doubt whatever, and began to look a little troubled. He feared the Factor more than any man in the district. So he merely made an awkward movement nearer his legal wife, and discreetly remained mute.

'Come out of it now,' continued the visitor; 'I'm going to talk to you.'

The half-breed did not appear anxious for the conversation, so he added deafness to other defects, and refused to budge.

The Factor frowned capaciously. 'Well, come out you' he ordered, apostrophising the wives, who obeyed with alacrity.

Then McAuliffe rolled up his shirt sleeves—coat he had none—and continued, 'If you won't come when you're called, darned if I won't have to make you.'

He sprang inside the tent, and, knowing the advantage of getting 'first hands,' closed upon Que-dane as he rose from the ground to repel the assailant.

But McAuliffe quickly discovered that he was not to down his opponent at a first onslaught. The half-breed was chiefly himself, and the well-oiled flesh was as difficult to clutch as an eel's body. There was no purchase for the hands, which glided and slipped along the greasy surface in ineffectual fashion. Having the advantage of first catch, the Factor succeeded with his great strength on forcing Que-dane to his knees. But here the profit ended, for the other, with cool deliberation, dived at his opponent's ankles, bringing him down heavily, to the stolid perturbation of Justin, who began to reflect whether, after all, his master would emerge from the struggle with untarnished reputation.

But the Factor, as he himself would have expressed it, was 'wonderful tough.' In spite of years and bulk, the sturdy old northerner received no material damage from his fall, for he was up again in a breath, as full of energy as before.

After more dodging around the narrow space, McAuliffe came in again, this time getting two arms, like a couple of iron bands, round the greasy body of his antagonist. They linked behind, while the pressure soon became sufficient to remind the half-breed that breathing was a chief necessity for existence. So he replied by hurling himself forward with careless violence, succeeding by this manoeuvre in breaking the Factor's grip.

A fresh struggle for supremacy was long and fierce. Que-dane's naked flesh was marked with scarlet lines and patches, where catching fingers had dug in vain; McAuliffe's face glowed with sweat and oil drippings from the half-breed's body. Still they fought and swayed across the narrow space, while the evening shadows began to creep along the ground, and mosquitoes blinded their eyesight.

The round ended abruptly and disastrously for the Factor. He was thrown with considerable force. His body was pressed firmly against the caked mud floor, held down by Que-dane's lubricated limbs. The right arm was free, but bent beneath his body. The position was serious. 'Wouldn't surprise me to hear I was fixed,' he muttered to himself. 'Darn it, every *nitchi* in the place will start to kick me if I am.'

The two squaws were watching the contest, without displaying the smallest show of interest. Justin had been hovering round the writhing figures, continually expectorating in firework fashion. Now he presented the hammer side of the axe, with a suggestion that he should with it gently tap the victor's skull.

'Git away, boy,' shouted McAuliffe, suddenly. 'Gold am! haven't been trying yet.'

He saw his opportunity. As he finished speech, the tent shook with a convulsive effort. This was followed by a furious howl of disappointed rage—the first sound Que-dane had given utterance to.

Skill had come to the front with valour beaten. The half-breed's hair, which was long and thick, had been plaited by the hands of an obedient wife into a single tail, which fell in a straight black line down his back. When Justin approached with his axe and suggestion, Que-dane half turned, apprehensive of attack from behind. Then McAuliffe made his effort. He forced his body slightly above ground, freed the right arm, then, before the half-breed could turn again upon him, seized the pigtail in his great fingers. With a rapid motion he wound it round the owner's neck, and, with a fresh effort, brought him prisoner to the ground at his side. The next second they rolled over once more, then the Factor assumed the more comfortable position. He knelt upon the captive's chest, and triumphantly called to Justin for one of the oak saplings.

'Told you so, boy. I was only fooling first part. Tell you, it's no trick at all to diddle this chap.'

With deep-throated chuckles, Justin selected one of the twisted sticks and handed it over, while the wives gravely seated themselves to watch further proceedings. These were interesting chiefly to Que-dane, for the Factor at once commenced to bring the stinging fibres across his naked flesh with measured strokes of a muscular right arm. While administering justice, he lectured. 'This'll teach you. It'll be a kind of hint for you not to monkey around after other fellows' wives. Do you catch on, Que-dane?'

The half-breed struggled furiously, howled fiercely, and poured imprecations upon the head of the chastiser. But he could not release himself, and the Factor flogged on, until the tough sapling flew to pieces in his hand.

The wives began to chatter and laugh widely, when the fragments were discarded, and Justin imperturbably handed over the second torturing implement. This was a spectacle of delight not presented to the eyes every day.

Dull reverberations echoed out into the still solemnity of the evening. Indeed, the flagellation was continued with such unflinching energy that even Justin gave an exclamation of dismay.

'Surely I you kill the boy.'

'It'll do him good,' panted McAuliffe. 'Goldam! it'll show him I'm going to be boss around here.'

'See! he jump like a frog,' said the half-breed, more interested than merciful.

'He'll jump like a derved locust before I'm through with him. Pass over t'other stick, boy. This one's getting sort of used up.'

Justin obeyed, but wagged his head. 'You kill him. He not jump any more. He lie quiet now.'

It was as he said. Que-dane had ceased struggling and profaning. Now he lay along the ground, limp and motionless.

'He's right enough. Only shamming a bit.' Then he ceased his muscular exercise, and bent over the prostrate figure. 'See, here, Que-dane, are you going around wife stealing again?'

There was no answer nor motion, while Justin shook his head again.

'You're right, boy. I've chloroformed him, so he's missed the lecture I was going to let him have. It'll be a wonderful good lesson, I reckon.'

'You beat too hard,' said Justin, bending over the bruised body, and touching the injuries with dark, deft fingers.

McAuliffe stretched his limbs luxuriously. 'Pshaw! don't trouble about that, boy. You get to work and take the woman back to her husband. Tell him he's got me to thank for seeing her again. I'm going down to the river to wash some of this dirt and oil off my hide. Give me the axe; I'll leave it with the old wife as I come along.'

Justin gave a grunt of compliance, then walked over to the rescued woman and pulled her up by the arm. Accustomed to obedience she followed him, but whether she was anxious to return, or willing to stay, did not appear. None could have told. Such a thought, likely enough, did not trouble her own brain.

The two disappeared along the forest trail as the moon came up over the ledges. McAuliffe prepared to descend to the river, but first he paid attention to the half-breed's lawful wife.

'There's a job for you,' he said, looking over the bowl of his pipe, and raising a sulphur match, which spluttered with blue light in the darkness. 'Guess 'bout best thing it can do, is to look after what's left of your derved thief of a husband.'

CHAPTER VIII

THE PIERIAN SPRING

That same evening, the old Antoine, after listening to the Chiefs last tale of sorrow, sought Menotah in forest and by river, forgetful of age and weakness. At nightfall he came upon her, tripping lightly along the path, with song on her smiling lips and the usual joy at Tier heart. He stopped and drew her—anxious to please, though unwilling to obey—aside to his own tree-environed hut.

Here, with the dramatic force and fantastic word-painting of his race, amid the long blackening shadows, he disclosed his heart. He spoke of the mysterious death of Muskwah, on the stricken mind of her father, and finally appealed to her, by all she held sacred, to return to the people who were her own, to break from the perfidious white, who would soothe the mind with flattery, while with deceit he broke the trusting heart.

The Ancient spoke without previous reasoning, for he had sufficient knowledge to understand that opposition must ever increase determination. At that hour he entertained but one central thought, namely the freeing of Menotah from the life bondage she was accepting. Here was the single bright spot in a dark heart, the only elevating attribute of an embittered nature, his love for the happy girl, who had sprung among them, as he himself had often expressed it, 'like a solitary flower waving in the heart of the rock waste.'

With her customary careless air, Menotah listened to the Old man's eloquence, hands clasped behind her back, radiant eyes wandering from point to point of interest. When he paused, before a fresh effort, she drew a little away and said quietly, 'I am sorry Muskwah is dead.'

So in truth she was, though with the kind of sorrow that breeds joy. For Lamont had assured her how necessary had been his removal. She understood that the Indian had sworn to take her lover's life; that if one was left the other must go. It was far better to lose Muskwah than her handsome white. So she was resigned, and looked upon the murder as part of the dark lot of necessity.

But when she spoke there was no emotion of the voice, nor tear in the eye. This was so evidently a lip sorrow that Antoine's anger ebbed forth in reproach.

'You say there is grief at your heart, child, yet you will give no sign. The man was your lover, and now is dead. In the camp there are maidens, whom he was never wont to favour more than with the passing glance. But these beat their breasts for the sorrow of his end. You, for whom he would have dared all, stand unmoved, and speak of your grief in tones that well might express joy.'

Menotah's soft brow doubled in a frown. 'You are over-ready with words, old Father. Remember, I have cast aside childhood, and may therefore know my own mind. He, who has gone to the shadows, was no lover of mine.'

'You lie, girl,' cried the Ancient, smiting a feeble palm upon his staff. 'Has not the old Chief, your father, told me of his favour towards Muskwah? More, the young man himself has spoken of his warm hope. Many a time did he tell of his love, beneath the still evening, when he sought me for counsel.'

'Did the Chief also tell you that I looked upon Muskwah with eyes of love? Did the young man come ever with the tidings that I had promised to be his bride? You would ask me riddles, old Father. Now must you also be ready with answers.'

'Tis not so. You are but a girl, and one made to obey. Since your father chose, with the wisdom of age, a husband for you, it was your duty to receive him, and thank the Spirit that he had sent you so perfect a man. You know not, child, the peril that lies in self-choice.'

Menotah stepped forward with all her lithe grace. She raised her beautiful features to the coloured air of evening, while the cheeks warmed in a glow of anger. Then she parted her proud lips for reply.

'I have not your learning, old Father, for I am but a girl, yet one who would wish to know. But I am the equal of those who call themselves men. You are wiser? I can draw you from your knowledge path with a glance. You are stronger? I can disarm you with smile or frown. I can outwit you in your slow movements. Now you would hold out to me advice. I scorn it, though I have listened for the sake of the love you bore me once. But when you cast blame at me, I will throw back your words and tell you that I have planned out my own life path, that I will follow it to the end, in spite of you and all. Do you heed, old Father? Once you taught me the power of ready speech. Now it is the master who is put to silence.'

The Ancient tottered to the door of the hut, then paused, leaning in helpless fashion upon his staff. His shrunken form seemed more dwarfed than ever, the wrinkled face more deeply lined. There was suffering in every slow movement.

Weakly he quavered forth, 'I am old, so old that I have lost count of the years in the past. Now my age is mocked by those who were crawling children when I was already weak with time. Is it to be sorrow to the end, nothing but sorrow, until my body is brought to the fire, and memory fades

away?'

The girl was touched by her old mentor's genuine misery. 'Surely,' she said in soft accents, 'none may pity those who sorrow when there is need to rejoice. Old Father, I would not cause you suffering.'

The dull ears were quick to note the change in voice. All that was good in his withered heart poured from him, like a death gasp, in a last pitiful entreaty,—

'Have I not always loved you, daughter, child of the laughing heart? Even now would I have shown you hatred, for loving one of the hated race, but I could not. Love is stronger than mind, greater than Nature, for it conquers both, and binds them down in chains. It must live and burn, nor may it be quenched at desire. Child, fair child, by such love—the only gift an old man can give—I pray you, be guided by my counsel. Come back to your people, and forget the past. All will stretch forth arms of love, to clasp you close. There will be joy in the encampment, with a song at every heart. For the tribe will not lose the sunshine, its morning and evening light. See! I am an aged man, and I beg this of you.

'Well can I look upon the days when you were but a crowing child. Then I would raise you in my arms and clasp you to my shoulder, while you would lift your baby head to smile into my face. Then I first felt the love fire stealing silently from your holding limbs to my old heart. So in the white winter I would clutch you to my heart, to warm the body which had never known the power of love. Also, when you were older, with uncertain steps you would walk at my side, while I would point out tree and rock by name, that I might list in to the music of your voice raised to imitate the sounds.

'Yet seasons came and went, each finding you beauteous, and leaving you more perfect. But one day, when I gazed on you in the sunlight, I knew you were formed to a woman, a being enriched with what loveliness and grace the Spirit may give. Jealously I watched you, flitting lightly, as the wind-borne flower blossom, from forest to river, always with the pure joy smile and the same heart gladness. Then I knew we had truly given you the name of Menotah—the heart that knows not sorrow.

'Then the white company came to our land. I feared, for I saw your beauty; also I knew the black hearts of those who had robbed us of our own. Yet now that which I have feared and fought against has befallen you.

'Menotah, daughter of love, light of my age, listen once again to the weak old Father. Grant me that for which I ask. See! I will come to my knees; I will kiss your hands. Never have I humbled myself to any before. Child! give me back my love, and hear my words.'

Tears of heart grief coursed drearily along the cheek wrinkles. His clenched hands shook, while the senile body trembled with emotion. The words fell without meaning against his ears. Sad thoughts were at his heart, and the tongue gave utterance, but whether the two agreed he might not tell.

He had cause for sorrow; for he spoke truth, when he said the girl before him was the only being he could love. Now the great affection, enshrined in a weak body, was held a thing without worth; it was to be laughed at and cast aside. A single satisfaction remained, and that a sad one. Future might bring change, she might yet learn that the love she now discarded was a thing unchanging, which would burn at the time of need with the steady flame of constancy. After the reckless passion of youth, this would be the final haven of shelter, the last rock on which the broken soul might pause and rest a while, before continuing the pitiless march of despair.

'Girl, I have done. Forget an old man's tears. Yet bear in memory one thing: when his aid is needed, he will be found, with hand outreached—to save, or to avenge.'

The last word fell forth in a sharp whisper. Then he leaned in exhaustion against the log wall, while there was silence save for his deep breathing. Menotah stood near, a resolute determination upon her paler face, defiance in every proud pose of her body. Presently she spoke,—

'Better had you saved breath and strength by silence, old Father. Must I again say that I have my will, that none shall turn me from following the desire of my mind?'

'I but spoke the innermost thought, child. Perchance it has given you pain.'

The Ancient was humbled in his weariness.

'It was as casting a handful of feathers to the wind,' said the rebellious girl. 'Even the memory has now faded.'

He raised his head half fiercely. 'It will return. A time lies in the future when the echo of my words will deafen your hearing. You will come back to me then. Yes, you shall return, and pray for my aid.'

'I shall not need it. There will be one to protect me, stronger than you.'

He shivered as her words touched him. 'But I look forward, child. I gaze into the black shadow beyond. My eyes are clear in spite of age, while yours are blinded with mistaken trust.'

He cast off his weakness and faced her. The blanket crawled from his lean shoulders and rustled

to the ground. The eyes shone wildly, with that strange, prophetic instinct of the uncivilised mind.

'I tell you, girl, that time *shall* come. Even now it is not far distant. Then you will seek me out, you will creep to me with a prayer on your white lips. You shall come as a suppliant to me, seeking vengeance on the head of him you now proudly call your life support.'

Night had now fallen; the forest had grown black and weird; shivering spindles of the northern lights crept tremulously, with whispering movements, backward and forward across a blue-white sky.

Menotah stepped back in all her happiness. Then her bright laugh rang forth, drowning, for the minute, soft moanings of the night breeze in the tree tops.

'Laugh, girl; yes, laugh. It gives me joy to hear your happiness once again. In the coming sorrow I shall never listen to that sound which has so often brought warmth to my weak heart.'

She laughed again, while the pines shook and muttered. 'You shall hear my laughter while you walk in life,' she cried merrily, 'unless you would stop your ears to it. Old Father, I shall leave you to your sleep. You are speaking on strange things to-night.'

She picked the blanket from the ground, and arranged it, with soft, womanly attention, round his body. Then she took his arm and led him to the door.

'It is a truth,' he quavered. 'Surely as to-morrow's sun will kiss yonder trees, shall you cry for vengeance on the betrayer.'

With a slight shudder—the night air was chill—Menotah stepped back from the hut. 'You cannot kill my heart with your bodings, old Father,' she said sternly. 'To-morrow, perhaps, you will speak in a different manner.'

But, at the moment of departure, a tall figure, enveloped in a long cloak, came quickly from the shadowy trees in ghostly fashion. It might have been man or woman. As this apparition reached the clearing round the hut, Menotah beheld it and cried aloud with startled surprise.

The old Antoine came to the door at the sound. But when his eyes fell upon the cloaked figure, a mighty fear of the unknown overwhelmed him.

'To the water, child!' he cried shrilly. 'Tis the *Mutchi-Manitou*. He comes from the swamp to seize you. To the water! His power is only upon land.'

But she showed no such fear. She merely caught the black cloak, and said, 'You should not be here. Why have you come?'

'You haven't been near me all day,' said the figure. 'I am out of food, and hungry.'

She drew this apparition back to the forest with eager hands. 'I will come when the moon shines, and laugh at the spirits of the dead. But there is someone within the hut.'

The figure stepped away silently, while Antoine came feebly forward.

'What is this, child?' he asked, yet with tone of suspicion.

Menotah turned to him in her liveliest manner, and again drew him back to shelter. 'We two have looked on much to-night, old Father. We have seen and spoken with the evil one himself.'

Then her joyous laughter rose again and circled in the night.

CHAPTER IX

THE LAUGH THAT DIED

That short season, which northerners compliment by title of summer, had almost come to its last day of warmth. There were wonderful colours by day, with clouds of floating gossamers at night. Occasionally the wind veered, then brought along from the Arctic shores icy blasts, which angrily bit with foretaste of approaching winter.

The last boat of the season, leaving that year later than usual, lay along the log stage ready for departure, with its fur and feather freight. Soon after sunrise on the coming morning she would leave the Saskatchewan, to escape the ice fields which would rapidly form along her wake. For the sharp cold of that evening was sufficient to drive anxiety into the pilot's heart. Already the greater part of the trees, that shed the green mantle in winter, had parted with summer beauty; the long grass shivered in dry white stems; birds of bright colour had escaped to the more hospitable south, leaving in their place clouds of dainty snow-birds, that broke the silence of the cold air by the sharp hissing of constant short flights. Earlier in the day a slight frost flurry had suddenly fallen, which the dry wind had drifted in pools of fairy crystals beneath the sheltering rocks, and in thin, white line along the rugged fringe of the desolate forest.

Little matter of importance had occurred since the day Antoine had made ineffectual appeal to

Menotah in the bush-trailed hut. The girl had left the people of her life to dwell with her nominal husband in a small forest shanty some distance from the fort. Here, during those few short weeks of dying summer, she found continuation of that perfect heart-whole happiness she had lived upon always. This was all she wished for, with the addition of love, and she was granted both. Never had she so entirely proved her right to the name of 'heart that knows not sorrow,' as she flitted along from morning to night, a bright ray of pure joy, with the face of laughter and fresh mind of confiding love.

For a short time Lamont was altogether satisfied that he would never wish for change. His young girl—she was wife in the sight of heaven and earth, for what is a ceremony when hearts respond?—fascinated him with her childish ways and caressing affection, her enticing laughter and joyous bursts of song. During those days the withered Antoine always heard, as he snuffled daily alongside of the hut, the clear music of her perpetual joy. She was like unfading sunshine as she lavished worship of limb and tongue upon her heart's god, so it may readily be conceived how Lamont fell for the time beneath the glamour of attraction, until he came to feel that he might contentedly live thus for ever, away in the summer forest, with the bright, beautiful girl, laying aside all association, forgetting the call of civilisation. But, to a man of his temperament, this, could be nothing beyond a dream, from which he must awake gradually, yet surely. There are other seasons than summer, and there are times when the flower is scentless, the tree no longer green.

So the rapturous heart-warmth in his body faded with the cold approach of Nature's winter, and as the days grew shorter, the north wind keener, desire became re-awakened, the roving spirit of adventure called to him from distant lands. At length the surrounding desolation, growing more intense as autumn lengthened, became wearisome. Following on this he discovered for the first time a restraint on his movements. Then came the passionate longing for change, that indefinite and empty resource of the vacillating mind. He longed desperately for southern connections, actuated not unentirely by a curiosity to learn the actual fate of Riel and his followers, with whom he felt a sympathetic interest. There was but one more boat—a final chance for escape. If he allowed it to slip, he would be chained down to the lonely regions for many months during the intense cold of the Arctic winter. Days and weeks of monotony in such a spot! The very thought was intolerable. This hopeless prospect settled, without a shade of remorse, the wavering balance of his determination.

But there was an ulterior motive. The 'yellow stones' given him by his fair bride were, as he quickly discovered, singularly pure, though small, nuggets of gold. Such a chance of great wealth as was here afforded should not be allowed to merge through lack of application. So he had resolved to collect a few companions, return to the north immediately the spring winds opened the waters, and institute a search for the ancient river bed, where Nature seemed to have so lavishly scattered her treasures.

Nor was he alone in such determination. As may have been observed, Peter Denton was more of the knave than fool. This gentleman of uncertain antecedents, about the time of the punishment of Que-dane, found his position too uncomfortable for toleration. The very Indians despised him for cowardice; Justin openly reviled him on chance meetings; the Factor swore at him with unnecessary unction; as a final degradation, he had narrowly escaped a thrashing at the hands of the Icelander, when the latter, contrary to all the expectations of Dave, attained the stage of convalescence. So he became more than anxious to place himself within the bounds of civilisation. But he had no intention of returning empty handed. Sneaking round the hut one night, he beheld, through the window, Lamont closely examining the box of glittering stones. With undivided interest he watched further, while the unsuspecting owner returned the treasure to a hole in a corner of the earth floor. Then he crept away, with an idea simmering in his brain of negotiating a small *coup d'état* before leaving.

Herein he was favoured of fortune. Of course the hut was always open to an invader, though generally occupied. But, by careful watching, he found his opportunity. When the others were assembled on the stage to welcome the boat, he crept into the hut, unearthed the small box, then absconded rapidly. The next day he took canoe to the mouth, caught the boat as she passed, and journeyed south, with joy at his avaricious heart.

This was a fortnight back, so he was safe away. Now, on the drear September evening, when the shadows closed round quickly, the last boat of the year rocked and grated against the rotten logs, while Captain Angus smoked strong plug and quaffed draughts of black brandy with McAuliffe in the fort.

But human passion and action only ebbed into full play after fall of night. Then, within the reed-covered hut by the petroleum swamp, Menotah, her head and shoulders wrapped by a blanket of many folds, was talking with a dark figure half enveloped in a long cloak. Around them reigned an almost perfect silence; so peaceful that it was quite possible to hear the rustling of crisp leaves as they lightly floated across stagnant pools, to note the formation of crystal ice spears as they lengthened over some shallow water patch, slowly converting liquid into solid.

From the low roof swung a lantern, casting strange shadows around the open space, faintly illumining Menotah's happy face, and at times the rugged features of her companion.

'But what are you going to do?' she asked. 'I tell you, the boat sails very early in the morning. If you do not go on her, you must stay here all the winter. Are you well enough to go?'

'I'm strong enough. Pshaw, girl! I'm as good as ever I was.'

'But shall you go?' she asked again.

'I'll think. Can't fix your mind to these sort of things at one jump. I reckon you know what I'm making at?'

Menotah looked at him strangely, as a shudder passed over her. Perhaps it was the biting wind, for she drew round her blanket more closely. 'I cannot understand you. Why won't you explain to me, as you said you would?'

The other laughed hoarsely. 'What's the good of it to you?'

She made an impatient movement. 'Well, I want to know. Perhaps I am curious; I believe most women are. Why did I find you as I did that night? Who is it you are going to kill? Why have you made me hide you and keep quiet myself?'

'Keep it back a while longer, and I'll tell you the whole thing.'

'But I want to know now. I have helped you right along, though you would tell me nothing. You said no woman's tongue could be trusted. As if I could not have kept quiet!'

'There was a risk, anyway,' replied the figure shortly; and then, 'Is the Chief alive yet?'

She shook her head, while a faint shadow of sadness crossed her bright brow. 'Ah! he has breath, but nothing besides. He has shaken off strength, and is fading fast to the shadow land. Perchance he will not see the sun of another day.'

As she finished speaking, the dull braying of a distant horn floated along the icy wind, to hang in throbbing echoes above the swamp.

They stared at each other in the dripping light of the lamp.

'The boat horn!' exclaimed Menotah.

The dark figure bent and bit his fingers. That heavy sound recalled to memory many things; chiefly a home and connections in the 'Spirits' Province.' He too was reminded of the bleak prospect which lay behind any further delay. So he merely put the question, 'You're sure the boat leaves in the morning?'

'Yes; Angus told me. I have never known her to leave in the night except once. They were afraid of the ice.'

'It's cold enough now to scare them.' He drew a deep breath and beat his hands together. Then he muttered, 'I mustn't lose sight of him again.'

'What are you talking about?' said Menotah, with a short laugh.

The other started. 'You heard, eh? No matter, girl; it's all my racket.'

She shook her small head with a puzzled air. This man was certainly an enigma, with his strange conduct and general silence. He wished to be avenged on someone who had done him a great wrong. Before the departure of each boat he had never failed to ask her for the names of those going in her. Even then, unsatisfied by her declaration, he would steal secretly to the point, and, crouched behind the willow scrub, would scan the black monster as she passed. The keen-eyed girl had watched him closely, and learnt much, though not the one matter which was alone of vital importance.

Such thoughts as these she now put into words. But the response obtained was merely, 'Nobody saw me moving about, except you?'

'And old Antoine,' she added; 'you know the evening you came upon us both? It was just after Muskwah's death.'

The remark, made carelessly, had an invigorating effect upon her companion. A look of utter incredulity passed across his worn face. 'You don't tell me he's dead?' he cried.

'Of course,' she returned, somewhat unfeelingly 'Surely I told you that?'

'Never,' he said violently. 'Tell me now.'

She shrank back a little. 'After all, I am wrong. I remember I did not wish you to know. But he was killed during that great storm of the last moon. His body was swept away along the great river. Nobody knows anything further.'

'Except you, I reckon,' said the figure bluntly.

She had spoken the lie unflinching, but at this covert accusation her cheek went white, and the one guilty thought of the mind stabbed her with remembrance. She stepped forward with her lithe motion and pulled the cloak from his spare shoulders. 'What do you mean by that?' she cried. 'Why should I know anything? Do you dare accuse me of killing Muskwah?'

He drew away from her angry hand. 'Pshaw, girl! there's more fire in you than I thought for. 'Course I thought you'd know more about him than others.'

'But why?' she persisted, in the same passionate voice.

'Well, he was your husband, and I suppose you liked him in a sort of way.'

Her face broke up at once, and she laughed outright. 'He wasn't my husband, and never would have been. The Chief wanted me to take him, but I—well, I was satisfied with someone else.'

She glowed afresh with the thought of her present perfect happiness.

'You're strange creatures, you girls,' said her companion, with a half smile. 'Muskwah was a fine enough looking fellow in my fancy. Which of the gang did you pick out, anyway?'

Menotah's clear laughter rang forth joyously in the pure heart rapture. The sorrowless waves of sound circled above in the frost-gleaming air, and beat far around into the forest, over the crisp ground, above the nauseous marsh. But it was for the last time. Neither the figure before her, nor old Antoine; nor even the cold winds that sighed round her head to lift the dark tresses in sport, heard that laugh again.

'Why!' she exclaimed, panting for her pure breath, 'it was not an Indian at all.'

A presentiment of sombre fact flashed across the listener's brain. His shrouding cloak whispered to the ground as he sprang upright and seized the girl's shoulder. His fingers dug into the soft flesh, until she would have cried aloud. But fear in his eyes froze up the power of speech.

'Good God! don't say it's *him*—not him. What's the name, girl? Who is it?'

His voice was deep and hoarse. The words were forced from his tongue in jerky syllables, barely intelligible. She moved her red lips—scarce knowing if she spoke. Yet a sound proceeded therefrom in a whisper, forming a word, a single name, which caused the figure to clench his fists and swear furiously. Then she almost fell upon him. 'What do you mean?' she cried pitifully. 'Tell me what you mean.'

The forbidding exterior concealed a kindly heart. He looked upon the delicate, upturned face, the small nose, moist eyes, quivering mouth, all framed within the dark wreath of hair. He saw the slight figure, already ripening into the rounded lines of maternity. He thought of the meaning of treachery to that perfect piece of humanity. There might yet be opportunity for saving the heart from death.

'It's nothing, girl,' he said in surly manner. 'I was a bit astonished for a moment.'

'No, no,' she cried, 'it was not that. I cannot be deceived so easily. I saw fear in your face, and there was pity. Ah, yes, there was pity for me; I could see it. Why—tell me why? I have always been so happy. You cannot pity me now. Why should you?'

'It's all right,' he said, with slight knowledge of comforting. 'It's all a mistake of mine, anyway. Don't you bother yourself.'

'I can't believe you. I am trying to, but it is no use. There was that pity upon your face. Ah, tell me. Tell me all—all—all.'

Her voice died into a wail of distress, as she fell on her knees and grasped his hand. This pitiless work had been performed unintentionally; the warmth and young life had been in a moment swept away by a mere suspicion of truth. Without the hut, blasts of north wind blew colder, with flurries of snow, while thin ice sheets formed slowly upon each black swamp pool.

'Where's he now?' came the abrupt question.

'I do not know. I have not seen him since noon.'

'The last boat leaves first thing in the morning.'

The echo of his words had scarcely died away, before a deep sound came vibrating along the wind from the direction of the river. Here was direct contradiction to his statement.

'To-night!' screamed Menotah, springing to the doorway. 'It is the second horn.'

The figure joined her. He was calm, though the face was vengeful. The long cloak had been cast aside, and he was now fastening a buckskin coat round his body.

'Make for the point,' he said shortly. 'Go for all you're worth. I'll meet you there. We may catch her as she passes.'

'It is a long way, and the paths are slippery with frost.'

They escaped from the labyrinth surrounding the swamp, and, when in the open, Menotah sped along with the agility of a deer. She easily outstripped the man, who followed at his best pace, the felt hat pulled closely over his forehead, as though he were still fearful of detection.

'So long, Angus. Sorry you're not staying the night. I'll have to finish off the bottle with my own neck now. The frost's getting sharp all right. I guess it isn't safe to stay.'

'We'll soon be clear of the river, anyway. The current's strong, with wind the right way.'

'That's so. Well, good biz, Angus.'

'S'long, Alf. Keep right till I see you in the summer.'

The last rope was thrown over, a dark sail hoisted, then the boat swept down, like a huge bird, towards the tree-covered point.

Here, concealed behind a sparse kanikanik bluff, a passenger awaited the boat. He was angry and dissatisfied enough. As minutes dragged past, he uttered many an invective against the absent personage, who had robbed him of the small treasure on which he had in great part depended for future enterprise. When the horn brayed discordantly forth, he slung the rifle carefully across his back, then crept forth to gaze along the wide reach of the river. Presently the black monster appeared. He stamped upon the rock to warm his half-frozen feet, then let himself carefully down the steep incline. A minute later he stood upon the shingle, at the spot where Muskwah had encountered his fate. The boat bore down over the cold waters, the steersman responded to his signals. With a distinct feeling of relief he found himself floating rapidly away from an inhospitable region.

Menotah did not proceed directly to the point. She turned very slightly aside to visit the hut, their rude home, which yet was for her filled and over-shadowed with the most blissful memories of life. There, she felt instinctively, might be found decisive answer to that torturing fear which now began to gnaw at the innocent heart of love. She must know at once whether the mysterious figure had erred, or whether he had spoken with the conviction that knowledge brings.

Never, not when the heart was at its lightest, had she sped through the forest with such hasty flight. Her sobbing breath—distress of mind and body—came and went in short hot stabs, as she burst from the last bushes upon the clearing. The hut was black and silent. There were no warm rays streaming from the half-open door. The only sound within was the melancholy chirping of a discursive frog.

Her shadow flitted across the threshold, then she sprang to the opposite corner, to dig away the loose dust soil with her trembling, slender fingers. The box of yellow stones. By this time she knew he would not depart without them, for he had lately explained to her their value.

Search was short and unrewarded. Then, when she perceived pursuit to be vain, she began more fully to comprehend the meaning of that look of pity which had so bewildered her trusting mind. His rifle, that usually leaned in the angle of the wall—why was it gone? He would not be hunting that night. Many other small articles, now remembered and looked for with sharp tension of memory—where were they? Above all, why did he stay out so late? Where was he?

'Gone!' moaned the north wind, as it crept wailing into the hut. 'Gone!' cried her shuddering heart. 'Gone!' whispered each dull, inanimate object of her surrounding.

'Forsaken! Abandoned! Betrayed!'

So shrieked every waving tree, each lashing bush, the separate patches of white grass, awesome in the night. Her tired and bruised feet sped along once again. The eyes, burning and tortured, stared frightfully upon the black, distant headland, where the last pitiable hope of life joy yet reposed.

On and on, through the growing rigours of the night, while the heart that knew not sorrow slowly broke and died.

After the boat had drifted away, McAuliffe lit up his pipe and made his way back to the fort over the crisp, frost-spangled grass. An otter cap had taken the place of summer's straw bonnet; thick woollen gloves wadded his great hands; above the breeches he wore Arctic socks, secured at the knee with gaudy little tassels. Standing by the water had made him chilly, so he reflected cheerfully upon the black bottle which awaited him behind the blot of yellow light ahead.

'Goldam! the cold's a terror,' he remarked to himself. 'And I'm stiff as a frozen-in gold eye. Why, Kit, my girl! Where have you sprung from? Where's your pard, eh?'

He patted the grey mare, as she emerged from the bush with a soft whinny. 'You'd be a lot better fixed in your stable, night like this. Not much of a place, eh, old woman? Too strong on the ventilation question, I guess. Better than fooling around here, though.'

He pulled off a glove and rubbed the frost from her soft nostrils. Then he noticed she was trembling and breathing strangely. Her white breath floated along the cold wind like steam clouds. Repeatedly she turned her head to sniff into the darkness behind.

'Something up,' mused the Factor. 'Kitty's scared, or she wouldn't play the old fool like this. I reckon there's someone there behind.'

The mare backed violently, almost throwing him down. 'Goldam! you're no chicken on my toes, I tell you, Kit. What's wrong with you, anyway?' He craned his neck forward, and presently muttered, 'Heard a sort of sound then. Kitty's derved cute. She don't rocket around for nothing.'

The breath released by the utterance of such words had scarce floated away, before the bushes parted with sudden movement. The following second a figure ran forth by the mare's side, and disappeared instantly in the darkness. McAuliffe had peered beneath the animal's neck, and, as the auroral lights shot for an instant into brilliancy, his eyes fell, for a breath only, upon that face, that figure. Then he shambled to his knees and embraced a frost-coated rock with hoarse exclamations, while the mare cantered briskly across the open space, snorting fiercely.

'I've got 'em,' moaned the Factor, rocking himself backward and forward in the strange, ghost-like light. 'I've been warned of 'em, and now they've come. O Lord! O Lord! I never prayed in my life, and it's too late now. Besides, I wouldn't know what to say. Now I'll have to go away and be locked up in an asylum presently, while the little blue and green devils hop and tumble around all the time. I drank square with Angus right along, and never mixed. There was only brandy, anyway. Now I've got 'em. I'm an old moonhead from this night forward. O Lord! O Lord!'

'He won't come back again,' the dark figure was saying, half kindly, half angrily.

The two stood upon the wind-swept headland. The boat had long since vanished into the night. Below rushed the mighty river, type of eternity's unceasing course. Above, the aurora flashed red shafts, while a soft moaning filled the sky.

She was sobbing fearfully. 'He has only gone for a short time. He desires something—for me, perhaps. Then he will return to me.'

The other placed a rough hand on her arm. 'It's no good, girl. You've just got to look square at a nasty truth. We all have to at times. He's gone by this last boat. He couldn't get back if he wanted to.'

Her head was bent, the face concealed in small fingers. 'But he loved me,' she wailed.

Her companion laughed hoarsely. 'He said so. Lamont was always clever with his tongue. But he can't love, girl. He hasn't got the heart for it.'

She looked at him with sore, tearful eyes. 'You know him, then?'

He stared in surprise. 'Well, I should say so! You know I've been hanging round here for the chance of fixing a certain man. I reckon you can guess his name now.'

'I shall hate you,' cried this strange girl; 'hate you, if you speak so.'

'There's no reaching? the bottom of a woman's heart,' he said carelessly. 'You must do what you like.'

'Oh, this is terrible, terrible,' cried Menotah, frantically. 'I have been saving you all this time from death, that you might murder the man I loved more than my life. But you have not yet succeeded, and now I know. How can I think wrong of him? He loves me; he told me so. He always said so.'

'That's a tale all girls will believe easily enough. But he's betrayed wiser folks than young women before this night.'

She had stopped weeping, and now looked at him with cold, fierce eyes. 'If I had let you die, he would have been safe.'

'The country is his enemy,' he said significantly, 'but I have his secret. He might have laughed all right if I'd snuffed out.'

In the same hard voice she continued, 'If I could kill you now, that secret would die with your life. Then he might be safe.'

The remark was so unexpected, that he was some time before replying. Then he said, 'You're a fool, girl, if you can't see the difference between friend and enemy. You've done lots for me, and I'll stay by you now.'

'How can I tell whether there be such thing as truth or right?' she burst forth. 'If he has deceived me, you may do the same. You, too, are a white man. If I had the power, I would kill you now!'

'Pshaw! you're crazy, girl. Doesn't matter to me whether you trust me or not. We've both got the same enemy, that's all.'

She shuddered dreadfully. 'He is my enemy,' she said slowly. 'Oh! no, no!—not my enemy! Yours—not mine!'

The figure came up to her, and turned her pale face to the flashing lights of the north. 'You can't love him yet, girl?'

'I gave him my heart,' she moaned, tearing herself away from him. 'You cannot love against inclination, neither may you hate at will. I would hate him, but I'm too weak—I cannot.' A moment's pause, then she cried at him again, 'Why should I hate him—because he is your enemy? Tell me, how has he wronged me—tell me that?'

It was difficult indeed to convince that innocent trusting heart of a man's treachery and

faithlessness.

'All right,' he said again, with the same touch of pity in his voice. 'Listen here a few minutes while I tell you.'

Then he stood by her side and narrated a tale of black treachery, of darkest cowardice. A man had committed the crime, which might not be forgiven. He had fled from deserved retribution, knowing there was one man who held the damnatory secret. Then he had encountered that man, and determined to silence him for ever.

But when he again became silent and wiped the cold frost dews from his face, the girl bent like a crushed flower, knowing that the joy of life was gone—that the dark shadow of grief had settled eternally across her path. Amid the sighing of the wind and the sharp passion of her own sense came the clear memory of her own words:—*'If anyone should kill my heart with sorrow, I would give life and strength to the cause of vengeance. I should never turn back.'*

The man at her side was astounded at the entire change that had passed, like the devastating breath of the cyclone, over the girl. A plain, blunt man, and inartistic, he could not know that pure happiness is one of the principal factors of human beauty, that its dissolution should be attended by such startling alteration, both of face and form. Menotah was a different being, of new appearance and manners. The bright light had faded from the lustrous eyes, now forbidding and snake-like. The unrestrained laugh had left the mouth, which was now set in a hard line of purpose. From her sunken cheeks had departed the rich health colour, from her hanging head that haughty pose of conscious perfection. Within, the heart was dead—cold—unresponsive. No longer did it pulsate with mingled delicious emotions of devotion and trust. It was now controlled only by an unrelenting design—by the inexorable duty of the future.

There was no further use for the attributes of beauty. They had been once utilised for the purpose of attraction. They had succeeded—fatally so. Now their work was over, and they might well be laid aside.

She was calm now, and the voice was steady when she spoke. 'We will take each our own path,' she said. 'I have a husband to find, you an enemy. I shall be before you. He is mine. I have his word for it' (Her eyes flashed fiercely.) 'He shall be my victim!'

'Let it alone, girl,' said the other, in a voice meant to be kind. 'A man can best do a man's work.'

But she turned at him again, with the fury that was part of her new nature.

'What do you know of vengeance? I know a man's honour, a man's method. He will shoot from behind a tree, stab with a knife into his foe's back, then go away satisfied. No one but the wronged can punish the wronger. You call death the worse, but there are many things more bitter than the destruction of life. If you cannot believe that, look upon me and consider what I was. You men are weak after all when it comes to the point of vengeance. We women apply what we lack in muscular strength to the passion of the heart. We do not fail at the great moment.'

'It's no good crossing you—that's a sure thing,' said the figure. 'Still, I shall have the chances—'

'I can make mine,' she interrupted. 'A man may give up disheartened after first failure; a woman will return with fresh energy to the attack after a hundred reverses. Listen to what I say; judge me if I fall away from my oath. This man has betrayed me; he has broken my life, my happiness; he has abandoned me as the scorn of my people; he has cast me aside like a broken weapon. Mayhap he is now laughing at my broken heart.'

'Therefore I swear by the Great Spirit, by the Light and the Darkness, by the River—even by the Great God of the white men—that I will have my vengeance, that he shall suffer for my sorrow!'

So they passed together, from the sullen gleaming of the Saskatchewan, to where the fires glowed red in the encampment.

Later, on that same dark night of sorrow, the aged Chief lay in his miserable hut, dying. By his side stood Antoine, more withered and time-stricken than even his fast fading companion. Behind, at a short interval, appeared the heavy countenance of Menotah.

Outside, within the ruddy circle of the smoke fires, squaws squatted in statuesque positions, softly beating at drums to keep aloof the evil spirits. Also, many dark shadows of warriors crossed and recrossed, muttering incantations to the weird cadence of the music, as they passed round the enclosure with arms waving wildly above their heads. The strangely coloured scene was unnaturally impressive.

The tale of Menotah's grief was known, even to the dying Chief. For he had heard a muttered conversation at his side, and had prayed Antoine to tell him all. The news, expected though it was, convulsed his feeble frame with a last passionate fury. He drew himself frantically upright, and stretched out a claw-like hand.

'Why did we not slay him? That would but have called down the wrath of others. Better their vengeance than my daughter's despair. Antoine, why did you not poison him with strong drugs?'

The Ancient stood motionless, though his lips trembled as he muttered fierce words of execration. He had looked for this end from the first days of opening passion. He had besought the girl he loved to learn the lesson of hating the perfidious white, even as he did. Words had been useless; no prayers might avail against the will of the stubborn heart.

'Trouble not, my father,' said Menotah. 'I have knowledge now, and can avenge myself.'

A dull light crawled into Antoine's eyes as he raised his head and noted her expressionless face. 'You speak like a daughter of the tribe, child—as one that I have taught. 'Tis well. You must live for vengeance. Before this night I told you thus. Behold it is true.'

'Vengeance! Vengeance!' came in thick utterance from the now prostrate figure.

'You shall look from the hunting lands, old friend, and behold your daughter avenging herself upon enemies. The sight will gladden your heart, as you sweep over the fields, and slay the buffalo with hand that misses not its aim.'

'I shall see her ... you, also, aiding her.'

'Surely. Then, when the work is over, we shall hasten to join you in the sun country of joy. There sorrow will be lost in success.'

'Is there light?' asked the dying wreck, struggling to raise his head.

'There are the red fires below, and the cold ghost lights in the sky. The light is sufficient.'

'I see no longer ... the blood is ice in my veins ... to-morrow you will give my body to the flames ... I shall go forth with my weapons along the way of shadows ... young again, with eternal strength.'

'Far from the white man, and beyond the reach of his cruelty.'

The Chief groaned, while the deep breathing grew more difficult. The fires crackled sharply, while the drum rattling rose louder on the night air.

'Daughter,' he gasped, 'come to my side ... put your hand upon mine and swear.'

Silently she obeyed. The blue fingers closed hungrily round the warm rounded hand of his child. For a space he lay silent, fighting for life breath.

'Menotah, my child-love, my age-light, I shall see you again in the joy land whither the Spirit calls me.... You must swear, by that you hold in honour, you must take the great oath, never to pause on the path of vengeance ... until you avenge your wrongs on the life of the vile white.... Good Antoine will aid you.... Strike, child, and pity not. Let his blood be spilt for your lost honour.'

The effort had been too great. He lay, throbbing with death agony, while a thin stream of blood trickled from the mouth and coursed slowly along a deep furrow of the chin.

'He passes,' muttered Antoine, hoarsely. 'It is time. On such a night was he born. So does he die, amid the north wind and biting cold. Swear, child, lest he die cursing you.'

A hollow exclamation ascended from the withered form. 'Swear!'

Then she placed the right hand on her father's head, and raising the other aloft, with stern voice and unflinching determination, took the oath which might not be broken.

The final flicker of strength darted into the exhausted frame, that sudden flash of energy which heralds the silence. 'Antoine,' he whispered, 'raise me to the light. So will I die cursing the white man.'

The Ancient raised the emaciated form in his shaking arms. For a few seconds, faint, yet intensely bitter words of condemnation and hatred fell from the blood-stained lips, before life faded away into the unseen. Menotah, still holding the hand, felt the shudder of the departing soul, and caught the distant echo of a voice—forced, as it seemed, from the cold body, after the passing of the Spirit, 'I go, daughter ... it is dark.'

The dreary death chant and low groaning of the women beat upon the night.

Half contemptuously Menotah turned from the still form, with passion unexpressed. Antoine lifted his slow, watering eyes from the withered remains, to gloat upon her hopeless aspect.

'You grieve not, daughter?'

'I have done with such things as joy or grief,' she said savagely. 'My destiny calls, and I leave the emotions for the sport of fools.'

The Ancient shivered, for the cold bit into his stiff limbs, 'You speak as he would wish to hear. You shall have your desire, child. I have said it.'

Half mad, she turned to the open door and called to the dusky-featured ones squatting at the fires,—

'Shout louder, women. Howl until the voice breaks the wind and scatters the ghost lights.^[1] Beat your breasts for the sorrow that lies within the camp. Louder, I tell you. Cry louder.'

Antoine laughed hoarsely. 'Ay, shout! He hears you not. Perchance the god has an ear open to

our cries.'

The uncouth strain of savage melody swelled fitfully upward in long, suffering cadence, then fell, dying away in shuddering murmurs, to ascend again more loudly, yet more bitterly.

Menotah clenched her small hands and bit the pale lips in the agony of the yet living heart. Then Antoine was at her side, nervously plucking at the blanket that trailed from her shoulder.

'Hearken, daughter. To-morrow we must burn the old Chief, and send him forth upon a long journey. Then there is duty—'

'You may forget,' she broke in coldly, 'but I—'

'Peace, child, let me have speech. You were ever over ready with your words. I am aged, and strength is not mine. I must be satisfied with controlling the striking weapon. So I can only aid by cursing your enemy, and by praying to the God.'

'May your god-hunting be successful,' she said scornfully.

'The God of the white men has the greater power,' he continued unmoved. 'He has conquered ours, and bidden the enemy rule over us. Therefore, daughter, I would for the time follow that God.'

'You, who always hated the white, become one of them! What plan is this?'

'Then I should be one of His followers, and He would hear my prayers. Now I have other gods, so He could not listen to me. I would beseech Him each day, to grant us vengeance upon the white man.'

'Will you sport with the lightning?' she said calmly.

'I care not. I will take canoe, before the ice binds the river, and paddle for six days. Then I shall find one of their doctors. I have heard the wanderers tell of him. They call him Father Bertrand. He must tell me what I am to do, to join the followers of the white God.'

She turned from him wearily, longing vaguely for silence and isolation. 'Pray to whom you will; all gods are the same. They laugh at sorrow, and they heed not.'

'You shall see, child. I have greater wisdom than you. But now we must take our part in mourning for the dead.'

He took her cold, resistless hand, and together they stepped within the ruddy glow. Then he raised his sh king hands and cried aloud,—

'Mourn, warriors! The Chief, who led you to battle, who kept you in peace, who gave you wise counsel, your father, your ruler, is dead. Cry aloud to the Spirit, and sing your songs of grief.'

'Mourn, women! The Chief, who loved you, who protected you, who smiled upon you with favours, your father, your husband, is dead. Scream your lamentations, tear your hair, dig the sharp nails into breasts, and cry aloud in your grief.'

The unearthly melody surged upward in a tumultuous wave of sound, until the auroral lights flickered like flames in the blast. The air became thick and silvery with frost crystals, while sharp cold settled along the ground. This was a night of frost, of death—of fearful and unutterable despair.

[1] The shout of the human voice repels and scatters the auroral lights. Hence many Indian legends.

PART III

THE HEART'S PEACE

CHAPTER I

LAMONT

A radiant flood of light poured from the white moon upon the rippling waters of the Red River. A grove of black oaks along the bank waved silently in the clear night; frogs chirped merrily from the fenced in fields, where fireflies sparkled and flashed before a long dark background of foliage. Along that portion of the shelving bank, where a young man and a dark-haired girl walked closely together, might be perceived on looking back the twinkling lights of Fort Garry, from whose stone walls the shadow of war had now lifted for ever. Nearer, outside the actual fort, a grey stunted tower shot upward from the thick of an oak bluff. Here rested in their last quiet many of the brave English and Canadian boys who had fallen in the late Rebellion.

Winter and spring had passed since the desertion of Menotah. That time had wrought change to the western and northern country, a change, sad perhaps, yet necessary from the standpoint of civilisation. The last traces of vengeful fire in the breasts of those who had joined the insurrection had been stamped out, the final agreement had been made, the white again triumphed. Louis Riel had swung upon the gallows at Regina, before the eyes of many on that dreary, treeless plain, that no traveller who has once seen can forget. There was no leader, no keen spirit left. So the survivors gladly snatched at that, only thing they could now ask for—pardon.

Yet the question of justice, from the position of the conquered, may be still worth considering. One of the half-breeds most zealous to the cause spoke thus in the echoing valley^[1] before his priest,—

'Why did I fight, my Father? I, who have the blood of the white men in me. It was for that reason that I fought, and that I killed. The white man came into a country which was not his, which had belonged to others for many hundreds of years, and he saw that the country was good, and full of animals. Also he perceived that the women were beautiful. So he said, I will make this place my home, and call my friends to come here also. These men came, and brought with them guns and fire-water. Then they took the women, first one and then another, and had children by them. So was I born, and I have brothers and sisters of many different mothers. Yet the father was the same. But what could the Indians do against the white man's guns? They said, give us back our wives and our daughters, also our land and our buffalo. But the white man only laughed, and gave them fire-water, which ate away their manhood and their courage. So they said at length, we will rise up and reclaim our own. We have now nothing to lose, for the white man has taken all from us, except life. Let him take that also, or give us back that which makes it happy. That is why I fought, my Father.'

It is a strange fact in modern times, and one so far unrecognised, that the Rebellion should have been crushed by the power of the Roman Catholic Church. Standing merely upon the path of duty, Archbishop Taché, with his band of gallant priests, amongst whom Father Lecompte must stand predominant, succeeded in quenching the flame of human passion entirely by means of that extraordinary devotion entertained by these ignorant children of the Rebellion for their kindly teachers.

Actuated the Archbishop certainly was by a high sense of duty, yet it was also right that he should subsequently look for that reward which the Government had promised, as some slight return for the salvation of a country. It is notorious that such reward was never paid. It is, or should be, universally known that there was but one care which distressed 'the man of the great heart,' as his 'children' affectionately named him, upon the deathbed at peaceful St Boniface,^[2] still a care heavy enough to almost break that generous heart. The Government had steadily refused to redeem their promise, or to grant to Manitoban Catholics that separate school system which is their right and their due, which above all has been solemnly assured them. Still, it may not yet be too late to perform a tardy justice, which, on the side of the Government, is a duty.

Now the days of the bloody scalping knife have sunk into history. The nondescript individual, who to-day answers to the title of Red Indian, is a very different being from the noble prairie trackers of the olden days, before the introduction of whisky and vice. Up in northern districts, far from the damning pollution of traders and treasure seekers, may still be found at long intervals the haughty heathen warrior with his paint and feathers of liberty. But in all other parts the immorality of the white man has done its work too successfully. Is proof required? Then listen. It may be doubted whether there is at the present time a single full-blooded Indian alive on the Canadian prairies!

Should such types of humanity—Longfellow's 'Hiawatha' accurately depicts them—be utterly extinguished? Look at the Menotah, the Muskawah, of this work. These are true life studies, which may hardly be found to-day, never until civilisation, with all its attending evils, has been left far from sight. Is the taciturn, morose half-breed, heavy in feature, abnormally dull in intellect, an efficient substitute for such? At that particular spot on the Great Saskatchewan where the scene of this narrative is for the most part laid, any at this day might well blush at owning affinity with white men. That once noble race, the origin of which is beyond all conjecture, who possess secrets, powers and occult arts beyond all our discoveries, must be blotted out during the lives of most. Riel made an effort to save it, not an unselfish effort, still he did his best. Where he failed, none may succeed.

But to return to narrative.

One of the two figures on the Red River bank to the north of the fort was Lamont. His companion was a young girl of French extraction, named Marie Larivière. She spoke the English with a pretty accent, and hung to the arm of the handsome young man with clinging tenderness.

The gates of Garry were now thrown open wide. Any might go forth upon the surrounding prairies or enter the young city. All danger of hostility was past, and the land was at peace.

'But talking about being constant,' the girl was saying; 'it is such an easy thing when the one we love is present.'

'And rather too much the opposite when he's away, eh, my Marie?' said Lamont, with the lover's softness.

'Well,' she said, with dainty hesitation, 'one naturally looks for that which custom has made us

long for.'

'But when I was away, you found others to take my place, didn't you?' he asked, gazing eagerly at her small face, with the dark crisp curls nodding over the forehead.

'It's not a fair question, Hugh. You may be jealous if you like, but still I have something against you. That long mysterious journey north; you can't give me a reason for that.'

'Business, *chérie*. I thought of you all that time.'

She laughed. 'You were quite satisfied with thought only. Come, tell me the truth. Was there not some hidden attraction there? I have heard that the Cree girls are beautiful—some of them. Was it one of them?'

He joined carelessly in her mirth. 'Who is jealous now? Are you afraid of an Indian rival, my Marie? But who are these?'

Two other figures came along the trail in the white light. One was tall and stooping, the other short and brisk of step. They were talking together in French. So still was the night, their voices might be heard before they were themselves visible.

The couples advanced and met. Then Lamont gave a quick exclamation—more it seemed of fear than surprise—and pulled off his hat. 'The Archbishop!'

He it was, enjoying the cool of the evening. The tall priest by his side was Father Lecompte, the man of his right hand. This latter looked careworn and very ill.

It was, in truth, a kindly face that turned towards the young couple as they passed—smooth, clean-shaven, with a pair of soft eyes, crested by wavy hair. At that time it bore a tired, anxious expression, result of recent incessant toil. The privations he had suffered for the country of his adoption had been great. Through heat and cold, by river, prairie and forest, he had travelled; on horse, on foot, by boat, for many days and weeks. Often without food, always lacking rest, until the great work was accomplished, and he had won. A truly noble-hearted man that.'

'God bless you, my children,' he said, in the quiet, thrilling voice which all knew so well, as he smiled upon them.

'I couldn't speak,' said Marie, breathlessly. 'It is strange that one should be overawed by such a good man. I couldn't thank him, or anything.'

'He was the last I expected to meet along here. I didn't know he had returned.'

'Doesn't Father Lecompte look ill? You know he accompanied the Archbishop on his travels, and it has broken his health.'

There was a silent pause, while they came slowly towards the brilliant lights of the inner fort. Then she said musingly, 'So Riel is dead.'

'What made you think of him?' he asked quickly.

She raised a hand to point towards the grey tower, into the shadow of which they now entered.

He thought of the dead that lay around, and shuddered. Then there came back to him the recent execution at Regina; the dark figure, champion of a hopeless cause; the lines of mounted police; the cosmopolitan crowd; the dreary plain. He thought also on a certain figure in that crowd, one who had watched the mournful and dramatic scene with almost a wild interest. It was only a disreputable loafer, with ragged garments and dirt-begrimed features. It was, in short, a man with identity fearfully concealed.

'Come,' he said suddenly, drawing her gently on, 'let me take you home. It is late, and to-morrow will be busy.'

After seeing his *fiancée* to her home, Lamont set out along the irregular street, which followed the meandering of the river, towards his lodgings. The brightly illumined window of a saloon attracted his attention, and allured him to enter for a chat with the proprietor on latest matters of local interest. So he came into the smoky bar, where the usual throng of deadbeats—broken-down English gentlemen for the most part—were talking or shouting, according to the amount of liquor imbibed. Some of the figures that loomed through the thick cloud of smoke were decidedly unsteady. Very prominent among this latter class was a certain individual of cadaverous complexion and yellow moustache, at the sight of whom Lamont started with a short oath of gratification. The man was unquestionably Peter Denton.

He quickly nodded to the bar-tender, who knew him, then passed to a side room, where those who placarded themselves in the outer world as exclusive devotees to the cause of temperance were wont to be served in strict privacy. Here the wielder of the cocktail flasks soon joined him, with the usual salutation, 'How goes it?'

'Who's the chap over there, that one with the sandy hair?' asked Lamont, pointing towards the bar through the drifting smoke.

'That? Just a crazy sort of ranting fellow. Ter'ble drunken lot he is, too.'

The other laughed in his self-satisfied manner. 'See here,' he said, catching at the bar-tender's

shirt sleeve, 'I've been after him since last fall. He made off with some shiners of mine. Guess they're stowed at his lodgings, if he hasn't got away with them all.'

'You don't say,' said the man, making an accurate shot through the fog at a distant spittoon. 'He looks a crooked tool, right enough. Still, I've not heard much talk against him, and long as he can pay for liquor, it's not my biz to speak. What'll I do?'

'Load him up. I'll stand the racket.'

'I tell you, he can take a fancy quantity. What's the plan?'

'When he's too raddled to know me, I'll offer to see him home.'

'Then search round the shanty for the dosh?'

'That's what.'

The bar-tender chuckled. 'That'd stand some beating. I'll go and fix him up with a drop of drugged spirit. You'll wait here, eh?'

The scheme could not fail to succeed. Denton was 'ready' for his enemy in less than quarter of an hour. Some trouble was experienced in getting him to the street, but once there he was quite prepared to accompany his newly found companion. Leaning heavily upon his arm, he staggered, with the unflinching instinct of the drunken man, towards his home, which was nothing more pretentious than a dirty little shack in a sheltered spot without the fort.

Once inside, Lamont went promptly to work without loss of time. There were but two inodorous rooms, the innermost of which contained a truckle bed. Upon this he dumped the garrulous Denton, then left him, singing cheerfully a hymn of doubtful wording for self-edification. Afterwards he lit a broken lamp and made search for his missing property.

First impressions conveyed the idea that, if the gold had been secreted in this place, it would not be difficult to come across it. For, beyond a bed and box in the one room, table, two chairs, cupboard and crazy bookcase, which hung gingerly to the loose plaster, in the outer, there was literally no addition to the original building. Carpets and curtains were luxuries unknown; coarse paper had been fastened across the lower portion of dirty window frames; a rickety stove was propped against the wall by means of a couple of bricks. Lamont searched everywhere, in each nook and dirt-encrusted cranny, by the greasy light of the lamp, which dropped faint yellow rays along each sordid article. Then he dragged the proprietor from the bed, pulled off the coverlet, searched mattress and floor beneath. He ransacked the shreds of rusty clothing, tapped the crumbling plaster, examined every part of the flooring. But there were no traces to be discovered of Menotah's first and only material gift. Denton must have parted with the whole under pinch of want.

Lamont turned up the flickering flame—the oil was failing—then kicked the drunken wretch on the floor. The ex-minister responded with an unsteady homily on the joys of humility. Then Lamont reflected.

He felt certain that this was the culprit who deserved punishment at his hands. That would be a simple matter. All he had to do was to dash the dying lamp to the floor, then depart. This crazy shanty of dry wood would be in ashes within the hour, and the drunken body of its owner cremated.

So he stood for the moment undecided, then smiled slowly and shook his head. Nerve was wanting, even for such a little thing as that. Perhaps he was getting weak. It might be that there were already sufficient unpleasant shadows haunting the past. An addition to such might well prove beyond tolerance.

Denton's tongue had ceased its unmeaning flow of words, as its owner slowly sank into the deep slumber of inebriation. Lamont went into the other room, placed the lamp on the table, then seated himself, still following up the new line of thought recently suggested. To-morrow he would be married to a girl he believed he sincerely loved. Then he would settle down to a changed life, and restart with a new set of morals. The past, as a thing gone, was to be forgotten. He would now become a respectable citizen of the new western metropolis.

Then his eyes wandered carelessly round the darkened room, as he leaned forward to turn up the flickering flame from its dull red smouldering. Light darted through the heavily smoked glass, and he found himself gazing upon Denton's large Bible, which stood on the bookcase shelf. His lips curled into a contemptuous smile. Then he went across the dry, creaking boards and pulled down the worn book. To his surprise the balance was uneven, while a hollow rattling came from within. All attempts to open it failed, as the leaves appeared to be firmly bound together. But when he came to look at it more closely in the dim light, he realised that what had once been a book was now a box. There could be no doubt on the matter, for a small keyhole was visible immediately beneath one of the boards.

He placed this imitation between his knees and burst the lids apart. A quantity of paper, with a small buckskin bag, fell out upon the floor. The next instant he held in his hands his recovered treasure, or rather the larger portion only of the original gift. Denton had evidently laid them aside as a private bank from which he could draw from time to time.

Examining the case, he saw that it had once been a Bible, but that a hole had been cut in the

centre of each leaf, the remainder at infinite labour having; been fastened together securely.

There was nothing to keep him after this discovery. Leaving the book on the floor, in close proximity to its sleeping owner, he pocketed the bag, then stepped out on the beaten trail and made for his lodgings. On this occasion he reached them without incident.

[1] Qu'appelle. (Who calls?)

[2] See prefatory note.

CHAPTER II

THE LIFE OBJECT

'Say, Dave!'

The Captain turned his head slowly, then drew the short stone pipe from his mouth.

'Hustle over here.'

Dave came leisurely across the grass space.

'When are you getting, Dave?'

'Morrow; noon,' came the brief reply.

'Call it day after, and I'll come,' said the Factor.

The Captain looked surprised. 'How'll you manage, Alf?'

'Don't tell you everything, Davey. I've got my leave all right. Justin can fix things while I'm away. Goldam! it's time I had a bit of a rip up.'

'Well, I can't do it, Alf.'

'You can, Dave. Just think a while. You're on good time this trip. A day this way or that won't go for anything. I'll fix it up for you, Dave. The skins weren't quite ready to be shipped; the darned old boat wanted some pitch on her side—scraped her over a sunk rock, you know, Dave. Lots of easy lies, if you like to make them. I can fix five first-classers while you're thinking out one hoodoo, Dave.'

'You can't by a jugful,' said the Captain, hotly. 'I've more practice than you, Alf. There's generally something to reckon for, end of the trip. Tell you, it strains a fellow's invention pretty hard sometimes.'

'See here, Dave. Early morning, Thursday, we start south.'

'Suppose it wouldn't make such a lot of difference, anyway.'

'Course it won't. You don't get me for a passenger every trip, Dave.'

'That's so. There'll be another beside you, though.'

'Who? There's nobody round here, far as I know.'

'Someone's going all the same. She's under my protection, too.'

'She! it's never Menotah?'

Dave nodded. 'Mrs Spencer that's going to be.'

'You're fooling, Dave. She hasn't got the stuff to pay her passage.'

'We've fixed that. Tell you, I'm looking after her.'

'But she's not going to hitch on with you?'

'That's what,' said the Captain, stolidly. 'She's been after me for a long time. Reckon she's caught me at last.' He sighed with an air of resignation.

McAuliffe burst into a lusty laugh and slapped his knee repeatedly. Then his great face suddenly grew grave, as he thought on the darker side of the picture. What could have induced the heart-stricken girl to a promise of marriage with the ugly little Captain? Perhaps she had lost all sense and reason, poor girl. Then he said, 'Tell how you managed it, Dave.'

'This way,' said the Captain, nothing loth. 'I was fooling round by the boat, watching the boys loading her up, when Menotah comes round to me all of a sudden, and asked if I'd take her across lake. She couldn't pay for the passage, but she did her beautiest to make me say I'd agree.'

'Well! well!'

'Course I hopped at the chance. Said I, see here, Menotah, you want me to take you south. Just

say you'll splice with me, and I'll put you across the lake many times as you like.'

'What did she say?'

'Fairly corked me, I tell you. Didn't think, or stop a minute, but just said yes at once. Made me promise I wasn't to come round her, till she'd done some job or other down Garry way. But say, Alf, what's come over her? Her eyes are like a couple of chunks of ice, while there's never a smile to be seen on her face. She's a darned pretty gal yet, all right. Queer things gals, ain't they, Alf? There's no understanding them. Guess she's been after me all this time. Well, well, she's caught me now, so I reckon she ought to be happy.'

The Factor was deep in thought. 'You wouldn't take her across, 'cept she promised to be your wife, eh?' he said slowly.

'You wouldn't want a fellow to lose a good chance, would you?'

'Well, Dave, if you want my opinion, I'll give it you straight. I call it a sort of mean trick to serve the gal. I know her better than you do, mind. She's got some scheme in her brain. It's a thing she's dead set on, and when it's done, she'll likely drop you. You mark me, lad.'

'She won't marry me, eh? See here, Alf, you don't know the first darned thing about it. I tell you, I'll make her.'

'And that'll be a tough sort of job. You'll find Menotah isn't the sort of gal to stand making. Bet you what you like you don't marry her, Dave.'

'You're getting cranky,' muttered the Captain. 'It's no business of yours, anyway. I'm going to marry my gal. If I reckon she's not going to stay by her word, I won't take her across. She don't play any of her women's tricks on me.'

McAuliffe laughed. 'I'll get even with you there, Dave. Darned if I won't pay her passage myself. You'll have to take her then. How's that, lad?'

At this decided cheek, the angry Captain moved off and made toward the stage, muttering diatribes against men who interested themselves overmuch in the affairs of others. Finally he found relief to his feelings by kicking an Indian, who had taken advantage of the Captain's absence to get a comfortable siesta in the shade.

From beneath heavy eyebrows McAuliffe watched the retreating figure with low chuckles. He enjoyed getting the better of Dave. Yet in the kind heart, which beat beneath a very rugged exterior, there lurked a secret and real pity for the broken girl, once the sunshine of that land, now the emblem of its misery. From long contact with the natives of his district he had learnt much of their religion. He knew with them vengeance was not merely a gratification of passion, but a duty which might not be neglected. He shrewdly guessed that Menotah possessed some secret design against the life of the man who had professed for her such love, who had yet cast her aside and gone back to the world, heedless of the misery he had created.

McAuliffe was right. Dave had also spoken truly. It was Menotah's intention to cross the lake, and that she might obtain her wish, she had consented to marry the Captain of the boat.

For the desolate girl had concluded that it was time to discharge the last duty of a short life. Then, and not till then, she had a right to release the breath, and return to the Manitou, that hazy land of the Beyond, where her father dwelt. There, if she first obeyed the will of the god, the heart might find its peace.

Those long past months of winter and early summer had been charged with the fulness of horror and loneliness. As she lived for an object, so mind and body strength never entirely forsook her. For herself she cared not, nor for happiness of others. But she only struggled on beneath the overwhelming weight of life, until the time should come when the spirit called to the sombre duty of fate.

To her, in that misery, day and night, sunshine and storm, were alike. What mattered it whether the ground was flower vested, or mantled with snow? There was no difference in the touch to her bare feet. Whether the trees were joyful in summer, or black with winter? The picture of Nature was unchanging to those eyes. Whether faces surrounding her were kind or stern? The heart had done with the idle phantasy of affection. Each day dragged its hours away, detail with that preceding, to be replaced by another equally lengthy, not less dreary. Environment partook of the nature of a constant hallucination. As there was little life within, there could be but slight animation in surroundings. When she had been happy, her light-heartedness found novelty in things that had in themselves no real change. Now that she was so deeply sunk in the slough of despair, the shifting moods of others expressed always the same, the monotonous sentiment—hatred of herself. For she had cut herself apart from the people of her name by a forbidden alliance. By her own selfish act she had drawn disgrace upon the tribe.

The birth of her child, though it brought another pang of torture, proved perhaps the means of preserving reason. Maternity was detestable, yet it carried responsibilities which might not be neglected. Bitterly she reflected that here was another creature born to despair and misery. Surely it would be better for this smiling boy to die, and know not the horror of living. But when the tiny voice was first lifted in unconscious appeal for nurture, resentment perished beneath the sudden passion of early motherhood. What if the father was villain and traitor? Here was at least

a portion of her own body, flesh of her flesh. The child should learn the name of mother, but never that of father. It should love the one parent and hate the other. Often she dimly reflected as the infant lay, breathing softly in healthy sleep, upon her knees, knowing not that he was the child of misery and the son of a broken heart. And such were her thoughts: Ah! if I might only live to bring this boy up to manhood and teach him the lesson of his life. Then should one appear far greater than Riel, one who would gather together the sons of the Ancient Race from the four winds, from the ice ocean to the count of the wind, who would swoop, like the Spirit of the Storm, across the land, from lake to forest, from rock-land to prairie. Then, with his justice and his might, he would blot the white traitors from the plains which were not theirs, he would drive them from the wide fields they had wrongly stolen from others. Then the country would come back again to its own children, and there would be joy at the heart of all.

But, at length, she felt within her that hot flame which warned her of duty. Then appeared the black boat upon the river. It but remained to secure passage in her across the Great Water. Dave was repulsive and hateful, yet she gave ready consent to his demands. No obstacle could be allowed to stand in her path at that stage. 'When I have finished my work, I will again think of joining myself to a man,' she had spoken bitterly, as she turned back to the dreary hut.

Before that long journey to the south, one detail of the plan required attention. So, on that evening when Dave and the Factor had a difference of opinion regarding herself, she turned her heavy footsteps toward that place where she knew the old Antoine might be found. Very feeble was her mentor now. Outside the door of his hut he crouched in the last sunshine, the nodding head leaning against his staff, quivering hands tapping feebly on skeleton knees, bleared eyes deeply sunken, ears uncertain of sound. To any passing along that silent pathway he might have appeared as a very personification of grim sorrow. To the grief-stricken woman he was fit emblem of the vengeance she sought, worthy representative of the evil one himself.

With the child resting upon her back within the blanket, she came and laid a hand upon the Ancient's shoulder. He peered up with dreary eyes and would have forced a smile into the long wrinkles of his shrunken countenance.

'So, child; you have come.' Such was his greeting.

'For the last time, old Father. To seek one more service, then to trouble you no more.'

'It is no pain to succour those we love. The life fades from my body, yet the warm love remains still within. Sit at my feet, child, as you were wont to do. Tell me what it is you desire.'

She did so, yet in the motion a soft fluffy head brushed the old man's knee. A shudder convulsed him, as he endeavoured to drag the stiff limbs from the hateful contact. Feebly and vengefully he cried, 'Take that away, child! Why have you brought him here to torment my eyes?'

Not a muscle of the girl's face moved. 'I forgot,' she said coldly.

Then she arranged the blanket at the foot of a tall pine, wrapped up the child in it, and returned.

The Ancient spoke. 'Daughter, I know the matter on which you would speak. Make speed with the work, for my body strength has gone. I would wish to see the end, so may I tell all to your father in the joy land. Memory is now a faint shadow of the past. Yet will I speak on those things I may see dimly with the mind. A white man has destroyed your heart, my daughter; he has betrayed you; he has left you to the death misery. You would have punishment brought upon that man. Is it not so, my daughter?'

'It is so, old Father,' came the stern reply.

'Methinks there is still a faint shadow of memory remaining. It tells me that on a certain night I prayed you to listen to wise words. But you cast aside the love advice. So the anger grew upon me, and I said that surely a day would come when you would creep to me with a heart of sorrow, when you would pray me for help in the work of vengeance. Methinks that memory is not all shadow.'

'It is truth. I ask not for pity. I have prepared this suffering for myself. Let the dead past lie dead.'

'I would not call up the black tale of grief to wound you, child. Youth follows the unreasoning heart always. Now it but remains to find the remedy, to strike, to kill.'

All the malevolence in his nature poured forth in the whispered sounds. His wrinkled face grew hideous as he looked at her, the grey-white hair hanging in sparse lines along the neck.

'For that I have come,' she said defiantly.

'Tis well. Am I not living but to aid you? Ah, child, might I only listen to your soul laughter again. Might I hear your song of happiness, I would go then with contentment to the fire, and breathe away my life with joy. Can you not find one smile, child? Is there not hidden in the cold heart a last laugh, my daughter?'

He would have said more, but she frowned and interrupted him. 'That which is left of the heart is not for joy or sorrow. To feeling it is dead. Were I now to laugh, the sound would strike terror to your soul. Can the ice thaw on the winter's day?'

'The heat follows,' he muttered. 'The flame of the sun will lick up the ice.'

'The heat will come; you speak truth, old Father. It is the fire which must consume my body.'

'Talk not of it, child. Even now the vision closes round me. Each day I look for the end. For you, life lies in the Beyond.'

Her passion was at length awakened. 'Life!' she almost shrieked in his withered face. 'Dare you speak of that which has passed? Already I have lived, and now stand ready for death. For, when misery comes, what is life but a memory, and what is memory but agony, and what is agony but death? May not I speak on such things? Happiness *is* life. When it is gone, that which is left is death. Perchance the body may still move and ask for food; may hate—it cannot love; may grieve—it cannot rejoice. Within all is dead. Only a hot clinging to action for the sake of vengeance holds the body from corruption.'

A small portion of the old colour returned to her thin cheeks. Her breath came and went quickly. The old man weakly upraised his shaking hands. 'Cease, child. The senses fail me,' he gasped. 'Speak into my ear. Tell me what it is you wish.'

She raised her face, until the young lips touched the scanty locks. With set face and hard voice she spoke a few words into his ear. He listened with slow nods of his feeble head. 'I have it, daughter. The materials lie within the hut.'

'It would be successful?' she asked indifferently.

'Unless the Spirit robbed it of power. The plan is well thought of, my daughter.'

'In the early morning I will come. Will it be prepared?'

'A shorter time will be sufficient. No, it cannot fail. Often have I made trial of it. Not in vain have I passed long nights beneath the moon. Not in vain have I plucked the strange herbs, and fed the plants with black blood of the dead. Much knowledge was given me by those who went before. Yet there will be more for those who follow me. Daughter, find me here when the moon touches yon distant ridges. Then can I say farewell, and lay my old body to the sleep.'

She gazed at the trembling figure and the palsied limbs. 'Perchance the sleep will be deep.'

'No, my daughter; there is time yet. Hot life burns within me, fierce life. The fire yet lives after the dying down of the bright flames. You shall find me here when you return. You shall pour into my ear the glad song of your vengeance. The young are swept aside suddenly, but the old survive and see the world decay.'

'Is this the teaching of your new religion?' she asked scornfully.

'I but spoke the mind thought. Of the new religion all things baffle belief. When your work is done, I may gladly return to the gods I have loved.'

'What is there in the new faith which passes understanding?'

'I can see nothing clearly. The doctor, who threw water on my forehead, and drew thereon a charm, told me we should love those who have made life bitter to us. It were great evil to punish them, for in the hands of the God alone lay the might of vengeance.'

'Should we then treat friend and foe as alike?'

'The doctrine is false,' he cried shrilly, as the evening shadows rose from the river. 'What is the gift of the hand when the thought at the heart is hatred? The doctor further told me that the God once lived as a man and walked the earth. More, He was even killed by the men He had called into being.'

'Why pray to One Who is dead?'

'He lives again. Now He has come through the unknown of death, no power may touch Him. Therefore is He God.'

'I believe it not,' cried Menotah, clasping again the child in her arms. 'Behold! it is now my turn to give you advice. Return to your own gods, who bid you take vengeance and crush the foe. Not willingly would you harm those you love. Why then should you have pity for those you hate? I trust not to such teaching.'

She turned to depart, yet the old man sent after her quavering words, 'Let not anger prevail over the mind, my daughter; for when the blood runs hot, and the heart rages with passion fire, the hand may tremble and the eyes may fail. See there is no need for the second blow.'

She cast the words back at him as he sat huddled before the door. 'You may throw aside your fear. Have I kept this strength to fail at the last hour, when retribution lies like a gift in my hand? I, child as you call me, am older even than you. The day of sorrow is longer than the year of joy.'

'You will return?' he muttered, dimly perceiving that she moved away.

'When the moons dips upon the ridge summits,' she said. Then, with the child clasped to her bosom, she disappeared with slow step amid the fast gathering darkness.

CHAPTER III

RESURRECTION

A big bluff man, with wide, glowing face and stentorian voice, entered the precincts of Garry about the end of July. He came invigorated by the prospect of a fortnight's leave, with the outspoken intention of enjoying himself. At every saloon—for he visited each impartially—there was a resonant welcome from many boon companions. McAuliffe was popular in his way among those of his own set.

So, three days after arrival, he might have been seen proceeding along the principal street, accompanied by half a dozen elderly men, lined and bearded, yet all disporting themselves like boys released from school. They were all 'Company lads,' down on leave from northern posts, actuated by a single idea of padding their few days of emancipation by as large an amount of dissipation as possible.

Presently this gang rolled round an abrupt corner, to collide heavily with a thickset man, buttoned up to the chin in a thick blue coat, and smoking a cigar of abnormal dimensions. With difficulty he retained his balance, though he completely failed to preserve contact with the undue length of tobacco, which was dashed from his jaws by the force of impact, and lay in the white dust. Before the owner could reclaim it, McAuliffe had seized him in a bear-like grip.

'It's Captain!' he bellowed. 'Darned if 't isn't old Captain Robinson.'

'Why! why! Alf McAuliffe, if I'm not a liar,' gasped the other. 'Well! well! Hold on there, Alf. There's an hour's smoke lying on the trail. Wait till I get my fist round it.'

'Boys!' said McAuliffe, turning to his companions, 'I'm going off for a while. Want to have a talk with Captain here. Pass over the basket, Pete.'

'You'll turn up later?' cried the satellites in unison, one of them handing over a small brown hamper, which he seemed to relinquish not unwillingly.

'Course. I'll meet you round the tent. Think I'm going to miss the fun?'

Every beard wagged, each eye twinkled, at the prospect of approaching diversion.

'Come on. Captain,' shouted the Factor, 'So long, boys. You're spoiling for a good scrap, the whole darned crowd of you.'

'S'long, Alf.' Then the chorus, influenced by entire mutual understanding, wheeled into an adjacent saloon, whither McAuliffe followed them wistfully with his eyes.

He was, indeed, consuming with badly suppressed excitement. 'What do you think is the last racket. Captain?'

The other blew a mighty cloud of germ-destroying smoke, and shook his head.

'Never could guess a thing, Alf. Let's hear it.'

'Peter's preaching!' burst forth McAuliffe, in a voice that might have been heard the other side of Garry.

'What, never old Peter? No: Peter Denton, that used to serve drinks at the Tecumseh? I mind him well. Terrible on praying he was. Used to say a grace before and after every glass of liquor. Not him, Alf?'

'That's who,' continued the Factor, heartily, 'That same living lump of hypocrisy. He's got a big tent fixed up 'way north side of the fort, and he holds what he calls revival meetings there every evening this month. There's a sermon, then he takes up a collection—for rescuing unsaved brethren. Least that's how he puts it, but I've got a fairish notion that the only unsaved brother who has a look into that money is Mister Peter himself. Don't tell a lie about it anyway, do he, Captain?'

The other chuckled behind his unwieldy cigar. 'What's your racket now, Alf?'

'Going round there later, along with the other boys. We're going to put ourselves in front seats and take in the whole darned show. We'll have some fun, sure. Peter don't know I'm around here. He'll feel wonderful surprised when he sees my old face peeking up under his nose. Wouldn't wonder if it didn't come near spoiling his sermon.'

'Well! well! You're a teaser, Alf. But say, what's that you've got in the basket there? Seems to me sort of uncomfortable to the nose.' He blew a cloud of smoke, then sniffed suspiciously.

McAuliffe was almost ashamed of himself. 'Well, now, I'm a darned sort of old-fashioned baby, ain't I? It's disgraceful at my time of life. See, I don't often get a holiday, Captain. When the chance comes, I'm bound to kick around a bit and knock up the dust. This is just a sort of modest surprise party I've fixed up for Peter—to mind him of old times, and show there's no ill feeling, you know. Captain.' Then he produced from behind his back the brown hamper. The same appeared particularly attractive to the flies, for a multitude of every species and size hovered and buzzed over the straw cover. 'Don't touch. Captain. I tell you they're as hearty as skunks.'

The Captain coughed suddenly, as an unsavoury odour assailed his nostrils.

'What is it, Alf? Been buying up old fish?'

'Just eggs,' came the modest answer. 'But they weren't laid yesterday. Tell you, Captain, if you look close, you can pretty near see the feathers shooting out of the shell.'

'You're sort of hard on old Peter, strikes me,' began the other, but McAuliffe choked him off at once,—

'Nothing's bad enough for the cowardly rascal. Shouldn't be surprised if we cut the tent ropes before we're through with him.' He laid the redolent hamper on the ground, that he might rub his hands in delight at the thought.

This public demonstration called forth the astonishment of a passing Chinaman, who stood and gazed blankly at the big man's evolutions.

'Here's more of your pards coming around,' said Captain Robinson. 'They'll be running you into a cool place presently, Alf, if they see you cutting these sort of didoes.'

'Dern his gall!' exclaimed McAuliffe, catching up the hamper and thrusting it against the Celestial's face. 'You git home, Johnny, and wash your clothes.'

With unusual alacrity this command was obeyed.

'Now, Captain, come on back to the hotel and have a feed with me.'

'Can't do it, Alf. Got a whole crowd of things to fix up. Come round later, if you like.'

'Well, be up half past nine. Sharp on time, you know; I'll be there. Room No. 14. You'll find your way there by the smell of whisky. Least that's what Dave said. Wonderful nose Davey has for that sort nothing, anyway.'

'Right. If you don't turn up, I'll reckon the police have got hold of you for making a disturbance, eh?'

McAuliffe picked up his basket with a chuckle. 'I'm young enough to play the fool, but I'm too old to get caught,' he said. Then he made speedily towards the saloon, where he knew his elderly companions might still be found. A few minutes later he was vigorously quarrelling with the bartender, who wanted to eject him and his unhealthy burden.

It was a strange spectacle, one which probably might not be seen in any other country, thus to find several men, all of them distinctly past the prime of life, indulging in capricious acts of rowdyism which could only befit the average schoolboy. The officials of the H.B.C. chained down as they are for the greater part of life to the monotonous loneliness of some northern station, form a class apart from all others. As such a class they are especially distinguished by a strong craving after liquor—a natural product of a continued solitary existence—and a juvenile impetuosity of manner, which can only exhibit itself during their few days of leave, when they can return to civilisation to feel themselves again surrounded by fellow creatures. The reaction is a natural one. The anchorite who returns to the world generally plunges deeply into the whirling vortex of pleasure, to make up as far as possible for all he has lost. A conclusion points at once to the axiom, that folly is no respecter either of age or person.

It was half an hour after the time appointed, when McAuliffe, arm-in-arm with Dave Spencer, tumbled noisily into the hall of the hotel, where Captain Robinson was waiting behind another cigar of great proportion.

'Fact is,' burst forth the Factor, as he entered in cyclonic fashion, with a cut across the forehead and his big face adorned with several bruises, 'we had a bit of a row with some of the fellows. Come on upstairs. Captain; there we'll have a smooth time for next few hours. Yes, 'twas a regular set-to tussle,' he continued, as they arranged themselves upstairs. 'It wasn't so very far from a free fight. But we got the best of it. Yes, we diddled them—though we weren't much of a crowd, far as numbers went. Davey here came along just the right time, and mixed himself up fine. I tell you, Captain, you'd have curled up if you'd have seen Peter's face, when he spotted me sitting right down front of him, with a grin on my face you might have measured by yards. What with me encouraging him in a sort of whisper all the time, he couldn't talk worth shucks. I just wish I could have got his face photographed later on, when old Billy MacIntosh caught him per-lump on the end of the nose with a fairly meaty egg. Tell you, it would have drawn a grin out of a fence post. Dave was squirming around like a pesky worm.' He dropped heavily into a chair, and shook again with laughter.

'It's too bad, boys,' said Captain Robinson. 'Here were you having a smooth time, while I was putting in hard work.'

'Never mind. Captain,' said Dave, 'we're right in it now. Where's the liquor, Alf?'

The Factor, with true hospitality, was helping himself first. Then the bottle went round, the air became charged with smoke, conversation grew discursive.

'Quite a long time since I saw you last, Alf. Dave I'm meeting down in Selkirk pretty often. I reckon it's three years since we ran up.'

'It's all that since I was down. Garry's changed more than a little in the time. You're the same, Captain. I reckon you've chewed your weight in baccy since then.'

'I guess. How about yourself? How's the shooting, eh? Crack shot yet, Alf?'

The Factor growled out a low laugh, and beat his great fist upon the insecure table. 'Not a darned bit of it, Captain; it's no go. Tell you, I'll never be able to shoot. Getting worse all the time. Listen here to what happened a few days before I came away this trip. I was out early to chop logs, and first thing I saw was a fat old tree-partridge, settled on that big pine 'way outside the door. So I said to Justin, "Fetch over your gun, boy, while I show you the way to knock down partridges." I thought to myself, this is a slick shot right enough. I'll have this old chap for breakfast. Well, I guess that bird knew something about me, or maybe its pards had put it up to a thing or two, for he kind of jerked his head a one side and looked at me, much as to say, "What derved trick are you up to, anyway? Think you're going to fix me, eh?" So Justin chucked me over the gun all ready, while the old fowl sat tight as a rock. Then I took a good, steady aim and fired. Suppose I must have brought down about a bushel of cones and truck. But when the smoke cleared off, there was that partridge sidling along the bough towards me, pleased as anything with himself, looking at me straight, with as near a grin across his beak as any bird's ever managed yet. "I'll shoot you by proxy, anyway," I shouted, and gave the gun over to Justin. But before he could get a fair hold of it, that partridge was off. You needn't tell me birds can't think out things for themselves. Tree-partridges can, if other birds can't. That old fool knew well enough I couldn't hit him, but he was pretty darned sure Justin could. He reckoned it would be too risky to wait and see if he was right second time.'

Dave reached across and turned up the lamp flame with deep-throated chuckles. The Captain knocked an inch of ash from his cigar without perceptibly shortening it. McAuliffe suddenly blew the stub of his out upon the floor, in a shout of laughter.

'Goldam! can't get rid of old Peter's face time it stopped that egg. Here! pass over that box of sharpshooters, Dave.'

It was now dark and silent outside. About the only sound round the window was the dull, vibrating hum of mosquitoes. Presently the Factor began to narrate his experiences during the previous year.

But when he came to relate a certain incident, which had occurred on that autumn night of the boat's departure, the jocular lines were stamped from the two faces, as their owners listened intently to the narrative. Then the Captain spoke. 'You were full, Alf.'

'I was sober. Goldam! I was ridiculously sober.'

'Mind, there was Kitty as well,' put in Dave.

'That fixes it, if my words don't. I saw him plainly, just as I can see you boys now. You can't guess how terrible scared I was the next few days. I couldn't dare leave the fort after dark I made Justin hide away the whisky keg. You can call me a razzle-witted old fool, but I hadn't even the courage to walk over young Winton's grave in broad sunlight.'

There was a short interval of silence, then the Captain expanded his nostrils. 'Reckon there's something burning in here.'

McAuliffe sniffed capaciously. 'You're right, Captain. Darn it, there's my cigar stub working out a nice hole in that matting. I'm the sort of fellow to be in a civilised place, ain't I?'

He went on his knees to examine the amount of injury done. 'Pass down some water, Dave; there's a hole right here I could shove my head through, and it's burning all the time.' When he had deluged the flooring to his satisfaction, he continued, 'Now we'll just shift the table, so that one of the legs will nicely go over the bald spot. Then it won't get stuck down to my account. I reckon hotel servants never move anything.'

Hardly had he spoken, when a deep, wailing sound throbbled forth and echoed weirdly round the room.

The three started, then Dave shambled across and leaned as far from the window as the insect frame would permit. Presently it came again—a resonant iron cry, which solemnly thrilled the heart in the quiet night.

McAuliffe was still squatting on his haunches near the burnt matting. 'I know what it is!' he said suddenly; 'Father Lecompte's dead.'

For it was the single bell of the dim church opposite.

'Sure of that, Alf?' said the Captain, in awe-struck tones.

'Dead certain. He's been terrible sick. Old Taché never left him all last night. They said this morning he couldn't pull through to-day. 'Well, it's nice to be a good man, though they've got to go, same as us bad 'uns.'

The muffled cry rang again. Then McAuliffe dragged himself back to the chair. 'We've got to die, sure enough. They needn't get to work and remind us of it, though, just as we're feeling good. Fill up, Captain.'

'Shut down the window,' cried Dave. 'Enough to give a fellow the megrims, listening to that racket.'

'Too hot, Dave,' said the Factor. 'Here, we'll have a round of poker. Wait till I get out the cards.'

Plang!

'Goldam! queer that a dirty bit of metal should put three men in the suds. Cheer up, Captain; you're a chicken yet.'

He threw the cards across the table, then brandished a bottle round his head.

'When round the bar,
A short life and a merry 'un
Is better far,
Than a long life and a dreary 'un.'

The other two took up the last line and howled it forth with the lusty strength of unimpaired lungs.

'That's your style, Alf!' shouted Dave. 'Fill up the glasses, pard, and to hell with the blue devils.'

Plang!

Three glasses were raised, emptied in a quick gulp, then replenished. There were hurrying footsteps through the night beneath, while a stranger, more solemn sound uprose from the church, where the windows were filled with yellow light. A solemn mass was being sung for the repose of the soul of the dead priest.

'Hold it down, Dave!' cried the Captain. 'Five cent ante, boys.'

The amber-coloured liquor gurgled pleasantly from the bottle neck and splashed into the Factor's glass. His eyes shone as he gathered up the five cards. 'We'll have our little jamboree well as them over the way, I reckon.'

'Quit it, Alf,' said the Captain; 'I'm religious, mind. No blasphemy here.'

McAuliffe laughed thickly into his glass. 'You're all right, Captain. Mind how you won twenty dollars off me one Sunday, just before starting for church? Reckon your religion wouldn't drag you from this bottle over to yon service, eh?'

Plang!

'I'll raise you, Dave. That's nothing to do with it, Alf; I'm religious when—when—'

'You're sick, eh?'

'There's a time for everything,' said the Captain, with the solemnity that was liquor induced. 'I'm religious at the proper time, mind you, just at the proper time. Other times I'm gay.'

'This is the gay time. Captain. You're a great lad! It's your pot. Ante up, Dave.'

'Reckon it's time the bottle passed this side,' said the latter.

'Got to go by me first, Davey. Never mind, lad; I'll leave you the cork to chew. That's right, Captain; hold your hand round it.'

Plang-ang!

'Bellringer's tight. Now then, Dave. Half for you, half for me. I'll have the big half, and you take the little 'un. What's that, Captain? I reckon I just will raise you.'

'Pass,' said Dave, clutching the bottle frantically.

'See you,' said the Captain, jerking his head forward over the table.

'Full house,' cried the Factor.

'Like us,' added the Captain. 'Good, Alf. Three kings.'

Plang-ang.

'What's that?' cried Dave, quickly.

'Why, the pesky bell, you old rocket. You're everlastingly raddled, Dave.'

'I'm not. There's somebody monkeying around outside.'

'Boil your head,' muttered the Captain. 'It don't matter, anyway; all bad folks are asleep by this time.'

'I'm darned sure there was someone. Heard footsteps, then a sound like striking a match to look for a number. Some of your pards after you, I reckon. Alf.'

'Let 'em come. Lots of liquor for 'em. Fetch up that full bottle from the corner,' shouted the Factor.

'Ante up first, Dave. You're the worst I ever saw for trying to sneak in your nickles.'

Strong knuckles fell determinedly upon the door panel to prove the truth of Dave's words.

'It's your pals, Alf,' said the Captain, with a chuckle. 'Bring 'em in, and we'll make an everlasting night of it.'

'Bet you; it'll be the boys. They're after giving me a surprise party. Lucky I'm not in bed, or they'd have dragged me out first thing.'

The heavy knocking came again, this time lasting longer.

'Come on, you old razzle-pates!' shouted McAuliffe. 'What are you standing outside making that darned row for.'

'Come in and have a drink!' yelled the Captain, equally excited. Dave's harsh voice also extended the invitation.

'Gimme that bottle, Dave. You're too derved full to get the cork out.'

Then the door opened slowly, but no more than two figures entered, and one of these was a woman.

The three turned upon them with hearty cries of salutation; but the next instant they were all upon the dirty matting, tied up in a knot of legs and arms, clawing at one another, rolling over and over, with strange, animal-like cries of fear.

Plang-ang!

'Old Billy!'

'Billy Sinclair!'

'Lord! Lord! I've got 'em this time!'

CHAPTER IV

CHARACTER

The old hunter stood by the table, with a slow smile breaking upon his thin face as he looked upon the grovelling, snake-like figures at his feet. Then he sniffed at the atmosphere, and began to comprehend.

'Sit here,' he said to the girl, whose head was covered in a flowing blanket, pushing a chair into the corner. 'I'll have to sort some order out of this crowd.'

Then he pulled at a leg which wriggled from beneath the table. It belonged to McAuliffe, and its owner bellowed fearfully at the clutch.

'It's got me, Captain. Hold on to my arm, Davey. It's going to drag me off.'

'Come out, Alf. Don't you know an old pard?'

It was ineffectual. The Factor only raved and struggled the more. So Sinclair turned his attention to the others, who proved more amenable.

'It is you, Billy?' said the awe-stricken Captain. 'There's no foolery? You're not a pesky spirit come to scare us for our sins?'

'Get up and put your arms round me,' said the hunter, a trifle testily. 'I never had much flesh to carry; what I've got now is solid, though, I reckon.'

Then Dave peered up, a queer object with stains of liquor and sodden tobacco down his cheeks. 'We reckoned you were fixed, Billy. 'Way up the Saskatchewan by the *nitchies*.'

'Well, I wasn't. Pull Alf up, and I'll give you the yarn.'

Captain Robinson shook the prostrate figure. 'Git up, Alf. It's the square thing. Old Billy's here, skin and all.'

'I didn't drink much. Captain—only a few glasses. There was a lot of water in that last lot. You saw me mix it. Captain.'

'Didn't take you for a coward, Alf,' said Sinclair. 'I'm here, good as ever, with Menotah as well.'

'Where?' blurted forth Dave. 'My gal! Darned if there isn't my gal!'

He would have shambled off towards her, but the hunter stopped him. 'Let her alone, poor girl. She's had more than enough trouble.'

'She's next thing to being my wife, though. Guess she's wanting me.'

'You bet,' said Sinclair, smiling ironically.

'It's hard on a fellow not being able to speak to his gal.'

'Well, have a drink; that's pretty near as good,' said the Captain. 'Come on, Billy. Lord! it makes me feel queer down to the knee bones, to see you standing upright there.'

The hunter laughed. This well-remembered sound almost entirely removed McAuliffe's fear. Slowly and cautiously he dragged his head from the matting, then gazed fearfully upward. 'That was Billy's laugh,' he muttered. 'I don't reckon any ghost could raise such a racket.'

'Yes, Alf; you're scared of me, eh?'

'No, I'll be darned.' He clambered ungracefully to a sitting posture. 'I never was afraid of old Billy not when he was alive; so it sha'n't be said I'm scared of his ghost.'

'Well, shake, then,' said the hunter.

McAuliffe was still distrustful. 'Let's see you put down a dram first,' he said. 'If you can still drink whisky, you're Billy. If you can't, you're his ghost.'

'I was just waiting to be asked,' said the hunter, filling himself a glass. 'Here's to you, Alf.'

The latter was up in a second, grabbing at his hand. 'Sit light there, Billy,' he cried, forcing him into a chair. 'Tell us the yarn from start to finish. Darn it, I'm glad it wasn't the whisky. This is the second time you've scared me, Billy. I tell you, boys, straight, I thought I'd got 'em a terror. As there's no danger of the jumps, I reckon we'd better drink Billy's health, eh?'

A fresh bottle of spirit was cracked, and the glasses charged. 'I'm real glad to drink to you again, Billy,' continued the Factor, sniffing appreciatively the ascending aroma. 'Though, I tell you, you've shortened our lives by suddenly returning to yours. You haven't dealt square, Billy. Why didn't you turn up before? See here, now; there's got to be no more larking off to the grave, and rising again to drive your pards to total abstinence. Yes, Billy, if you'd been a ghost to-night, I should have turned temperance orator. I tell you straight I should.'

'But the yarn, Billy,' cried Dave. 'Didn't the *nitchies* try to fix you?'

'No,' replied the hunter. 'Somebody did their best to shoot me, but it wasn't a *nitchi*.'

'Who?' they all asked with a single voice.

'Lamont.'

A faint sound—it might have been a groan—came from the dark corner. The Factor tilted his glass in his amazement, until the liquor splashed upon the scattered cards. The Captain was shouting, 'Who's he?'

The hunter's spare face appeared almost frightened. '*The White Chief*,' he said slowly.

McAuliffe growled like a bear, and dropped the glass outright; the Captain sat upright, with the ash end of the cigar in his mouth; Dave gave a deep cry.

'I mind it now,' the latter shouted. 'Was dead sure I'd seen his face, but couldn't fix it nohow. Now I mind it. 'Twas one night I came upon him sudden at the Lower Fort, without his paint.'

McAuliffe collapsed into a chair. 'Goldam!' he exclaimed weakly, 'to think I should have lived with him. You're wrong though, Billy. He fought for us that night. If it hadn't been for him, we'd all have been fixed—'

'Lamont goes on the strong side. He knew it was all over with the Riel racket. If he'd been taken up there, it was all up with him. He knew that.'

To remove the veil of mystery which so far has environed the 'White Chief':—

Riel was not, never had been, the prime factor of the revolution. Himself a dull man of irregular habits, yet one whose mind might easily be moulded; in unscrupulous hands, he was powerless to act as sole leader; he could not forecast future chances without assistance. Left to himself, he would never have struck the blow for right and liberty. But, when sitting outside his shanty one summer evening, a young man came to him. His sudden arrival was in itself mysterious, and from the first he cast a powerful glamour over the great half-breed. The darkness came up, night gathered round, and still Riel talked with the young Canadian, who was, on his own confession, the finest rifle shot in the Dominion, perhaps in the world at that time. Proofs of this were not wanting. The heavy-featured man became delighted with the skill and flattery of the fascinating white, who soon began to pour into his ears a vividly painted word picture where his own name recurred frequently, in conjunction with such expressions as power and wealth unbounded. He was aware of Riel's intentions—his desire to reclaim the land from the oppressor. To be brief, he had come to aid him.

The next scene represents the revolt from authority itself. Riel was nominal leader, but in all things he was guided by the cunning brain and persuasive voice of his white subordinate. This latter kept disguised as a blood Indian, with the paint, feathers, buckskin and bead work of the native warrior. For long none suspected the true identity, except, of course, the Indians themselves, to whom he was known generally as the 'White Chief,' or the 'Father's Friend.'

While this disguise remained, Riel triumphed. In every struggle Lamont's unerring rifle accomplished its pitiless work, until police and soldiers grew to dread the report of the Indian marksman's weapon. He kept himself always in a place of safety, well out of the direct flight of hostile bullets.

But an Indian traitor—there were many of them—who entertained a grudge against him, narrated the tale to hunter Sinclair of St Andrews one day while tracing up a moose. Lamont had formerly been an acquaintance. After learning this story he found a means of coming upon him suddenly, to prove the truth of the Indian's word. The name, of course, had been changed, but Sinclair penetrated to the identity by the report of his wonderful shooting powers. In his surprise visit, attended though it was by considerable risk, he was successful. The meeting was a dramatic one. After an appeal had been wasted, the hunter threatened to capture and hand him over to the Government. Lamont replied by snatching a revolver and firing at him. The hunter had moved quickly aside when he saw the intention, so escaped the bullet. In the dark night he escaped without further risk. Later the story became known widely, while a reward was offered for the apprehension of the White Chief. Yet Sinclair alone held the knowledge of his actual personality. To all others he was merely a name and a marvellous shot. Lamont suspected that Sinclair would not open his mouth, in the hope of himself obtaining the reward, coupled with the *kudos* of having, unaided, captured the Indian auxiliary. His only chance now was to follow up his former friend and kill him—especially as he now began to understand that Riel was doomed, that the Rebellion must fail inevitably.

His motive in thus allying himself to Riel must be sufficiently obvious. He had previously gone over all ground, had reckoned every chance, as he thought, to finally arrive at the conclusion that an insurrection of Indians and half-breeds must be successful. He was but an ordinary adventurer, yet of more than average intellect. He would sway the mind of Riel, the invaders would be conquered and driven out, the half-breed leader would be chief of the entire country—nominally only. The reins of power would actually rest in his own hands. To depose the dull-witted half-breed and obtain entire leadership would then be a comparatively simple matter.

But most men omit in their reasonings the single detail of importance. In this case he had reckoned entirely without the influence of the Church, and the extraordinary power which it held and could exert over its ignorant and superstitious children. When the Archbishop with his assistants first commenced their efforts, he had smiled disdainfully at the wild fancy of men being such fanatics as to be priest led. But this gratification endured no longer than a fortnight, by which time he found many on whom he had confidently relied laying down their weapons, returning to their homes with the declaration that they would abide by the command of their religion. The Intrepid Archbishop had conquered.

So he abandoned Riel to his fate and fled, with the price of blood upon his head, to remorselessly and energetically follow up Sinclair's trail. He might easily have escaped from the country, but the lust of vengeance was hot within him. Besides, he fancied himself in love with Marie Larivière. After the silencing of the hunter, he might be able to fan the flame of passion into a fiercer and hotter rebellion. So he followed the trail, even to the forests of the Great Saskatchewan.

'Well, well, Billy,' said the Factor, half an hour later, 'it's a wonderful experience you've had. I tell you, if you could have seen young Winton that night, and old Blackey rocketing around, you'd have reckoned yourself you were dead.'

'What's the matter with drinking Billy's health?' said Dave, thirstily.

'You're a cute lad,' said the Captain; 'fill up and pass the bottle. It's all right; Alf pays the racket.'

'I mind now,' broke in Dave. 'It was when I was raddled in the fort I recognised Lamont. Called him White Chief, I did, and he turned a sort of green colour. I mind it all now.'

'You were full, Dave,' chuckled the Factor; 'what I've said right along. That's the only time you're sensible, lad. Come on, Billy, drink your own health.'

The hunter had told his story amid constant interruptions of the above character. After leaving Winton, he had set forth through the gathering darkness to bring up the horses. He found them tethered as left, but when about to depart fancied he could detect—with the sharp hearing instinct of his profession—sounds of a stirring body in the bush adjacent. There were no repetitions of these motions, so he got the animals clear and began to move on the return journey. Then the conduct of the grey mare aroused fresh suspicion. She refused to approach a thicket of red willow lying slightly to the right of their path. He hesitated for a time, then, thinking her fear was probably due to some passing Indian, placed himself between her and the bush. Still he advanced with what speed he could muster. The loose rocks were slippery with dew, and the undergrowth tangling to the feet. He had passed, and breathed a sigh of relief. At the same instant that brushing aside of bushes sounded again. Then a stone flew from the centre of the bush and struck the mare full on the side. She broke from him, plunging like a wild creature, and finally rushed away into the forest.

That same instant a low, vengeful voice broke forth in the gloomy silence. 'Sinclair,' it said, with a stifled laugh, 'I've fixed you now.'

That dreaded rifle cracked. There came the shock of the bullet, and he had fallen unconscious to the ground.

Here McAuliffe had interrupted eagerly, "Tell now, Billy, was the pain bad?"

'Didn't feel a thing, except an awful sudden shock, same as you might receive from an extra strong electric battery,' replied the hunter. 'A fellow couldn't wish for a nicer way out of life. It's a case of alive one quarter second, dead the next. There's no suffering nor worry. You just hop out of life and step into eternity. That's what death by shooting is. 'Course only when it comes sudden and unexpected.'

'Diddled you fine, Captain,' said the Factor, rubbing his hands. 'See here, Billy, Captain and I had a big argument on that one time. He said a man couldn't be killed right off by a bullet. Suffered bad he did, before dying. I told him he didn't know the first thing about it. The fellow would turn up right away. I'm right again. Yes, Captain, got you fine. Here's old Billy jumped out of his grave, purpose to let you know.'

Captain Robinson blew forth a mighty fog of smoke, and remarked that McAuliffe was talking through his hat.

So, for once in his life, Lamont had made a mis-shot. At the time he must have been over-excited. Then his enemy was very close, and he was too confident. Still he had been quite satisfied that his skill could not fail, for he had gone off at once, without waiting to examine the body.

Menotah, passing happily from the river pool to the forest encampment, had come upon him immediately after. Half an hour later, and the triumph of the White Chief would have been complete, for his victim was rapidly bleeding to death; but the girl's skill, aided by the advice and health-giving restoratives of the old Antoine—who of course knew nothing of the rescue—had brought him back to life and strength. Her pity had gone out to this wounded man, who was far from home and friends. She was anxious to save him from suffering, so had cared for him as he lay for some days and nights beneath the red willow thicket, and when strength served, had led him to the hut by the swamp. For he had explained his wish for privacy.

'Say, Billy, where's that hut, anyway?' asked the Factor.

"Way down the swamp. Only she and the old medicine man know of it.'

'Thought I knew all the district. Wonder I never struck it.'

'It's well hidden. Petroleum swamp, too. There's a shining fortune lying around there.'

'No way of shipping it, and no market. But think of you hiding down there, and then larking out of the bush that night on me and Kit. You made me swear off liquor for a month, Billy. Why didn't you come back to the fort?'

'Didn't dare,' said Sinclair, shortly.

'Don't see what there was to be scared of.'

'Lamont. I tell you straight I was afraid of him. He's a strong will, while mine after that shot got a bit broken. I was weak and nervous as a baby all summer. Then, I reckoned, if I lay quiet till I got fixed up, I might be able to get in a dirty sort of shot at him to level matters. Yes, I was cowardly mean enough to want a pot at him, same as he put in at me.'

There was no remark, so the hunter continued,—

'When Lamont made off, last boat in the fall, my idea was to follow. Menotah helped me again. Through her I got a canoe with a couple of *nitchi* boys, who paddled me away across to Horse Island.^[1] From there I was lucky enough to get a passage in a late fishing boat. It was a terrible risky journey. We were frozen in twice; but it broke and we got back. Even since then I've kept away from Garry, until I'd got everything ready fixed. Didn't want Lamont to see me. He's round here, you know.'

'What's the plan now, Billy?' asked the Captain.

Sinclair smiled. 'A warrant will be out in the morning. We're going to arrest him in the night.'

'Any trouble getting it?' asked McAuliffe.

'Took time, of course. But, I tell you, the Commissioner took down what I had to say, as though 'twas a plateful of oysters.'

'There's the reward as well, Billy,' put in the Captain.

'Yes. He said my services would be referred to the Government—'

'Don't you believe it, Billy,' interrupted the Factor. 'I know that sort of darned business. They'll refer to each other, and this joker will write to another baldhead. He'll go on to some other fool, and that one will refer the whole crowd back to first correspondence. Then they'll start to work over again. By the time your grandchildren are getting oldish, you'll get a letter to say they won't give you anything, owing to lapse of time, incorrect information, and a lot of other truck. That's how they do business in Government offices. They work for eternity, they do.'

'Near shifting time,' said the Captain. 'I'll be finishing my smoke presently, then we'll make. Wake up, Dave.'

The latter gentleman was lolling over the table, breathing deeply. McAuliffe poured some water down his neck with instant result.

'It's your ante, Dave; hustle yourself. There's going to be a picnic round here. We're going to have Lamont arrested and strung up at Regina. We'll go there together, Dave, and cut a dido.'

It took yet another half hour for Captain Robinson to finish his cigar, so the others filled in the interval by much loud conversation, heedless of time, or peace of others in the little wooden building.

Ever since her entrance, Menotah had sat quietly in the dark corner allotted to her, without motion or speech. Frightened by the busy motion and numerous faces of Fort Garry, she had followed Sinclair with an almost dog-like submission, obeying his every word, yet only keeping silence on the matter that lay nearest her heart. Night and day she carried in the warmth of her bosom a black substance enwrapped in dry grass. It was of the appearance and consistency of solid glue. This was Antoine's last gift—a drug, which, when introduced into the blood, cast the body into a consumptive shivering no human art could cure. The time for its use had almost come, but she said nothing. They must not suspect her object.

But she was not to be left altogether to the quiet her soul desired. As the time for departure arrived, Dave, who was far from sober, suddenly caught sight of her. At once he lurched across the room.

'Here's my gal waiting here for me all this time,' he said. 'Darn it, boys, you've left my gal out of the fun. Come along with me, Menotah, and have a sit on my knee.'

He caught at the blanket and pulled it from her head. The beautiful unbound hair flowed down over her shoulders, framing the pale face, which looked up so pathetically at her tormentor. Hunter Sinclair thought of the deer fever when he saw those mournful eyes.

'Come on, gal,' cried Dave, coarsely. 'No moping when I'm around.'

She held out a little hand to him. 'Ah! leave me,' she pleaded pitifully.

'I brought you across the lake. You're going to be my wife, ain't you? No going back on your word now.'

'Come on, Davey,' cried the Factor, in a ripe voice, 'I'm waiting to see you home. No drunks allowed in Garry after nightfall.'

'My gal's asking for a drink. You're a mean dirty crowd finishing up the whisky, and not giving my poor gal a drop.' He lurched to her side, and took her cold little face between his hot greasy hands. 'Never mind, Menotah; I'll give you a good kissing instead. That'll be better than liquor, eh?'

She struggled with deep panting breath, and weak little cries for pity. Poor stricken girl! her cup of misery was very full indeed. She was a woman and weak, but an Indian. They were men and white, therefore cruel. This distinction was wide and sufficient.

'Ah! let me go, if you are man and have a heart,' she wailed, with broken sobs. 'You made me promise you would leave me to myself for a time. Will you keep that promise thus? If you have pity, leave me.'

The others stood around with loud laughter and coarse jests as Dave put his amorous designs into execution. And these were men, loyal-hearted Canadians, who loved their queen and flag. The life of one of them had been preserved by the struggling girl he now refused to aid. True, they were all over-mastered by liquor, otherwise McAuliffe would certainly have interfered, probably also Sinclair on the lowest grounds of gratitude. But let it be remembered far worse things have been done, are done to-day, by such men, in full possession of their faculties, with sober and deliberate intent to ruin.

'You blasted gal!' shouted Dave. 'Can't you give decent kisses to the man you're going to hitch on to?'

'Wants harnessing, Dave,' said the Captain. 'Here, I'll hold her, while you smack her on the lips. Ain't she got a pretty little kissing mouth, too?'

He did hold her, careless of her moans and choked sobs. Dave twisted his hand into her silken hair and dragged her small head back, then pressed his dirty, liquor-tainted face across hers. She cried from her bleeding heart to the Great Spirit that he would aid her, and judge between her and these. And doubtless the Spirit heard that cry.

'I'm going, Dave,' stammered the Factor. 'B'lieve I'm nearly full. Must have some fresh air before bed.'

'Give us a show, Dave,' shouted the excited Captain. 'It's my turn, I reckon.' He pushed Dave aside, then tried to kiss the trembling, miserable girl.

But Dave was at him in an instant, with a dim idea that his rights were in danger of infringement. 'You'll insult my gal, will you? Darned if I won't fight you, Captain. I tell you, you don't know Dave Spencer. He's terrible tough when roused.'

He pulled off his canvas jacket, and danced like a figure on wires round the Captain. The other two interfered, and soon the whole four were quarrelling together noisily.

In the midst of this tumult, Menotah rose and quickly slipped to the closed door. Dave immediately wheeled round and lurched after her. She struggled with the handle, which she could not understand. He caught her by the arm just as the door came open. She clenched her teeth, then, as a spark of the old fire shot into her lustrous eyes, she struck him with all her strength full in the face with her free hand. Half dazed, he dropped to the floor, while she disappeared—out into the hot, clear night, beneath the kind gleam of the stars she knew and loved.

The quarrel ended. Dave was raised by jocular arms, swearing fearfully. He announced his intention of going at once after the girl and smashing every bone in her body. McAuliffe offered to join him, so the two tumbled heavily down the narrow stairway. The Captain and Sinclair lurched off in an opposite direction.

The former couple forgot all about Menotah, even before reaching the outer air. They stumbled along cheerily for a short distance, only intent upon their own happiness.

'Say, Alf, where are we anyhow?' asked Dave, thickly.

'We're all right, Dave. Straighten up, now; this is New York City,' came the confident reply.

'Don't say. Well, well, sort of thought I was in Fort Garry to-day. Couldn't have been, Alf, eh?'

'Course not. Ever been in New York before, Davey?'

'First visit, Alf. Fine place, ain't it?'

'Bet your life. First-class saloons, I'm told. We'll sample 'em, eh?'

Dave sniggered. 'I reckon.'

More he might have said, but at that instant they came upon a log lying across the road. Without the least hesitation they both took a header, then lay sprawling on the other side in the dew-wet dust.

They sat up, more pleased with themselves than damaged by the fall. 'Was it a cyclone, Alf?' asked Dave, blankly.

'Whist, Dave. Don't make a racket, or we'll have the police on us. They'll say we put that thing across the sidewalk. Disgraceful in a great big city like this, ain't it?'

Dave sympathised, then the Factor's note changed to anger. 'Goldam! I've split up my right boot and half smashed a toe. I shall go to a lawyer's office first thing, and sue the corporation of this darned city. Sticking obstacles on the sidewalk to smash the toes of honest citizens. Sha'n't be able to walk in Central Park to-morrow, now my boot's broken up.'

'Never mind, Alf. You can get boots half price from the Company. Nothing at all, if you cook the books.'

'Davey,' said the Factor, reproachfully. 'I couldn't do it. I'd like to cheat, but dern it, Davey, I can't. I'm too high-minded.'

For some time longer they talked from their respective dust heaps, while mosquitoes sang in the air, and frogs chirped in the grass around them. Then they climbed to their feet to continue aimless peregrinations.

'I know, Davey,' said the Factor, suddenly, as they came to a corner house. 'There's a nice little saloon right up here. Come on, and I'll drink your health, lad.'

'Isn't it next turning?' said the other, merely for sake of argument.

'Course not. That 'ud take us down to Broadway. Think I don't know my way about?'

'Long time between drinks, ain't it, Alf?'

'You're right, Davey. Wonderful fine place New York, ain't it? We'll have a drink, then I'll take you around on a car, while we take in the show.'

'I'm right on,' hiccupped Dave. 'Come on, Alf.' They linked together, and staggered up the byway in the darkness. The road and themselves soon ended in a ditch.

[1] Geographically known as Selkirk Island, though wrongly placed on all maps.

CHAPTER V

THE DEAD HEART

While the lonely, heart-broken girl sat in that tainted room, her whole being bowed with grief, the drunken revellers shouting before her, many thoughts passed and flashed across the highly-

strung mind.

Position, before that brutal assault, was as nothing. It mattered not at all that she looked on others enjoying themselves in the manner to them most congenial, that she was outside all this, barred by the law of race from having any part in their festivities, even had she wished it.

But why should men be cruel to her, she who had harmed no one? Why, because she was Indian, should she be treated as animal? She knew she was beautiful—once that knowledge had been the chief joy of the heart; she had, to the ruin of that joy, succeeded in attracting the desire of a handsome white; he had told her she was perfect in face and form, that she was in fact the divine woman of Nature. Yet he had taken her, under the seal of a false love, but to while away a few careless hours of leisure.

He would not so have treated the woman of his own race. Had he ventured to, others would have risen to prevent the insult. Yet the same justice-mongers would have raised no bar to the ruin of the poor girl, more perfect, more trusting, infinitely more loving than her white sister. She might be trampled on, despised, destroyed. And why? Because she was merely the girl of the forest, the Indian, not a human being in their sense of the word.

Her brain could not unravel this paradox.

The tears of blood dripped forth silently. Once had she been Menotah, now time and treachery had changed that happy heart into dead fruit. The lively girl had grown to a revengeful woman. In such a state, sympathy would have been gall. True, there were none who would offer pity. Had there been, what balm of healing could their compassion bring to that diseased mind? Every incident in the bright past had faded, each hope and warm pleasure had been shrivelled up like a dry leaf and swept away. For the one hour of deepest misery drives into oblivion all memory of the lapsed years, when joy was ever present, into forgetfulness each day of laughing sunshine, each hour of unburdened delight.

Each man or woman in the last despair can live upon the dreary phrase, 'There was a time.' All, whether in poverty, in death, or time of lost honour, may repeat the sad and mocking words for what consolation they contain. There was a time of youth, when sorrow was unknown, when the mind was always a butterfly with its light hope, when the heart was hot and large with love. It was summer then. Now it is winter—all is coldness and desolation.

Yet the hour of vengeance approached, when that terrible life duty must be discharged. She felt the substance warming in its poison by her bosom, and, in the bitterness of her grief, smiled. She must make entrance into her husband's room and find him alone. This drug had no internal effect, though its commingling with the human blood meant a death lingering and terrible in its slow wasting. She would place a portion in her mouth, then approach the destroyer with tears and bitter protestations of yet living love. As a last favour she would beg permission to kiss the hand which so often had fondled her. This he could not refuse. Then she would bite deeply with her poisoned teeth into the flesh, and watch him, as he fell away from her, with the fearful greyness spreading over his features, as the racking cold seized every limb and made each muscle shiver. Afterwards she might go away and look for peace.

Yet, supposing that he relented at the sight of her, that he renewed the vow of love, that he swore again to be constant. Should she grant pardon, if only for the sake of healing her own deep wound?

Never! Take again that which had been given in pure confidence, the gift which had been despised? She had given him her best, her all. He had broken it with scorn, had cast it down, and trampled on it with his feet. Perhaps he might even now offer to return it as a proof of his manly affection. What would be the value of such a gift? What would be the true feeling at the heart of such a man?

Then forget the wronger, and search for the true-hearted. If some men are faithless, there are others, and many, who are honourable. If there is one enemy, there are others who are friends. Surely such a vile man is not worthy of remembrance. Forget that black clouds of treachery have ever darkened the sunshine happiness of a past.

Forget! This, alas, is the ever-present impossibility of life. None may forget death, when its grim power lies across the body, nor may the wound be disregarded, while the red blood pours therefrom. Can the heart forget when it has been robbed of life, of health, of joy, of hope, of all that makes the world beautiful? There is but one thing that in such case may be brought as food for oblivion—the vanished happiness of the past.

For this wound was deep as death itself. There was nothing left but vengeance, and after that—after that—Rest comes only after duty.

How mighty were these white men in their creations! How weak were they in themselves! For, in the lust after power, they had cast aside Nature and her works. They knew nothing of the sacred fire, of the beauty of life. Across the mighty water they came in great vessels to seize upon the territories of the weak Indian. With might they had driven out right, and made the former owners slaves in their own land. But when these conquerors lay beneath the cold shadow of death, whom would they call upon for aid? The Indian, with his deep knowledge of healing medicines. When food was desired for the body, to whom would they turn for assistance? To the Indian, who alone could lead them to the spot where the animals lay concealed. When it was their wish to feast the

sight upon things of wonder, whom would they summon? The Indian, with his inscrutable knowledge of Nature's inner secrets. Finally, when they wished to learn the power of love, it were useless to search for it among their own habitations. They must turn to the tents of the despised race, then depart with knowledge gained. Yet, by the law of justice, the white ruled the world. The Indian lay beneath his feet and looked to him for life.

Stranger than all this was the story of the white man's God. If the old mentor had not been advised wrongly, this God had walked the earth for years, to teach His children the lesson of life and death. This God must have taught them that women were of no account. One was to be taken and sported with, then cast aside for another. Their tears and their sorrow were to be laughed at and counted as nothing. This was strange teaching, for why should the woman be held so inferior to the man?

But perchance the white man had many gods, who gave each a different teaching. Yet no, it could not be. From all sides came the same unvarying tale of treachery and desertion. There were many white men in the country, yet they were all the same. All treated the women with cruelty, all were inconstant. Some there were who married, then deserted their wives for other women. The faith of the white God must be a cruel one. She would have none of it.

Yet, in obeying the prompting of her own mind, the will of the Spirit had been disobeyed. She had allied herself to one outside the tribe, and now but suffered the penalty of wrong-doing. A man who could not love joined to a woman with a heart. The result of such union meant misery to one, death to both. The heart continued its musings on the mystery of love.

Man is man, and woman, woman, whatever race or colour. They mingle together and pass daily, until one is strangely stopped by power of attraction for another. The man looks upon the woman, and sees that she is beautiful. She regards him with the growing thought that he is good and strong. Then, as the time passes, he comes to know that here is the life being whom the Great Spirit has brought into creation and led across his track, that he may take her to his home and call her his. For she was brought into life for him, and he for her. So he takes her by the hand in the evening time, and whispers in her ear, 'Let me twine my life with yours. Let us live as one, with soul to soul, having one mind, one wish.' Then she will agree, and the solemn compact is made, with the Great Spirit as witness. He has promised to shelter and clothe her, to care for her in time of sickness, to rejoice with her in happiness, to grieve with her in sorrow. She, also, promises to lighten his burden of daily toil with her soft love touch, to devote herself to him alone, to prepare his comforts, to make his home the centre of heart joy. But what shall be done to that man, who has fallen away from the great oath, by her who has remained true and faithful?

Let him be forgotten and forgiven? It were impossible. The heart, when it stirred into faint life, prompted otherwise. The teaching of the God was different. What justice was there in treating the apostate as though he had remained constant? Nor could it bring satisfaction to the stricken mind to see the God performing the work of vengeance.

Was there strength at the heart? Resolution for the meeting and the work? Doubtless, yet the strain and tension would be well nigh unbearable. There would be the journey, the watching for the opportunity, the anticipating of others, then the dread discovery before the once loved. After that must come the actual bitterness of the struggle. To look upon that face, which had been so indelibly stamped upon the memory; to behold again that well-remembered form; to speak and plead, with a love assumed, while hatred burnt within; to hold that hand, which had so often caressed her in the days of innocence. All such must be endured before commission of the act. The poison would be dissolving and stirring within her mouth, mingling with the breath, lying upon the tongue which had softly spoken to his ear the sounds of love. Another moment of strength, one more wave of feeling, and the work would be accomplished. The hand would be seized within hers, the touch electrifying each subtle sense current in her body. She would raise it to her lips, and she would kiss—yes, she would kiss first, then bite, burying her white teeth in the flesh with the mad intensity of the passion hatred, feeling his blood dripping and surging hotly across her mouth, mingling with the poison, which must then commence a deathly revelry along his veins. If the heart strength lasted for so long, all would be well. She might then crawl away to a place of quietness, cast down the aching body, and suffer the final pangs of ebbing life.

Was the heart of joy entirely dead? Had the single ice-stroke deprived it of all consciousness, blotting out the warm love and flowing vitality in a breath? The limb, frozen by the rigours of Arctic cold, is wax-like, cold, and dead to feeling. Yet it may perhaps be gradually revived and restored again to use and animation by assiduous attention. Was there not then some sensitive fibre of the heart, at present numbed by the intense frost of sorrow, yet which might be re-animated into at least a portion of the old happiness by tender nurture? The heart is so great in its far-reaching sympathies, so diversified in its range of feeling. Was there not a spot, as yet untouched by the mortification, one slight nerve which could yet respond to the anxious voice of friend—more, to the soft sound of lover's voice? Assuredly not. The heart was dead to feeling of human passion, alive only to its ice-cold determination of duty. Nothing could stir its sluggish pulsations as it lay within the flesh tomb. Not the excitement of her mission, nor the taunts of those who should have been men enough to have protected her from insult, not even the contemplation of again facing him she had so wildly and so foolishly loved, could awake that heavy, torturing burden within to a semblance of its past activity, to a shadow of the former brightness. All light and colour had been stripped from life. Even the body was cold, shrunken and debilitated. The mind had no resource to lean upon, the body no satisfaction to hope for. For the latter there remained death; the former looked only for silence.

A faint colour crawled into her thin cheeks and became constant, increasing in intensity of shade. The remainder of her face and the dull eyes became ghastly by contrast. Such a bright colour had once marked the rich stain of health; then it had altered to the pure heart blush; now it was the slow spreading fever of the mind. It seemed, indeed, as though the fire which had long been consuming her heart, after burning away the vitals, had spread to the exterior, there to consummate its work and consume the poor remnants of life.

There was one more thought at the dead heart, one doubting and perplexing query. Well might it trouble her, for none could have given answer to that constant cry—what is the rest that comes to the mind of sorrow after death?

CHAPTER VI

DURING THE DAY

Next morning the sun came up brightly in a clear blue sky. Two hours later a hot wind began to blow softly from the direction of the international boundary, bringing with it a heavy haze which soon settled over the entire heaven. Then the breeze dropped, while a dead calm brooded above and around Fort Garry. But the heavy atmosphere remained, enwrapping the place in a sweltering, mist-like shroud, through which the blinded rays of the sun fell sullenly in a stifling glare. Later, the heat became fearfully intense. Men, scantily attired, might have been seen stretched indolently in every patch of shade along the shelter of each house, fanning their perspiring faces with wide-brimmed hats. Insect pests, prominent among which appeared flying ants and malevolent 'bulldogs,' revelled in the thick air, to feed joyously off abundance of human and animal flesh.

Two strange-looking apparitions dragged their limp bodies from the depths of a profound ditch, which may even now be found to the west of the modern city of Winnipeg, and gazed around, then at each other, in utter bewilderment. Their faces were red with insect bites, and very dirty; their clothes were torn and covered with grass marks; they wore, in fact, the appearance of men who had unconsciously enjoyed a night out.

Presently the more genial looking of the two bethought himself of speech. 'Well, Dave, strikes me we've been camping out.' When the idea fully struck him, he slapped his knee as he sat on the edge of the ditch, and laughed lustily.

Dave was sulky and large headed. One side of his nose was much swollen, while a great thirst irritated his soul. He merely growled forth an incoherent reply.

'Tell you what it is,' continued the Factor. 'You've been loaded up again, lad. Guess I was seeing you home, when you went to work, tumbled into this ditch and dragged me in after you.'

The plausible explanation roused a sense of injustice in the other's breast. 'Why didn't you get out and go home, then?'

'It's a steep fall, Davey. Mind I'm getting oldish now. Reckon the shock would have stunned me. Must have been that, for I feel sort of queer in the head.'

Dave was panting like a dog, and vainly endeavouring to moisten his cracked lips. 'I've got a terrible thirst, Alf,' he exclaimed pathetically. 'I'm pretty near bad enough to drink water.'

Here the other could sympathise. 'You're bad, Dave, all right,' he said. 'Now you're talking, I almost reckon something cool would sort of make me easier. Come on, let's git.'

They dragged themselves upright to retrace the steps of the previous night. 'Goldam!' exclaimed the Factor, 'it's going to be a scorcher to-day.'

Presently they came out upon the Assiniboine. By a tacit and mutual understanding they shambled down the long shelving bank. Then, stretched at full length along the ground in luxurious fashion, they plunged their faces into the cool stream and sucked up long draughts of the pure water. Physically refreshed after this act of temperance, they sat for some time on a grass patch renovating their garments.

'Tell you, Alf,' proclaimed Dave more good-humouredly, 'folks'll be wondering what's lowered the river.'

They filled their pipes, though tobacco smoke was almost stifling in that atmosphere. Then they struck along the homeward trail.

'I'm terrible mixed up, Dave,' confessed the Factor, after a silent interval. 'Seems to me old Billy Sinclair turned up again last night. A fellow gets hold of queer notions at times, don't he?'

Dave assented, though somewhat doubtfully. 'I've got a sort of idea there was a whole crowd of us. A good crowd, you know, Alf, just having a quiet talk.'

'Then some bell started a racket, and old Billy's ghost turned up to scare us. Remember that, Dave?'

'Queer we should both get hold of the same notions, I mind hearing a laugh right by my ear, and I said to myself, well, well, that's just like old Billy's voice grin. Couldn't have been, Alf?'

'Don't see how,' said the Factor, unwillingly. 'Billy got fixed last summer.' But then a direful thought came upon him. He stopped and grabbed at his companion. 'You saw him, Dave? You saw Billy, same as me?'

'I didn't say that, Alf. I couldn't swear to it. I sort of thought I saw him. Put it that way, Alf.'

'How am I looking, Dave? Kind of wild the eyes—crazy, you know, Dave?'

'You look right enough. Eyes are same usual, 'cept for a bit of dirt under them.'

'Well, well,' muttered the Factor, reassured, was terrible scared I'd got 'em. But if I have, you've got 'em, too. That's sort of consoling, anyway.'

Dave was alarmed. 'We'll have to fix this up right away. It's ter'ble having to walk around, not knowing if your brains are right. What do you think, Alf?'

McAuliffe was inclined towards the gloomy side. 'It's a matter of doubt, clean enough. If we can see men that ought to be lying quiet in their graves, it can't be anything but a bad sign. We'd best make off to bed, Dave, and see if we can't sleep it off.'

'There's my nose, too. It's painful, I tell you. Feels as if someone had been dancing on it. That's another mystery, Alf.'

'There's lots of 'em,' said the Factor, mournfully. 'How did we come in that ditch, Dave? Billy's ghost couldn't have chucked us there. I'll make inquiries soon as I get back to the hotel, and find out if they know anything.'

'They wouldn't have seen Billy's ghost,' interrupted Dave.

'It's true enough, Dave. I tell you, I don't like it, for my head feels a bit shaky. It would be terrible if we were both locked up in an asylum.'

Dave shivered at the thought. 'I guess it's the heat, Alf,' he said hopefully. 'I'm feeling a bit beetle-headed—but not crazy. No, Alf, not crazy.'

'Then there was Captain smoking a cigar,' continued McAuliffe, blankly.

'I mind it. 'Twas how I reckoned the time watching it getting shorter. Well, well, Alf, we've had strange dreams this night, sure.'

'It's been a terrible bad night, Dave,' replied the Factor, ominously.

Then they quickened speed, in spite of the increasing heat, anxious to get back to the hotel and learn the worst. Their remaining remarks were divided impartially between mutual sympathy for a terrible affliction, and disputings as to whether the hunter's appearance had been real or imaginary. McAuliffe's final opinion was that Sinclair had actually appeared in the flesh, but that Dave was 'terrible crazy, anyhow.'

It was late afternoon before Sinclair felt himself disposed to stir outside into the white, stifling glare. But business called him, so he presently made off to attend to preliminaries of the approaching night work. This accomplished, he turned towards the hotel where he had made a dramatic appearance some hours earlier, but had not journeyed over half the distance when he encountered no less a person than Captain Robinson, as usual buttoned up to the neck in his blue coat, and pulling at a formidable cigar. This latter gentleman appeared to have no appreciation whatever of heat.

They linked arm in arm at once, though the hunter was unwilling to walk abroad for any distance. 'Don't want Lamont to get sight of me,' he said. 'It would scare him badly, I've no doubt, but then he might take it into his head to clear out before night.'

'Which direction does he live?' asked the Captain.

Sinclair nodded his head backwards. 'Way north,' he said. 'Comfortable little shanty. Married, too.'

'He's a daisy. Well, Billy, he's run down at last.'

'Sure enough,' agreed the hunter.

Then their conversation veered towards the events of the night preceding.

'Wonder where Alf is,' said Sinclair.

'I've just come from the hotel. Fellow there said Alf and Dave Spencer came tumbling in this morning, looking a bit used up, and crazy to know whether you'd turned up last night. They got mixed up over the drinks, so couldn't be sure whether they'd seen you or your ghost. Alf was wonderful relieved when he found out 'twas you right enough. Took another drink on the strength of it. He'd gone out again then. Guess we'll find him bumming around some place.'

Sinclair chuckled. 'Alf can't be still long, when he's awake. Got lots of life for his age.'

'Reckon I know him better than you, Billy,' said the Captain, who was dropping into a talking

vein. 'Last night he was accusing me of being religious—so I am, mind you, Billy—but it may surprise you to hear that Alf himself gets the fit at times. No, you never would suspect him of getting any idea on religion. Before he went north as Factor, he was clerk in a store down Port Arthur way. I knew him well then. He used to have a whole lot of literary truck someone had sent him up from the States. Always reading these books, he was. You know, Billy, they weren't the sort of thing you could safely put before a Sunday school class. Well, 'bout twice a year regular, I'd get a bundle from Alf with a sort of note, which would read this way, "Got a bit of religious fit on me. If I kept these, reckon I should tear them up. I'd be sorry for that later. Sending them on to you to look after till I'm all right again. One in the blue cover's best for reading." A week or so later, another letter would turn up, something this way, "It's all right. Captain. Religious fit over. Send along books soon as you can." One day, though, the fit came on him sudden, before he had time to mail off the books to me; so he burnt them all right on the spot. Tell you, he was mad when the fit passed.'

They were now approaching the business portion, as represented by a short length of sidewalk, and a few stores crowned by offices. When about a hundred yards distant, they both became attracted by the spectacle of a knot of people, in the centre of which gleamed hotly the red coats of a couple of the militia, who at that time were responsible for the orderly conduct of those living in the Red River Settlement. The band approached slowly through the heat, while shouts and derisive laughter ascended continuously. There was a certain deep roar, which completely drowned all other voices.

The two outsiders became more interested. 'I'm dead sure that was Alf,' said the hunter.

'There's fun going on, sure,' said the Captain, beaming at the thought. 'Let's get over there, Billy.' Sinclair soon spoke again. 'It's only a blackleg pulled up, Captain.'

The soldiers just then had particularly strict orders to immediately arrest all suspicious characters seen about the fort, because many unprincipled actions had latterly been committed by members of the loafer fraternity. Therefore the smallest unprincipled action perpetrated in Garry during these days, immediately subsequent to the Rebellion, seriously endangered personal freedom of action.

Then they came up to the excessively hot yet jubilant procession, which was composed somewhat as follows,—

A motley crowd of loafers and deadbeats, who jeered in unison, and part sympathy for the law-breaker, at the perspiring efforts of the police behind; a plentiful sprinkling of the omnipresent small youth, and ubiquitous dogs; then the culprit himself, half dragged, half supported by the two soldiers; close behind appeared the master of ceremonies, one Alfred McAuliffe, closely attended by a jovial party of grey-bearded men, who strenuously seconded the efforts of the chief speaker by pelting the prisoner with language and what missiles came convenient; the procession closed by more loafers of assorted classes, with other specimens of small fry, both human and canine.

All interest was centered upon the prisoner, who was being forcibly projected along the strip of sidewalk, indulging in language more varied than seemly. He was no less important a personage than Peter Denton.

The factor was in a condition bordering closely upon extreme bliss. Shouting with the full force of his great voice, he strode along the walk, inciting the already too-willing small boys towards the persecution of the luckless prisoner. A huge felt hat crowned the red face, which was glistening with heat and delight, while big drops coursed unregarded along his nose, to be buried and lost within the mazes of his thick beard.

'Reckon we've found Alf,' said the Captain, blowing a greasy smoke cloud from his lips.

'Well, I should remark!' said the hunter.

'Pick up good chunks of mud, boys,' shouted the Factor. 'Don't bother about the stones. Fifty cents to the youngster who first catches him on the nose.'

'Make way, there!' ordered the police.

The advance guard of deadbeats yelled derisively.

'What's he done?' asked the hunter, stopping an individual with a bibulous nose.

'Hooked some bills that he found lying around a bit too handy—'bout fifty dollars, they say,' came the answer.

'They'll tan his hide for that,' chuckled the Captain. 'Where was it?'

'Don't know for sure. But while ago he started in to paint the Archbishop blue. Putting out some terrible talk he was.'

'They wouldn't stand that,' said the hunter.

'Bet you they wouldn't. The boys were hot at him, before the boiled 'uns^[1] came round. Ter'ble thirsty day, ain't it?'

But this hint passed disregarded.

'Don't hit the bullet stoppers, boys. They're only for show, and won't stand rough handling.' The Factor's bodyguard loudly applauded this sally against the unpopular police force.

Then an old man, who was hobbling briskly along with the assistance of a couple of sticks, delivered himself of an opinion. 'I tell you, boys all, this chap's as crooked as the river. If I was asked to lend a hand to splice him to a tree, don't know that I'd refuse.'

'Right enough. He's a teaser,' said another. 'He was swearing bad, right out in the middle of the road, with ladies passing and all.'

'That's so. I was listening to him. After a while I swore back at him, but it warn't any use,' said a fat man, with the air of one who has executed an unpleasant duty. 'My pard, Sammy swore at him as well. Didn't you, Sammy?'

He gazed round, but Sammy was only conspicuous by absence.

'He was using fearful words of blasphemy,' said a weird-looking individual, in the mottled garb of a minister.

'You and he wouldn't quarrel on matters of religion, then,' retorted the deadbeat of the bibulous nose. The noise became at once increased by an exchange of vocal amenities, in which, be it said, the minister more than held his own.

The procession reached a drinking saloon. Here it might have been noticed that a perceptible diminution in the crowd took place. But the Factor refused all such temptations, and remained faithful to the end.

'You're speaking your own language now, Peter,' he shouted, in his stentorian voice. 'There's no hypocrisy in you now. Keep it up, boys!'

'Hit him for me!' said a malicious little man with a squint. 'That blackleg cheated me out of five dollars the other day. I've never been able to get square.'

'All your friends coming up, Peter,' continued McAuliffe. 'Goldam! wouldn't have missed this—not for a hundred dollars, cash down!'

'What there, Alf!' cried the Captain.

McAuliffe turned, and recognised the two. 'Come on, Captain! Here's more fun than a bagful of monkeys. Hello, Billy! Goldam! this is the first time you haven't scared me. Join right on with the crowd. After we've seen Peter to the cooler, we'll go and get some supper.'

They did as directed, while the Factor returned to business.

'It'll be a case of a big fine, or a few months on the stones!' he shouted, with considerable unction. 'Know you haven't two five cent pieces to rub together, Peter; so we'll have to part from you for a time. Guess a few of the saloon keepers will have to shut up after you're gone.'

The procession wheeled sharply round a corner, and made for the place of detention. Here McAuliffe was compelled unwillingly to part from his victim and return to the hotel. When there he put a leading question to the hunter, 'Got the warrant out, Billy?'

Sinclair nodded. 'We're going round to net him soon as it's dark,' he replied.

No question was asked as to the whereabouts of Menotah. Indeed, for the time they had forgotten all about her. She was not one of them, she had nothing to do with their affairs, so why should they think about her? Her sorrow could not concern them.

[1] The soldiers.

CHAPTER VII

DISCOVERY

The cool breeze, which usually blows nightly in north and west, did not rise after the sun setting. On the contrary, though the thick atmosphere cleared slightly, and the wearisome white glare disappeared, oppressive heat stillness grew yet more intolerable. Sleep in such a hot bath became almost impossible. Shortly before dark, there were visible above the southern horizon small clouds of a copper tint, which ascended with peculiar, twisting motions, to break into incessant lightning on reaching a certain higher point.

That portion of the prairie, which receded from the north wall of the fort, was known as the least wholesome quarter in the district. It was infested by a cosmopolitan crowd of the poorest class, chiefly Jews and half-breeds, whose miserable shacks were scattered everywhere within dirty enclosures. Beyond this unfragrant belt were several small houses of light framework, surrounded with high fencing, which might almost have been dignified by the title of palisade. The furthest of these improved dwellings was the first to show a light on that evening. A lamp

stood near the ground floor window, which was standing open, and cast long, yellow rays across the open space in front.

The dark figure of a solitary woman came from the deep shadows beneath the north wall, and made in the direction of this house. Though her feet were bare, she walked indifferently, without flinching, over the broken fragments of bottles and other refuse which everywhere strewed the grass. Her features were concealed by a black cloak wrapped round head and shoulders. Yet, even so, at times might be seen the quick glitter of determined eyes as she glanced suspiciously towards the occasional figures that drifted along distantly in the gathering gloom. She passed from grimy tent to tarred shanty, until the unsavoury quarter had been left behind. At length she reached the tall fence which protected the house where burnt the guiding lamp. Here she paused, as though the journey's limit had been attained, and crouched into the long grass, half concealed by a bush maple which sprang up alongside the fence. Eagerly, as the tiger lying in the jungle for its prey, she kept her gaze fixed upon the illuminated window, which was scarcely more than a dozen paces distant.

By this time it was quite dark. A few gauzy moths and cumbersome beetles circled drearily round the drooping flower heads. The night air was stifling. Soon soft lightning began to play incessantly along all parts of the sky.

The woman remained bent in her cramped position, unconscious of the deadness, of sharp pricking of the limbs, disregarding the wounds in the soles of her feet, where blood trickled forth slowly. Her straining eyes were constantly fixed ahead. She could not note such trivial torments as attacks of insect or any mere suffering of the body.

A sullen roar broke from the south and trembled along the ground, while a faint air wave rippled through the night. Then silence and heat settled down again.

But, before the echo of that sound had rolled itself away across prairie, a deep groan burst from the woman's lips as she sank back in a trembling heap. Every muscle in her body shuddered; her mad fingers fought into the dusty turf; she sobbed and wailed so piteously that any chance listener might well have wondered at so great a sorrow, yet withal so quietly that the sounds covered a very slight interval. This was weakness, but nature dies hard.

For in the full light of the lamp stood two figures within that room—a man, and close to him a girl, slender and dark. His arm was encircling her waist, she was pressed to him in an embrace, while he was looking down upon her upturned face with a smile—doubtless, also, with words of love.

This was an ordinary sight, surely, that of a greeting between husband and wife on the former's return from daily toil. The woman in the dark heat outside was surely strangely influenced by trifles.

During those past few days Lamont had been making mental preparations for departure. He felt that his continued presence in Garry was perilous. Any day there might enter the fort some Indian or half-breed, who could recognise his former leader, and who might feel inclined to place himself in comfortable circumstances by denouncing him to the Government. Sinclair, his especial enemy, had been dead for some time. Nothing but an accident could now divulge his identity as the notorious White Chief. Still, with the roving passion of the adventurer, he longed for another country, for fresh faces.

He had practically abandoned the idea of instituting a search for the river of gold which lay hidden in the distant north. The journey was a difficult one, and failure probably lay at the end. Then it would be almost impossible to find companions in whom he could trust—to venture alone would be madness. Besides, once in that district, there lay the danger of crossing some Indian warrior, who would strive to avenge Menotah's lost honour.

So far, the attraction which had bound him down to the western land was his real affection for his dark Canadian wife. He had been duly married to Marie by the rites of her religion, and for the time—as with Menotah—he was quite satisfied with his heart choice. But Sinclair had spoken truly to the Indian girl when he said, 'Lamont can't love; he hasn't got the heart.' So he had recently made the inevitable discovery that her presence had ceased to bring him pleasure; in short, that he was growing tired of her, as he became weary of anything which had a tendency towards daily repetition. This fact Marie, with woman's quick discernment, perceived, and—not possessing Menotah's tender devotion—resented, as she had indeed a right to do. Slight quarrels had arisen, like first mutterings of the yet distant storm, which could not fail to widen the breach which had been already formed by his growing indifference. On more than a single occasion actual bitterness had shown itself, and though such scenes more usually ended with kiss and fresh protestation of love, memory survived, converting the lip promise into a mechanical action which had no consent of the heart.

So Lamont was only now waiting for a favourable opportunity to steal away from the country, and join the forces of some insurrection in any other part of the world. His wife would be left behind as a matter of course. There were women to be found everywhere. Doubtless he could discover many as beautiful in the new land of his choice. Had Sinclair set the wheels of the law revolving but a month later, he might have found himself too late.

On that particular day they had quarrelled—the heat had made him irritable—but as evening approached and an indefinite feeling of fear tormented the mind, he had made such humble

overtures towards reconciliation that Marie was astonished at the change. As she was sincerely fond of her husband, when it so happened that his moods agreed with hers, she was perfectly willing to meet his advances half way. Consequently it appeared that the threatened storm had been averted. Then the lamp was lighted in the little sitting-room overlooking the dark prairie, the window was left open on account of the heat, while they listened to the first smothered exclamation of the distant thunder.

Then Lamont began to experience that dim presentiment of approaching evil, which is such a real and such a terrible truth. He became suddenly so entirely lonely, and in so fearful a mood, that he was compelled to turn to his weak wife for protection as well as sympathy. It was impossible to remain any time in one position, while thought became intolerable.

'How irritable you are!' she said, when he began to pace up and down the room.

'The place is full of mosquitoes. It is the lamp light. Shall I shut the window?'

'If you like,' she replied. 'They don't trouble me, though.'

He did not go to the window, but sank into a chair. 'Marie!' he called suddenly.

She looked up in some wonder, when he called again. Then she crossed to his side. He threw his arm round her and drew her on his knee, to whisper in her ear, 'You love me, *chérie*, don't you?'

She did not know what to make of this sudden change of front. Somewhat doubtfully she replied, 'Yes, Hugh, when you're nice to me.'

'You don't say that in the way you used to.'

'And you haven't kept all the promises you once made. You were never to speak a harsh word to me; never dream of quarrelling with me; I should always have my wish; you would always love me devotedly; and—oh! I don't know how many more.'

He put his hand over her mouth, then caressed her half fondly, half nervously.

'I always love you, *chérie*. You know I do, so you must forgive me. And you will always remain faithful to me, won't you?'

'Yes,' she said carelessly.

'You will always take my part? You will protect me—'

She gave a short laugh. 'How can I protect *you*?' she cried, with some scorn. 'What's the matter with you, Hugh?'

He passed a hand across his forehead. 'I'm unsettled. I hardly know what I'm talking about to-night.'

'Go and lie down. I'll bring you something to drink presently.'

He took no notice of her words, but pressed her to him eagerly.

'You will never desert me, Marie mine? You will be faithful to me always?'

'Of course,' she replied petulantly. 'At least so long as you are faithful to me—and country,' she added, as an afterthought.

He started wildly, all his worst fears aroused. 'What has that to do with us? If I am true to you, why think about country?'

The small patriot became infected by his strange mood. 'It is the true man's first thought. Home and country must always go together.'

'Pshaw! What has it done for us? If it is to a man's interests to go against his people, let him do so.'

He was almost startled at the horror on her face. 'Fight against your own land, against your own people! Do you mean that?'

'Why not?' he said huskily.

'It is the vilest thing a man can do,' she cried hotly. 'Look at the Rebellion that is just over. Don't you think with me that the traitor they call the White Chief is an evil spirit, and not man at all?'

The next instant she had approached him with solicitude, for his face was ghastly. 'Why, what is it, Hugh? You are not well.'

'The heat,' he muttered. 'I'm faint.'

Then there came a loud, hollow knock upon the outer door.

Lamont forgot his infirmity and sprang up excitedly. 'What is that?'

'I believe you are crazy, Hugh!' said his wife angrily. 'The paper, of course.'

'Don't go, Marie,' he pleaded. 'Stay here with me. I'm not feeling well. I don't want to be left alone.'

She stopped irresolutely at his side, and looked up at the nervous face. He was greatly excited, and trembling. With the woman's sympathy for suffering, she placed both hands on his shoulders, then said kindly, 'I'm just going for the paper. Then I will sit by you and read the latest news.'

With a soft hand she pushed back the hair from his forehead. It was moist with heat and his fear of the unknown.

'You really are unwell.'

He put his arms round her; then, yielding to a sudden impulse, he said, 'Kiss me, *chérie*.'

She did so, though with a perplexed smile, and with no conception of the idea that this was the last embrace which was to pass between them. As she released herself, the deep roar broke forth again from the southern night.

'The storm's coming,' he muttered, thinking on the night of Muskwah's end, 'It's the only way such a day could end.'

She was not gone more than a few minutes, yet when she returned her husband was standing near the window in a pitiful state of alarm. As she came questioningly to him, he clutched her arm with the weak action of the child who seeks protection from invisible dangers.

'There was a face—a white, revengeful face.'

'Where?' she asked, quickly with a strange glance. 'At the window. Only for a moment. The eyes were terrible. There was death in them. Didn't you hear me call out?'

Marie advanced to the open window, where a few mosquitoes sang their mournful, high-pitched note. There was nothing, except the soft lightning playing incessantly through the hot air. 'It was your imagination,' she said, with a certain wondering contempt. 'Come and see for yourself.'

But he did not stir. 'I hear footsteps. There are men coming through the grass.'

'Well, the prairie is public. People have a right to pass if they like. *Ciel!* Get rid of this folly of yours.'

She drew him to a chair, then seated herself beside him, and opened the single vilely printed sheet published in Garry at that time under the title of newspaper. That evening it was larger than usual.

He was completely beneath her influence, so obeyed her light touch, casting many furtive glances in the direction of the window, which was constantly flooded in a pale blue light. The thunder now commenced to roll and roar through the stifling night.

Outside, between the fence and the bush maple, still crouched the dark figure, never shifting her position, and always gazing into that room. Occasionally she could even hear a portion of the conversation.

Marie's attention was drawn at once towards the black lettered headlines of the opening column. 'It is an account of Father Lecompte's death,' she said solemnly.

'He is dead, then?' said Lamont, blankly, his thoughts on other things.

'You know he is. Didn't you listen to the bell tolling last night? You said it kept you awake.' Then she began to read from the closely printed sheet. 'The Archbishop has lost his right hand. The good priest, who fought with him so loyal-heartedly in his endeavours to quell the Indian rising, will be seen in our midst no more. During the Rebellion, when there were traitors—'

'The Rebellion!' he interrupted violently. 'You're always talking on that. I tell you, it's over and done with. I don't want to hear about the priest's death, Marie. Heaven knows this night is dismal enough without making it worse by reading such things.' Ho shuddered as he spoke.

With a little petulant movement his wife turned over the sheet. Her eyes were immediately caught by another headline, announcing far more significant intelligence. She read the paragraph that followed quickly, then turned to her husband, who sat motionless in his chair.

Sinclair, the simple-minded hunter, had reckoned without the journalist in the laying of his plans. He knew nothing of the searching curiosity of the reporter, with whom nothing is sacred, reputation least of all. During a moment of incautious jubilation in official circles, the secret must have leaked into the ears of clerks, each a type of garrulity, and the keen-scented news maker, who could track copy in the air, had made the tidings his prey. The newspaper is always the criminal's most faithful ally, the friend when everything human has dropped away from him. Now it came very near to wrecking Sinclair's well-devised plans.

Marie spread the sheet across her knee and smoothed it out excitedly. 'Listen, Hugh. Here is something that really will interest you.'

He made no reply, nor was there any curiosity in his manner. Full of the startling intelligence, she continued quickly,—

'It is about the White Chief. He has been discovered.'

She bent her head to read from the paper, but at the moment a strange sound of deep gasping

came to her ears. She looked up hurriedly, and then her own face for the moment grew white with fear.

He stood in the centre of the room, a livid hue crossing his face, knees knocking together in weakness of extreme terror, hands clutching at the table for support. His entire being was transformed.

Marie came forward, trembling. 'What is it? Tell me, Hugh—'

He reached out towards the paper, and tried in vain to speak. The shock had been so terrible, so fearfully sudden.

'It is *that*, then,' she said, with a strange light growing in her eyes. 'Would you like to hear the rest?'

She held the sheet beneath the lamplight. 'Information has been given by a man who for some time was believed to be dead, hunter Sinclair of St Andrews.'

It was all over now. There could be nothing worse than this, so strength, the unreasoning strength of despair, liberated his tongue and brought energy back to the limbs. He forgot the presence of his wife, everything save his awful position. He stood surrounded by a blood-red atmosphere, where lightnings blazed and thunders crashed; before him he saw the limp figure of Riel swaying at the rope's end; in his ears sounded the mad shouts and execrations of the people. He was a man by himself, outside all mercy, with a country shrieking for his blood.

'Sinclair is dead!' he cried, in an awful voice. 'He never rose, never moved. I could not have missed my aim. He is dead—dead.'

His wife shrank in her turn, the horrible truth worming into her heart.

'Speak!' she shouted at him. 'Tell me the meaning of this.'

He did not notice her. 'There is no one else. Spencer had no proofs. Sinclair is dead.'

He shuddered frightfully, then staggered across the floor.

Motion removed the numbness from his mind. The first paralysing wave of terror had passed, so now he saw again clearly. He looked upon his wife, with hatred growing in her eyes; he thought of the possible foes already in wait outside the door; he beheld the window, and knew that salvation lay there.

Thither he went, with an attempt at a smile upon his features. Ah, there was shelter and life in that dark night. But then the lightning burst forth wildly, converting the outer blackness into a weird atmosphere of shuddering blue.

He fell back with a shout no effort could repress. In the brief space of light had been plainly visible a knot of men crossing the prairie in that direction.

But his wife had seen them, too. The dreadful truth, so far a suspicion, now became a certainty. Unwittingly she had taken to husband the vilest and most cowardly of all her country's treacherous sons.

'I see,' she said, bending forward like the snake about to strike. 'You are afraid of these men. They are coming here. Perhaps you know why.'

One minute of perfect coolness, and he would be safe. He could escape by the door, pass out at the back, reach open prairie, then make for the bush. None could touch him there. But he must first secure his weapons, which lay in the next room.

So he laughed feebly, and smiled in ghastly fashion upon his wife. 'It's all right, Marie, *chérie*. The heat has knocked me over altogether. I'm just going out for a bit.'

But as he crossed the floor, she stepped forward and put herself in his way.

'Where are you going?'

His tongue and throat were parched. All he could say was, 'I'll be back in a few minutes. I can't tell you.'

She held his arm. 'Before you go, tell me what you know of the White Chief?' There was a pause, broken by the rattling of the thunder, then her voice came again, 'Why did you try to kill Sinclair?'

He tried to move onward—naturally the one idea was immediate flight—but she hung to him.

'I can't tell you. I know nothing.'

Then she placed herself between him and the door. Her face was hard and stern.

'You shall not go. I believe you know who this villain is.'

Again he tried to laugh. 'Yes—but I couldn't tell you, or anyone. He's a friend, who often has done me good service. I can't forget him now. He lives in Garry, so I am going out to warn him. I shouldn't like to see him hung.'

The last words were spoken in a thick whisper, while he turned a frightened glance towards the window.

'You liar!' she burst forth. 'Why did you speak to me on fidelity to country? What was the reason of your fear, and why did you see an enemy in every passer by? Why did you almost lose reason when I read that paragraph from the paper? Why did you yourself confess that you tried to shoot Sinclair?'

Deceit was now a useless weapon. The last resource lay in the power of a terrible name coupled with brute force.

'Damn you,' he said in a soft, sinister whisper, which had often aided him better than muscular strength, 'I AM THE WHITE CHIEF! Stand aside, and let me pass.'

'Never!' Then she compressed her lips fiercely.

He clenched his fists and made a menacing movement. 'Come away from that door!'

'You shall not pass.'

Then she locked the door and drew forth the key.

'It will have to be over your body. The choice is yours.'

She raised a denouncing finger, and met him with the single word, 'Traitor!'

He was cool again now. 'Too late for that,' he began, but her passion was fully aroused.

'See! Those men are waiting outside for a signal. They have come to arrest you. I shall see you hung at Regina, if the people do not kill you here.'

Her concluding words were almost drowned in a crash of thunder. A lurid picture of the bloodthirsty lynchers, with a prospect of horrible death by burning, flashed across his mental vision. Weakness returned, and he trembled.

'There are footsteps. There is someone coming up to the window.'

He would have rushed there, but dared not. Escape by the door was his only chance.

'Dare to lay a finger on me, traitor. I am a free woman now. Your perfidy has divorced me from you.'

'The key!' he cried in hoarse tones many times.

'There is the open window. Leave the house that way. The soldiers are waiting to receive you.'

The sweat broke on his forehead. 'I give you another chance. Stand aside, and let me pass.'

She drew herself up proudly. 'No man shall ever say of Marie Larivière that she feared a traitor to her country.'

This return to her maiden name showed him how completely isolated he was from all human sympathy.

He swore fiercely, then sprang forward at her. But the little patriot was ready; she doubled her fingers and struck him across the eyes.

'Perfide!'

The bold action aroused his entire fury. He seized her by the waist and flung her brutally to the floor. Bravely she clutched the key within her two hands. He bent over, and furiously struggled to wrest it from her grasp. But it is no easy task—even with far greater strength—to open the fist which is closed in a grim determination. She panted and sobbed, yet fought nobly; he swore and threatened, but could not succeed.

It was terrible. The sweat flowed from his face. Any second he might find himself surrounded by soldiers and his last hope gone. The demon within triumphed. He struck the girl twice upon the side of the head. She sank upon the floor, while the fingers yielded limply. Feverishly he clutched the key, again seeing the world of liberty opening and spreading before him.

He reached the door. With shaking hands he endeavoured to force the key into its place.

Suddenly a new flood of terror passed into his being and robbed the hands of strength. They were unmistakable sounds in the room. Someone had entered. As he started round, a low voice gave utterance to the pitiless words,—

'It is no good.'

Standing in the centre of the floor was a woman, barefooted, bareheaded, with hair streaming wildly over her shoulders, with hungry set look on her colourless face.

RETRIBUTION

It was Menotah.

Calmly she looked again upon her betrayer, the man who had won her heart, he who had lightly stolen her happiness. No shadow of doubt crossed her brow, nor was there; any sign of swerving from the path of duty in her passionless face. She had completed a dreadful journey to avenge, as her religion directed. Now that the moment had arrived, she would not be the one to display lack of resolution.

And again he looked upon her, his former and present lawful wife. Even then, with vision obscured, with eyes failing by heat and his fervent fear, he marvelled at the complete change which time and his perfidy had worked. There was something familiar in that figure, in the stern features, in the cold voice as it delivered its mortal message. Could this hard-featured woman have owned at any time some connection with the laughing girl he had taken to himself in the lone forests of the Saskatchewan? Yet, if so, where were the eyes that always danced with joy, where was the colour that had played like chequered sunshine across her cheeks? What sickness had robbed her step of buoyancy, what hand had deprived her of all the numerous graces that had contributed towards making her so adorable a thing of life?

Even in that moment of selfish terror he could realise that Menotah had vanished with all her youth and beauty; that, from the ashes of her dead heart had sprung another being, bearing her name, though lacking all her womanly qualities. This figure had but one object in view. The words of the careless, beautiful Menotah of the summer forest rang forth with the thunder, and flashed within the lightning in letters of fire, *'If anyone should kill my heart with sorrow, I would give life and strength to the cause of vengeance. I should never turn back!'*

Yet, outside everything remained quiet, save for the tumult of the elements. There were no visible signs of other enemies. This woman, though terrible perhaps to gaze upon, was devoid of strength. As he had no feeling apart from his personal safety, he began to breathe again.

But she divined his thoughts. Deliberately she drew from the folds of her cloak a small knife, then, with the indifference of a butcher about to slaughter, examined the point. The brightness of the metal was dulled at the edge by a brown stain.

Stealthily she came round the room and crept near the door. He was fascinated by her eyes, and fell back as she approached. Then she spoke in a dull voice, 'There is poison on the knife point.'

Then he understood the deadly nature of that brown stain. She slipped into his late position near the door, still watching him with eyes that never twitched or closed.

Soon Marie recovered partially and dragged herself to a sitting posture. With large, wondering eyes she stared upon the intruder.

'I am changed since the time you last saw me,' said Menotah, in passionless tones. 'Why am I another woman, while you remain the same man?' She paused, as though waiting for reply. When none came she continued, 'I will tell you.'

But she did not, for with the thought came other recollections—the aged Antoine and his last weak words; her dying father and the oath she had sworn over him, using words which might not be lightly set aside. Already had she failed in the appointed course of action. She was threatening, where she should be pleading. Still, before the final act, she would trifle with this man, as he had played with her. She would put his courage to the test. But first she turned to Marie, and said in her *patois* French,—

'Do you love this man?'

The girl was half dazed, but she directed her gaze towards the pitiless face. Then Menotah, attracted possibly by sympathy for one who was to suffer her pangs, drew nearer and looked closely at her features. Then she said, 'You are his wife?'

The other moistened her dry lips. 'I was,' she muttered.

'He deserted me for you.' She hung on every syllable. 'When he said he loved me, you were at his heart; when he caressed me, he thought of you; when he spoke tenderly, he forgot it was not you he was addressing.'

An angry flush of shame crossed Marie's brow. 'He never cared for me—the traitor. And I hate him.'

Menotah turned. 'So; she who was your wife before your own people has nothing for you but hatred.' Then she picked up the key, which Lamont had dropped in his sudden fright. 'It is time,' she said quietly, then unlocked the door and threw it wide open. She cast aside the cloak, while the knife glittered as she stretched forth her arm. 'You may pass if you wish.'

He was stupefied at this new move, and wondered at her meaning. Beyond he could see the lamp light flickering in the hall, and further, half hidden in shadow, the dim outline of the outer door. In that direction lay liberty. How simple it was! A quick bound forward, two or three steps, and life would be his again.

But then the cold voice struck on his ears again,—

'First I will warn you. As you pass I shall strive to wound you. A touch with this knife is death.'

He stood irresolutely, while a contemptuous smile broke over Marie's white countenance.

'I am waiting for you.'

He gazed from the open door to that terrible window, where the dreaded power of justice perhaps even then lay concealed.

'It will be over in a single moment.'

He tried to nerve himself for the act. With a single motion of his hand he might hurl the slight girl from the door; with one blow of his powerful fist he could paralyse that arm. But she was quick, and fearfully determined. The risk was too great.

'Coward!' she burst forth in a first expression of passion. 'I am but a weak woman—how weak you can hardly tell. But even for your liberty you will not attack me, for the gift of your life you dare not pass me.'

There was silence, until the splashing of heavy raindrops on the shingle could be distinctly heard.

'Hark! there are other sounds than the rain and the thunder.'

'I hear footsteps,' said Marie, in a barely intelligible voice.

Menotah barred the doorway with a trembling arm. 'Your chance is gone,' she said, yet with a peculiar deliberation. 'You know why these men have come. You do not deserve to live, for you have been false to everyone. They will take you with them, and treat you as they did Riel. They will hang you as they did him.'

She fell back as she spoke against the wall, while the hot breath choked her.

Another thought occurred to him. If he could reach the next room he might obtain his weapons. Armed, he would be not only a brave man, but a formidable foe. But Menotah still guarded the threshold, the deadly instrument in her hand, her eyes following his every movement.

'You cannot escape,' she murmured with low, fearful accent. There was a new expression upon her face which Marie wondered at. 'You are captured by a weak woman. You did not think to set eyes on me again. You thought I should crawl away to some quiet spot, there to sob away my life as the wounded deer. Yet I have followed your footsteps to repay you for the wounds you have inflicted upon me. The time is here now—the hour for vengeance.'

The last words fell from her lips in a frightened whisper. For the first time since that fatal night of desertion, emotion awoke in her colourless face, while a strange moisture started into her eyes.

But where was the plan for vengeance, and why did she not follow it out? For this meeting she had waited and planned. Now it had arrived. Why did she not make use of opportunity and act quickly? The deadly drug still lay unused in her bosom. Why did she not make use of it? *Because she had then forgotten its very existence.*

Again came the sounds. On this occasion Lamont fancied he could detect a creaking of the storm door outside.

'They are coming,' said Marie, in a hushed tone.

Menotah looked upon her wildly. She repeated the words as though doubtful of their full significance. Then in a tremulous half whisper, 'Perhaps they are all round the door. He might escape by the window.'

'Escape!' half shouted Marie, excitedly.

Menotah's face had broken and changed, like the sky after a storm. The cruelty had melted and gone. A look of fear crept into her pain-filled and lustrous eyes. Suddenly, after a short and mighty struggle with herself, she turned and loudly cried at Lamont,—

'The window!'

The guilty man started at the change in that voice. Again he saw Menotah in the full sunshine, flitting along by the high cliff of the Saskatchewan, with bright song and laughter.

'There is still one chance left.'

Lamont could not move. He was divided between paralysing dread and suspicious perplexity. But she came towards him. He shrank from the knife with the brown stained point. Fearlessly she took him by the arm, then compelled him across the room.

'See!' Her voice was low and fervent. 'You may yet escape, with this knife to aid you. Make for the bush on the river's opposite bank. There you will be safe.'

There was a trembling pity in every motion, while her limbs shook with weakness. Upon her he turned his dazed eyes. Then he saw that her cheeks were burning, as though with fever, that the look on her face was wild and cunning.

'Let me go for my rifle,' he said.

'You cannot. They will see you. Go! For the love you bore me once—escape.'

Marie passionately intervened. 'You have jested with him enough. Take care, or he will snatch the knife from you.'

'Jesting!' cried Menotah, piteously. 'Ah, no. I am the coward now. I loved him. I gave him my heart and wrapped my soul round his life. Now I am called to avenge. I cannot. I cannot. The pain has returned—back to my heart. I thought the flame dead and cold. But it has sprung up again. It lives! It lives!'

She sprang at Lamont, and hung to him with an embrace. 'There is still time. Go! Go!'

'Stop!' cried Marie, furiously. 'You are in league with him. He shall not escape.'

'Do not listen to her. See! I will hold her arms.'

Marie advanced with a loud cry, but Menotah was upon her with all her lithe strength, holding her back, stifling her screams.

'The knife!' cried Lamont, with his usual selfish thought.

She threw it at him, but in the effort Marie cast her aside. Frantically she cried, in a piercing voice which rose above the storm, 'Help! He is escaping. The window!'

A second of silence, then there came deep voices and sounds of hurried footsteps.

'There is death on the point of the knife.' Again she held back the struggling Marie.

Lamont sprang to the window. Freedom was his. Another second—one more step forward, then the darkness would have received him, the night would have covered his flight. But that step was not to be made.

A man rose up suddenly from the gloom, a spare man with thin, nervous face. There could be no passing, no resisting, this new opponent. He had not strength to raise his hand against that figure.

'Sinclair!'

The single word burst from him as he fell back in a bath of terror. There was no hope now.

For hostile sounds uprose on every side. Like a man in a dream, he watched an officer, followed by two soldiers, entering the room at the door. These men were deemed sufficient to arrest one who would be unprepared. A larger band might have excited suspicion; besides, there might still be partisans of the White Chief hanging round the enclosures of the fort.

But as these entered a dreadful cry rang forth. Menotah was upon her knees, crying bitterly in this new sorrow. 'We may not turn back, if we have sworn to hate. If we pray for vengeance, the God will force it on us against the will.'

Sinclair advanced with an oath, and took her by the shoulder. 'What are you doing here? Helping him to escape—eh?'

'Yes,' cried Marie, fiercely. 'And she would have killed me—the savage!'

'You'd better get out while we give you the chance,' said the hunter, 'or you'll be taken and hung along with him.'

She raised her streaming eyes to his, until the grandeur of her romantic beauty touched even him. 'I care not. I am woman again now. That is why I could not harm him whom I had loved. Take me and hang me. See! I ask it of you. It will be pleasure after my suffering.'

Trembling and hopeless, Lamont stood against the wall, though the knife gleamed threateningly in his hand. Sinclair covered the window, one of the soldiers was backed against the closed door, before him stood the officer. The latter held a bright object, which glittered ominously beneath the lamp light.

'Come, Sinclair,' said the latter, 'leave that *nitchi* girl alone. She can't trouble our plans, but if we fool around here for long, some may turn up who will. We may have been watched coming here, and, mind, the Rebellion hasn't been long over.'

'You're right,' said the hunter. 'Well, I'm ready.'

The officer pointed. 'This is our man—the White Chief, eh?' he asked, in his strident tones.

Fiercely Menotah turned upon him. 'No! it is not. This man is innocent. The White Chief is dead. I know he is. I myself saw him—'

'Quit your darned noise,' interrupted the man. 'What the devil have you to do with it? I'll fire you out of the window, if you talk another word.'

'That's the White Chief, all right,' said Sinclair, with a slow, savage satisfaction. 'He's your man, officer.'

Menotah could not be repressed. 'You dare not touch him. That knife he holds is poisoned.'

The men looked at each other. Close quarters with the traitor meant certain death. But the officer was equal to the emergency.

'I've got a warrant for your arrest, and I'm going to take you alive or dead. I allow I'd rather have you alive, so I'm going to give you two minutes by my watch to chuck down that knife. None of us mean to be fixed by any more of your dirty tricks.' Then he raised his hand, with the revolver levelled against the prisoner's heart.

The last faint hope died, though he still mechanically retained his grasp of the knife.

Sinclair chuckled. 'I reckon I shall get square for that scar on my shoulder now,' he muttered.

Then Menotah passed before him and knelt before the officer. She lifted her beautiful moist eyes, with a last request, 'May I speak to him first—just for one moment? He was my husband once.'

The others burst into coarse laughter. Then the officer pushed her aside. 'I told you not to say another word, didn't I?'

'Don't let her speak to him,' cried Marie. 'She wants to free him.'

'How can I do so?' flashed Menotah. 'There are four men here, and I am unarmed. What can I do?'

'Better put her out of the house,' said Sinclair.

Her face was grand as she turned at him. 'Who saved your life in the forests of the Saskatchewan?'

The hunter turned red, and muttered something awkwardly.

'Ah! let me wish him good-bye. He was my husband, and I love him.'

Her excitement, the heat of returning passion, had made her again lovely. The hair fell in luxurious disorder, the bosom heaved, and eyes glittered between wet lashes. The officer observed all of these things, and did not give the order for her ejection. On the contrary, he bent down and whispered something into her ear. The others guessed what this was, and laughed again.

She did not flinch when the proposal was made. It was indeed what she had expected. 'Honour is nothing to me now.'

'It may be risky all the same,' said Sinclair, addressing the man in command.

She smiled bitterly. 'Are you still afraid of one weak girl?'

The officer bit at his moustache. Then he said, 'You can't have more than half a minute.'

'She may give him something,' cried Marie.

'Hold my hands.' She stretched them forth proudly.

The officer nodded, and the two soldiers came forward. They placed themselves on either side of the girl, and took each a hand. Then they crossed the floor.

She twisted herself in front of the men, who stood well back from the dreaded knife, and spoke a few words into Lamont's ear. Afterwards the three stepped back, and left him standing by the side of the lamp.

The officer pulled out his watch. 'The two minutes start now,' he said briefly.

Menotah drew near his side, falling a little behind in the deep shadow. Perhaps her beauty had never been so remarkable as at that moment. Her eyes were glowing with unnatural fire, the light intensified by dark lines beneath, and brilliant scarlet of the cheeks. The lips were parted half painfully. She was breathing fast, and fighting for each deep breath. For this was all the last effort of nature. The whole of her remaining life strength was being cast into one supreme endeavour to save the man who had wronged her. That colour was but the hot passion fever of the mind; the brightness of the eyes was closely akin to the light of madness. During that awful day she had not tasted food; sleep had scarcely been hers for the past month; now she was nothing but a shell, containing a single spark of fire, which would flash once, then die away for ever.

The officer had raised his revolver, and now covered Lamont. The traitor stood motionless in the same spot, still clutching the death knife. The seconds of time which made up that first minute ticked away without action on his part.

Lamont glanced wildly at the dark window, the silent soldier guarding it, then at the standard lamp which stood between them. Every eye was upon him. Sinclair knew that his triumph was complete. Marie, with large eyes of hatred, regarded the man who had won her young affections and had so grievously dishonoured her life. None thought of Menotah, as she stood in the shadow. She never for a second removed her gaze from the officer within reach of her hand; she noted his slightest movement; deliberately she counted the rapid pulsations of these two terrible minutes.

And the last of these now drew towards its close, Lamont had not stirred, nor did he show any

sign of dropping the murderous weapon.

'Fifteen seconds more.'

'You're a fool, Lamont,' muttered the hunter. 'Chuck the thing away, and be a man.'

'Ten.'

Menotah was quivering like an aspen in the breeze.

Grimly the watch ticked off the last few seconds.

The officer took a more deliberate aim, while every man held his breath.

'Time.'

Almost before the word had formed into sound, Menotah dashed the revolver from his hand.

'Now!'

Lamont hurled the lamp to the floor in front of him, then bounded forward in the darkness. The soldier moved to meet him, despite the almost certainty of death from the poisoned knife. But, instead of the fugitive, he caught in his arms the figure of a girl. Menotah had cast herself against him to assist the escape. They rolled together on the floor, and Lamont tumbled over them both. Then, with a desperate movement, he dragged himself to the window, until he clutched the ledge with his fingers. But the man caught him by the ankle. Menotah deliberately threw her whole weight upon the detaining arm, and it broke down beneath the strain.

The next second Lamont had dragged himself free. Then he clambered to his feet, and in almost the same motion leapt from the window. All heard the furious shaking of bushes beneath, the hurried click of a gate in the palisade, followed by loud beating of feet upon the hard road.

'After him!' shouted the officer, swearing violently in his rage. 'Shoot him! Club him—anything.'

'He's bound for the river,' shouted one of the men. Then he flung himself from the window. The other followed, and after him the officer.

Sinclair stood in the dark room, biting his hands. 'If he swims across and reaches the bush, we sha'n't see him again,' he muttered furiously.

Then he struck a match. The pale, sulphurous flame lit up the room weirdly. Marie's nerves had given way, and she lay in a chair sobbing with weakness.

The hunter brought in the lamp from outside. As darkness disappeared, Menotah rose from the ground and tottered with feeble motions towards the door. That frightful strain had been removed at last. The work for which she had retained life and strength was done. Her vengeance had been accomplished, so she might rest—rest in the peace of death, for now there remained no further duty in life.

She spoke in a low voice of anguish. 'Has he escaped? They did not seize him? Tell me.'

Sinclair turned viciously upon her. 'Damn you!' he snarled, 'I could fix you for this. You've robbed me of my revenge, after all my planning and waiting. But you'll have to pay the devil now. Wait till they come back. I tell you, if they haven't got him you'll swing instead. They'll hang you, right enough, for this.'

Madly she drank in the glad truth of his opening words. Then she moved again nearer the door, as though she would once more seek a hiding place.

But tension never fails to find the weakest spot.

Suddenly she flung both hands to her burning forehead, staggered on another couple of paces, then fell crushed to the floor, with a low, heart-breaking cry.

The kindly darkness of insensibility blotted away for a time her madness and her pain.

CHAPTER IX

DARKNESS

Thus the weak hand, which was to have dealt the death blow, gave life to the traitor and liberty to the betrayer. For a secret tendril of love still clung and quivered about the dead heart. This might not be killed entirely, nor stamped out by a mere effort of the will, though for long it lay quiescent, in the mood of eternal silence. The presence, the sight of the once loved, aroused that latent force into hot overwhelming life, banished all recollection of duty, cast into oblivion memory of the sacred oath, the curse of her shattered life.

She became woman again—that was the difference.

Once he had deserted her, and the heart flickered out in a wild grief. The one thought then was for vengeance. She lived for it; cried for it to the Spirit; her soul was fed with the longing, while

the waiting for it maintained the body in strength. Then it came, the life lay in her hand, she was bidden to crush it and satisfy all longing.

But instead she courted a felon's death in a wild effort to assist him in escaping. To save him she gladly offered to sacrifice life and honour, though both of these things were valueless, and dead fruit in her mouth.

For when she saw the figure she had loved, feeling returned in a mad torrent. Still she hated him for the vile treachery; she despised him for the lack of manly courage: but she could not lay a destroying hand upon the body she had worshipped. For she had loved him with a passion of which even he himself could know nothing. She made, at the dedication of Self, no empty lip promise; she offered no meaningless service of the tongue; but she offered the soul and life happiness.

In her false strength, all through the weary months of the northern winter, when she rocked the babe upon her knee, she had played the part. It was then her strong determination to do justice to her people, to obey her gods, to avenge her dishonoured self. Yet what was the result of this mighty striving after an imagined duty? When the moment arrived for the act which should for ever quench desire, when she heard the steps of the approaching soldiers, when she knew they would seize him she had loved, hang the one she had fondly caressed, then came the flood of reaction. The old sharp pain crept back to the body. Again she was woman, weak, foolish woman, with no thought but to protect, and, save the man—what mattered it whether he were worthy of the sacrifice?—who had first lit that sacred fire within her breast. She was fool, traitor, coward. That is what the disappointed men called her. Perhaps they were right.

Yet unwittingly she had leaned towards the teaching of the white man's God—the doctrine she had so heartily rejected. The power of love had of itself taught the heathen mind to act according to highest admonitions. Was there then something better and greater in that strange, misty faith. Could it be that the white God had pointed to the Religion of Love?

Presently, as Sinclair waited anxiously for the return of the pursuers, loud shouting uprose from the direction of the palisade. After his reply, noisy footsteps careered along, and a minute later three figures put in an appearance—Captain Robinson, behind his cigar; McAuliffe, with a long-necked bottle protruding from his pocket; Dave, with his short pipe and smug self-satisfaction. This trio had followed the former band at a safe interval, and were now burning to learn how things had gone.

They were somewhat taken aback to find Sinclair standing moodily in the yellow blot of lamp light, with a young woman sobbing hysterically in a chair, and Menotah lying without motion along the floor. The unexpected sight checked their exuberance.

'Goldam!' exclaimed the Factor. 'Say, Billy, what sort of a picnic is this, anyway?'

'He's gone,' replied the hunter, sourly.

'Not Lamont!' the others cried in unison.

Sinclair nodded. Then he pointed to the corpselike figure. 'She's tricked us all.'

Dave, who had completely forgotten events of the night preceding, became greatly concerned when he discovered the identity of the lifeless figure.

'You've gone to work and fixed her!' he shouted. 'Who did it? By holy heaven, Billy, if you had a hand in it, I'll fix you right now.'

'Quit it, Dave,' said the Captain. 'There's another gal here.'

'Damn 'em,' shouted Dave, wildly, 'I'll teach 'em to fix my poor gal! I'm going to start work with Billy here.'

He produced a great revolver from his hip pocket, but before he could bring it down to his elbow the others held him.

'Don't be a gol-darned fool, Dave,' said the Captain. 'Billy's our pard.'

Dave struggled and swore. 'My gal's dead.'

'She's right enough,' growled Sinclair; 'only fainted.'

Dave was himself again. 'Gimme your bottle, Alf. I'm going to give my gal a drink.'

The Factor gave him the bottle, then asked Sinclair to detail events. 'Tell us how the flush was bob-tailed, Billy.'

The hunter obeyed, and startled his listeners by the account of Menotah's courage.

'Well, well,' said the Captain, when he had finished. 'So he's got right away.'

'They're after him,' said Sinclair hopefully. 'He didn't get much of a start, and they're armed.'

McAuliffe had a word to say. 'Pshaw! as if he couldn't get away from those bullet stoppers,' he cried disdainfully. 'Tell you, Lamont's a match for that crowd. Might as well try and catch a badger on open prairie as him. The badger jumps into a hole and pulls it in after him. Lamont's

the same.'

In the meantime, Dave was half choking Menotah with the fiery spirit. 'When whisky fails, order the coffin,' he proclaimed, as she began to cough.

Sinclair listened at the window. The night was very dark and pleasantly cool by then. Rain was falling heavily. 'They should be back soon.'

'It's not far to the river, and he'll swim that,' said the Captain.

'Then he'll be all right,' added the Factor. 'The bullet stoppers won't follow. First place, they can't swim; if they could, they'd be too darned scared of getting wet.'

The hunter turned to Dave. 'If you want to save her, you'd better get her away before they come back.'

'I'll chaw them up if they try to start fooling,' said Dave.

'You can't do it. They'd hang her quick enough for this night's business.'

Dave rubbed his coarse hand along the girl's smooth neck. 'They don't get her from Dave Spencer. We'll walk our chinks when we hear the bullet stoppers coming.'

Menotah stirred slightly, while a faint groan burst from her lips. Slowly she was returning from the bliss of insensibility to the awful dreariness of life. Then the Factor bethought himself of offering assistance to Marie.

So he snatched the bottle from the unwilling Dave, came over and touched her awkwardly on the shoulder. Not for years had he spoken with a 'civilised' woman.

'No darned use in crying, far as I can see.'

Marie dropped her handkerchief a little, but made no reply.

'I reckon tears are sort of unsatisfactory.'

Still no answer.

McAuliffe grew desperate. 'Never mind Lamont. He's not worth troubling over, anyway. See here! this is first-class whisky. Have a good pull at it. It'll make you feel fine and comfortable.'

He rubbed his coat sleeve over the neck, then pushed it close to her mouth.

Then she raised an angry flushed face. 'Leave me alone!' she cried.

'You'll have a drink?' said the Factor, blankly. 'It's fine whisky; I'm not fooling.'

'I don't want it,' she said, with a passionate movement.

This rendered McAuliffe speechless. The person who refused a drink of good whisky was, in his estimation, something worse than a criminal.

'If you want to do something for me,' continued Marie, 'you can take her out of the house. She has no business here.'

'Reckon none of us have,' the Factor managed to exclaim. Then he comforted himself secretly by means of the rejected bottle.

Here Sinclair buttoned up his coat and announced his intention of going down to the river. Menotah had sufficiently recovered to walk, so Dave, with a stubborn determination not to have her captured, proposed they should return to the hotel and learn final results the next day.

The others agreed. 'How about you, though?' asked Sinclair.

Marie saw she had been addressed. 'I shall stay here,' she said fiercely. 'I want to learn whether the soldiers have caught that traitor. To-morrow I can go home.'

'She's provided for,' muttered the Factor. 'Come on, Captain. Dave's got his gal.'

They went down the slippery wooden steps, while silence fell again over the frame house where human passion had raged so fiercely that night.

Three men, heated with running, wet to the skin by the heavy rain, came to the shelving bank of the Red River. About three minutes earlier another runner had reached that spot. Without hesitation, he had ploughed a rapid course through the mud reach and sought the deeper water. The former had arrived in time to see the latter swimming towards the opposite shore, putting all the force he could muster into the arm strokes.

They stopped at the edge of the mud, with the knowledge that the adventurer had beaten them.

Lightning still played softly across the heavens. The officer pulled his revolver, then fired shot after shot into the deceptive red glow, glimmering over the waters round the indistinct and distant swimmer. With the shot that emptied the chamber they saw the fugitive drag himself to

land by aid of the long willows which swept the stream. For a moment he paused at the foot of the tree-spread bank, to coolly wave his hand in their direction by way of farewell. The next minute he was swallowed up by the dark, pathless line of bush.

'No good following him there,' muttered one of the men resignedly.

The officer swore softly to himself. 'Follow! I should say not. He's as good a bushman as any *nitchi*!

Sullenly they began to retrace their steps, the officer wondering how he could summon courage to face his superiors; but before they had gone far they came across the hunter, tramping stolidly along the rapidly miring trail.

'Where is he?' cried the latter eagerly, as he recognised them.

The officer was sulkily silent, but one of the men answered for him. 'Safe in the bush.'

The hunter's face fell, for he had allowed himself to hope a capture might be made in the mud flats.

'Well, well,' he muttered savagely, as he joined the small band and tramped dismally back with them, 'the White Chief has escaped. That's the devil's business.'

Lamont did not penetrate very far into the dripping bush. He knew there could be no search before daybreak, and by that time he would be in a place of absolute safety. So he rested for some time beneath a bluff of black poplar, the while he planned his future course of action.

There were plenty of friendly half-breeds in the immediate vicinity. In one of these huts or dug-outs he could safely hide for a day or so, with his former disguise resumed. For he could make up and act the part of the native Indian to the life. Then he would steal or borrow a *shaganappi* pony and ride some night to the States, only forty miles distant in a bee-line across prairie. After, he would escape from that continent at his leisure.

'There's a rising in Brazil,' he muttered thoughtfully. 'That will be a good place for me to try my hand in next. A new rifle, and then for the strongest side. Besides, there are fine women among the Creoles.'

He laughed quietly to himself in the glory of this unexpected freedom and new life, then gathered up a handful of the clammy red clay which had earlier given the great river its name. He squeezed forth the moisture, then rubbed the soft slime across his features.

Next he scraped some powder from the roots of the black poplar and applied this also in carefully arranged markings. The change was startling. It would have required a very keen eye to have penetrated that disguise. Then he made his cautious way into the bush, destroying his trail as he went. There were no bloodhounds in Garry, very few Indians or breeds would lend assistance to track the White Chief. Even so, none of them were better bushmen than himself. He was entirely safe from pursuit.

Once he thought of Menotah, but then he only laughed at the weak foolishness of a loving woman; he thought, indeed, more of Marie, but then he frowned with a longing to get her again within his power.

So he passed on until he came to a place of shelter.

Shortly before autumn, he made safe landing at Rio Janeiro.

CHAPTER X

McAULIFFE'S RESOLUTION

By the side of the Great Saskatchewan it was darkness and chill evening, with dead leaves spreading upon grey rocks, and sharp sting of frost along the breeze. For winter was again drawing near, closing round the land that year earlier than usual. The following day would witness the departure of the last boat, and after that dreary event the days would roll monotonously one into the other, until it became a matter of difficulty to reckon the actual flight of weeks. Christmas and New Year would pass unrecognised, the February blizzards would shriek, and the ice hills raise snowy caps to a leaden sky. Thus all would remain in desolation, until spring, rising with warm breaths from south and west, should disperse the snow palaces, break the ice fetters and bring new life to earth.

Within the fort a light shone dully. Presently the door opened and McAuliffe appeared. Somewhat wearily he gazed at the heaving line of bush ahead, with the black points of rock between. Soon he perceived the full moon, just rising above the tree tops, defining strongly the tapering summit of each sombre pine. He shivered, then buttoned his worn coat tightly. The frost crept noiselessly along, stiffening each grass blade, while not an insect stirred down the biting air.

Massive in proportion though the Factor still was, he appeared thinner than on that well remembered night of the fight. Also a careworn expression had settled over his face, while the

grey in hair and beard was certainly more pronounced. When he stepped out to the open and commenced to pace up and down, it might have been noticed that his step had lost much of its former briskness, that the body leaned forward at a decided angle. He was growing elderly now, and neglected to give the body such care and attention as the years demanded.

A few hours earlier, he and Dave Spencer had quarrelled with such bitterness that Justin had been compelled to interfere. Menotah was the bone of contention. She had prevailed upon Dave to bring her back across the lake, that she might bid a last farewell to the land of her fathers. Then she would return with him to Selkirk, as the slave to do his unpleasant bidding. The time had now arrived. The boat was about to leave, so Dave had commanded the girl to be in readiness to sail with him early on the following morning. She had consented, asking only a single favour—that he would give her that last night entirely to herself. She wished to sleep in the hut, where she had spent the happiest days of youth; to go over again each hallowed spot; to revisit the inanimate objects, each of which brought back some sacred association. *In the morning she would be his, and he might do with her whatsoever he desired.*

When sober, McAuliffe's heart was large and sympathetic. He was sorry for the changed girl in his rough way, also secretly disgusted at the constant manner of Dave's bullying. Besides, he did not want to lose her from his district. So, as absolute despot of that part of the country, he had ordered Dave to relinquish his claims. The natural result followed, and the Factor came very near to smashing Dave up, as he had threatened. The sequel was that Dave, ejected from the fort after the manner of Denton, found himself compelled to seek shelter for the night within the boat.

The Factor was in a meditative mood, as he passed up and down on his evening exercise, the red sparks of his pipe glowing occasionally in the silver air. There was the rugged patch of bush, where Sinclair had frightened him so badly. That was on the night just about a year before, when Lamont made off, and Menotah went wild with her grief. Further along was a rough irregular mould, covered thickly with pine needles and brown cones. He did not clear these away from Winton's grave, because he had a superstitious fancy that they were keeping the dead body dry and warm.

Like most men accustomed to much living in solitude, he spoke aloud to himself as he walked along.

'Sort of seems to me everything's over now. There's not much for an old chunk like me to do, 'cept settle down quiet and wait for my name to get stuck on the death list. There's old Billy settling comfortable at home. Lamont knocking around somewhere, the Lord knows where, likely enough deceiving some other poor fool of a gal with his handsome face and fine ways. And here's old Mac himself, planted again in his district, just about as lonely as ever. Didn't have so much of a time down in Garry after all. Afraid I made a darned old fool of myself; always do when I get loose for a while, but then it's so quiet and desolate 'way up here, with nobody but the *nitchies* to talk to. Folks don't think, when they see us old chaps rocketing around, what it is to find yourself in a civilised sort of place, where there are lots of people, with nice bright saloons, where you can get your own mixture fresh and spicy, and a few good fellows on each side of you. Well, well, I'll not be leaving the fort many more times. Then they'll get to work and plant me alongside of young Winton. There we'll lie, a couple of good pards, until the angels come fooling around to wake us. Well, well, life's a queer thing anyway.

He laughed a little sadly, and rubbed his hands together to restore circulation. Suddenly he bent quickly. 'Ah! there's that rheumatism jumping up my leg again. Reckon I shouldn't be strolling around on a cold night. Guess I'll get inside.'

Presently he closed the door of the fort and watched Justin shoving pine sticks into the box stove. More interested than usual, he gazed upon the small bent figure, with grey hair falling over the neck, and heavily lined, expressionless face. Then he exclaimed,—

'Say, boy, how are the years going for you?'

The half-breed looked up and shook his head slowly.

'Don't know, eh? I guess you can't be far off sixty, boy. Anyway, I reckon you're older than this child.'

The other merely grunted. Age was a matter of perfect indifference to him.

'That's what it is, Justin. We're getting two stiff old baldheads. Say, boy, mind the time I thrashed Que-dane?'

A light crept into the half-breed's heavy eyes. He nodded his head violently.

'Couldn't do it now. Haven't got the nerve.'

'He walk this way now,' said Justin, shambling in awkward fashion across the floor.

'Must have twisted his spine. Didn't want to spoil him, but I reckon it did him good. He hasn't been stealing other men's wives since, anyway.'

There was a dreary pause before the Factor continued, 'We won't lose track of days this winter, boy. I'll fix the calendar right up behind the stove, so as we can see it easy of an evening. When I forget to mark off the day, you let me know before I get to bed. We got terrible off the reckoning last year. Time we thought Christmas was 'way behind New Year. We'll have some fun this year,

just you and I, boy. I'll make a fine big pudding, and you shall eat it, eh?'

He laughed heavily, then the half-breed, who was not communicative at any time, left the 'office' to prepare the supper moose meat. So the Factor was again left to his uncongenial thoughts.

'Darn it, I'm terribly lonely to-night. Feeling sort of uncomfortable, too. Got to pull through the winter without a friend to talk to or quarrel with. An old chap like me ought to have grandchildren fooling round his knees, digging into his pockets for candies, wanting him to monkey around with them, or spin long lies by way of yarns. I should have stayed east and got married. Then I might have known a decent sort of life. Well, this sort's got to slip off some time.'

He sat at the table, drumming his big fingers on it fretfully. Presently the virtuous fit wrapped itself more closely round his soul. Then his musings became of the following nature,—

'Going to turn over a new leaf right now. Going on a different sort of track from this day forth. There's to be no more deep drinking, or any such bad habits. I'm going to be what Peter used to try and make out he was. I start this night. Some fellows are always fixing up new resolutions—a brand new set once a month regular. Believe they only set them up just for the fun of knocking them down again. I'm not that way. 'Tisn't often I make a resolution, but when I do I stick to it. Goldam! I hang on to it by the eyelids. It's time I thought of turning reformed character, for I'm shuffling along in life pretty fast, getting down to the last few years at a terrible rate.'

He paused in his reflections, as if summoning courage to form a mighty resolution. Soon he wagged his head gravely.

'There's my winter stock of whisky just laid up. A fellow can't resist the smell of a nice mixed glass. If I once start at it, I shall slide back to the old life, and not be a darned bit better. I'll fix that racket right off.'

In his stentorian voice he called out to the half-breed.

There was a slow shuffling within the little passage, then Justin appeared from the kitchen, his tobacco-charged mouth moving slowly.

'You mind my fresh whisky keg—one Dave's just brought along for me, eh?'

The other grunted in affirmation.

'Roll it outside, boy, turn on the tap, and let it run dry.'

The order sped forth in a breath. After speaking, the Factor sat sheepishly gazing at the lamp, half ashamed and half frightened.

Justin stared at his master with unspoken sorrow. Even he felt it a matter of grief, to behold in a man of the Factor's size and strength an obvious weakening of reason. Had he been commanded to go forth and murder someone—that would have been explicable. But to waste the whisky!

'Git now, Justin. Hustle yourself, and let it run. Tell you, this religious fit won't last much longer.'

The half-breed grunted in more knowing a fashion, then shuffled away, presumably to execute the heart-breaking mandate.

Left to himself again, McAuliffe muttered softly, 'Well, I've seen something new to-night. I know now what Justin looks like when he's surprised. That's my first good stroke of work. Now I must think out another one.' Then he added regretfully, 'I shall be kicking myself for having done it in less than a week.'

Then he allowed his thoughts to wander over past events. After a few minutes his lips parted again, and he drifted off into a fresh soliloquy, this time addressing the pipe which lay on the table in front,—

'Now, if I was well enough fixed with shin plasters, I should get to work, resign my post here, and make off east, 'way back to St Catherine's. Then I'd settle down in a little frame house and live comfortable. Wouldn't cost so much. I shouldn't want to go deep into household expenses. Just that, with a couple of suits of clothes, one in spring, another for winter, tobacco, and a little bit for the saloons. S'pose I ought to give that up, though. Well, it's no use thinking about it. This sort of life's spoilt me for anything else. I've got no relations, nobody depending on me. Still, it seems a sort of pity and a waste of your last years to rust out here in the solitude.'

He rose from his chair and paced the narrow floor. 'That's where young Winton used to sit, sucking his pipe stem; Billy over there, on the York factory box; while Peter would be snivelling in yon corner.' His face lit up suddenly into a smile. 'Peter got a fortnight. 'Twas an extra bad case, the magistrate said. He'd have to leave the fort soon as they let him out of the cooler. That magistrate's a sharp lad. He could see through Peter's virtues clean enough.'

After another turn, he bent to rub his legs. 'Well, well, I almost reckon I'll lie down for sleep. I'm sort of tired, and this dirty rheumatism is jumping around in my legs again. Nothing like bed on a frosty night when you're not feeling good.'

A sudden thought perplexed his mind. He stood wagging his great head slowly. 'There's no real harm in it. Not in moderation. All the best men say that. Besides, it's hard to go without it, terrible hard. I do hope Justin didn't think I was talking seriously.'

To ease his mind, he again called out loudly to the half-breed. A muffled grunt came back from the direction of the kitchen.

'Done what I told you, boy?'

A decided reply in the negative was speedily returned.

The Factor rubbed his hands together cheerfully. 'Don't do it, Justin,' he called out. 'That crazy sort of fit's over. Say, boy, mix me a good stiff glass. Take one yourself to keep the frost out.'

After which command he paced the floor again, muttering, 'Darn it, whisky mayn't be a necessity, still a fellow can't pull along without it.'

Presently a curious sound came from within, and arrested his attention. After listening, he dived into the passage, there to discover the cause of disturbance. Justin was pouring some hot water from a kettle into glasses half full of a dark brown compound. But, besides this, he was indulging in an unheard of performance.

He was laughing to himself, with occasional chuckles, as the water splashed into the glasses, and a mist of steam rose round his head.

CHAPTER XI

THE HEART'S PEACE

Once more out to the lonely forest.

Those dark trees of death, the ever-sighing pines, tossed their solemn heads in unquiet motion; boughs chafed one against the other with moaning sound; the wind passed with dreary murmur through hanging clusters, causing at times the skulls and other grisly trophies of the death tree to scrape with horrid fitfulness one against the other. It was late night, and the moon shone with extraordinary brightness, while frost needles quivered along the silvery air. Even the dead leaves, carpeting thickly the open spaces, glittered radiantly with Nature's diamonds, while the soil became crisp and grey. Above the distant trees might be seen the shivering spindles of the Aurora. These crept up the sky with strange undecided movement, then retreated with a shudder, to again advance.

In that unutterably weird conflict of lights, the white walls of the fort were dimly visible. For long a dull yellow gleam poured from the single window, casting a tremulous shaft across the open, a sickly beam of light, in the heart of which trembled the frost crystals. Suddenly a dark shadow passed unsteadily, the light disappeared, the window grew black, night settled closely round the log walls.

Even then, at another mean dwelling, situated some way along the faintly defined trail, a feeble ray appeared. The crazy door was partially open, while a slow wood fire burnt within, the smoke winding its way from a hole in the grass roof. At the threshold stood a figure, strangely bent, gazing out on the white night. He seemed to have no feeling of the biting cold, though the weak hands were blue and shrivelled, and the grey face pinched with grief, hideous also with embittered age. Those bleared eyes saw little, his tottering knees could scarce support the withered frame, no thickness of clothing might furnish life warmth to the parched limbs. He was like the dead branch of a tree, which has been snapped from the parent trunk and lies rotting upon the ground, to be broken by the feet of those passing.

The trembling jaws moved faster. The dry lips parted to form the words of his customary evening salutation to the Spirit. Sounds fell from the almost powerless tongue, murmurs which could not disturb the soft sighing of the keen, frost-laden wind.

'I live,' he gasped, 'and I shall live, for the gods have forgotten me. They have left me here to decay and not to die, to fall limb from limb, while breath remains in the body, and the heart within stirs feebly. They are all gone, those with whom I lived. The men who sprang up with me have passed through the fire. Those who were born when I was already old have gone to the shadow land, white-headed and full of years. But I live. The god passes me as one not worth the taking.'

'What happiness is there in life? Memory has gone from me, and I have none to call friend. Nor do I love any, be it man or god. She for whom I lived is traitor. My affection has changed to the bitterness of hatred, and all that lies upon my tongue is a curse. Where is the beauty of life?'

'The God of the white men would not listen to my prayers, perchance He had not the power, and to the voice of my pleading was He dumb. Now have I come back to the gods of my fathers, the great gods, who are at least as powerful. Yet from them I receive no answer, nor does any message stir within me through the night. Perchance there are no gods. Perchance the world is ruled by evil passion and cruel might.'

Dry leaves rustled beneath footsteps. But the useless ears were closed to all sounds from without.

'I live,' he repeated, clutching with claw-like hand the corner of his blanket. 'Life is mine, but I

need it not. Long have I lived to gather much wisdom. Ay, and I shall live.'

Along, in the full light of the white moon, came the figure of a woman, upright and stern. She gazed neither to the right nor left, but kept the eyes, cold as the crystals that cut her face, fixed upon the winding path that trailed away in front. She was scantily clad, her head uncovered, save for the wild beauty of luxuriant hair; her feet were bare, and crushed, without feeling, the frost-covered leaves. Hanging from her shoulders was a trembling, frightened bundle. A child, shivering with the cold, wondering at his mother's sternness; a child, who touched her icy cheek with tiny fingers, who cried again and again the one love-word which had always before that night brought to him some response,—

'Mother! Oh, mother!'

She was insensible, alike to the wailing of her child and the sharpness of frost bite. Up to the hut door she came, until her cloak almost swept against the crouched figure, yet without sign of recognition, with no turn of the head. But the Ancient knew her. As she approached and struck his vision, he crept feebly back, gathering his blanket more closely round him, lest it should suffer contamination by touch. As she passed, unheeding that the last friend had forsaken her, he collected his failing energies, spat after her, raised his hands with malediction, and spoke bitter words of execration. All this effort might have been spared the feeble frame, for she trod on through the night with no heed to his curses, regardless even of his presence.

So he crawled weakly into the hut and closed the door.

But she kept on her course, dead to the present, forgetful of the past, conscious only of the immediate future. Her body brushed apart silver-lined bush, scattered the light hoar frost from dried grass stalks, and still she gazed before her, still she clasped the trembling child without word or sign. For her, joy had been spent; now even grief was a thing of the past. Behind her lay darkness, one stern resolution lay in front—then darkness again.

She came to a rugged rock, half covered with clinging bush. Here memory may have stirred the cold mind, for she paused, allowing her eyes to rest for a moment upon the black, glistening surface. Here had she stood on the evening previous to the fight; here had she chanted the happy song of pure heart joy, provoking the envy of all else that was beautiful in nature; here had Antoine admonished her of dangers impending, here also had that advice been laughed away. Through the forest, to the left, spread the river pool, where she had been wont to lie on summer afternoons to admire the beauty that smiled at her from the peaceful waters. That pool now flashed beneath the weird lights; the rock on which she had so often stretched her young body was still to be found unchanged. But what picture would that mirror now reveal. Where was the face of beauty, the lips curling into laughter, the eyes dancing with joy light, the smiles that had once dimpled the waves, and the soft features moulded into perfect lines of grace? Where? Ah, where? Vanished—departed—melted.

Gone. Gone for ever. So the dead leaves rained thickly from the cold trees, while icy winds moaned, and earth shivered at the approach of winter. For the brightest colours must fade, and everything living must see decay.

She departed from that spot, yet burying at each step some blissful memory of youth, and took the trail that led to the river. Soon the rush and roar of the swollen torrent beat dully upon her ears. At dreaded intervals the fitful thunder of the great rapids came trembling along the way. Still the set countenance remained unaltered, nor was there a word of comfort for the sobbing child.

Presently she broke from the last bushes and stood upon the brink. A wide stretch of river spread before her, burning and flashing beneath the gorgeous light of the moon. On the opposite shore, dreary pines tossed their dark heads and beckoned her to come. Far down the rushing stream were faint appearances of threatening rocks and a white foam line. Such were indications of the angry rapids. Here the waters boiled round jagged rock fragments, and light spray was hurled high into frosty air. Here roared and shrieked against the pale stars the Niagara of the Great Saskatchewan.

She stood upon the crumbling rock edge for many weary minutes, fearfully watching the turbulent waters, the wavering mind filled with many a strange perplexing doubt. Immediately beneath, rising and falling on the gentle waves beneath the bank, appeared a canoe, rasping upon the rock and lightly secured by a birch fibre to a willow branch overhanging the stream. At the bottom of the frail craft lay a single paddle. But this gleaming object, and nothing besides.

Presently she spoke aloud to her sole companions—the icy winds and unknown powers of Nature.

'It is all so long ago, and yet this is but the second winter of time. I have lived through it, and now must face the end. None may tell me where I am going. This I myself know—I cannot be punished more than I have suffered, I cannot suffer more than I have been already punished.'

The auroral lights crept trembling along the sky. Behind her the bushes shook drearily.

'If there be no happiness in the world whither I am going, there can at least be no greater sorrows.'

She was now in that complete solitude for which she had craved. Alone, entirely alone, with none to see, none to pity. The bar of race cut her off from the rest of the world, and upon her weak

shoulders lay the sin of others. This was the weight which might now be shaken off.

Again she cast her unfathomable glance upon the foaming river, and gazed at the fragile canoe, which rocked restlessly from side to side.

The dregs of the life cup were bitter indeed. Her own people hated her. On her approach they had crept away, with hidden faces. She was a pestilence when she stirred abroad. For she had dared to break the great oath, to cast dishonour again upon her tribe, to insult the dead father's memory. This was a crime which might not be pardoned. So her gods also had turned away, for she had broken their highest laws of right and duty. Vengeance had been placed in her hands—more, forced upon her, and yet—yet she had not strength, she lacked courage, to strike with that fearful weapon when it thus lay within her grasp. For that, also, she must suffer.

Darkness was everywhere in the world, yet she was about to plunge into a greater gloom. Who would be there, on that shadow way, to meet the broken spirit and bid it rest? Not the father, not even Muskwah. They were surely in the bright joyland, which must be eternally forbidden to her.

Perchance—how impossible a hope, yet how soothing—there might be another God of Whom she knew nothing. There might be a God so merciful as to care even for those who had not called upon Him during life, so compassionate as to pity one who had been deceived and betrayed. Ah, if there was such a God to receive her, to take her up in His arms, to breathe upon the dead heart and give it life again, how joyous would be the act of immortality!

She bowed her head, and moved slowly forward.

'It is time. Time for the great sleep; time for the peace. Only one little struggle, one quick gasp as the eternal change takes place, one stifling moment of agony, then I shall be as many are and all must be. For to this end must we come, and what lies beyond none may clearly tell.'

She crept down the steep bank. The child lay upon her back, stiff with cold, scarcely owning strength to cry. She swept through the willows and entered the canoe. The next instant she had cast off the clinging birch fibre. With one bold stroke of the paddle the light skiff darted toward mid-stream.

Another, then another, until the centre of the mighty river was reached. Here the waves sobbed round the paper-like keel, leaping aside in bars of burnished silver. The moon, reddened by the tints of the northern lights, poured forth a flood of radiance; the grim Spirit of the Waters uplifted pale arms and cried, 'Come.'

Swiftly the current pulled the canoe round towards the abyss; rapidly it floated down between the steep banks and gloomy line of forest waving on each side; down, until the white mass of foam became a snow mountain; down to the rugged rocks, where black jaws were dripping with flying spray; down, still down, towards the gate of Eternity.

She knelt, with paddle grasped firmly in both hands. Before her wailed the child. The baby lips found strength to release faint sounds. Again that tremulous cry beat upon the freezing air,—

'Mother! Oh, mother!'

Then she bent forward, to gaze earnestly upon the dark eyes, the small, round cheeks, the curling hair clustering over the little brow, the delicate shaping of the limbs. Soon she spoke again,—

'We will go together, child, for you are all mine. We may not be parted. I brought you into this world in a moment of horror; so now we will leave it together. You shall clasp my neck and lay your soft cheek against mine. You shall nestle to the bosom that has nurtured you. Then shall you endure no pang, for I will bear the pain for both. Quietly and painlessly you shall fall asleep, as you were wont to do upon my knee. Sleep, until you wake in a fair world on a flowery grass plain, beneath the full light of the sun. It may be so; yet it may be still darkness. It may be that when you drop to sleep in yonder waters—that waking will never come.'

Swifter grew the flight of the canoe, more furious the hungry roar ahead.

'Oh, son! Child of my body! Best of my flesh! Could you but know what a service I am rendering you, if you could look back, even as I can, you would raise your head in blessing and call me merciful. I am saving you. I am lifting from you the awful burden of life. I am taking you from the trouble and the treachery, which would surely break your spirit if you lived. 'Tis only a few more minutes now, then all will lie in the past, and we shall join the unknown. Ah, you do not know, you cannot understand that. You cannot feel yourself standing on the last ledge of life, before that black chasm which is the end of motion. You do not know that the gate is about to clash behind us, driving us forth into darkness. Or is it light? That we may soon tell. We may know then, also, whether there is a God Who gazes upon mortal suffering with the eye of pity.'

The foaming line was now awfully close; the roar of the waters beat upon her soul; feather-like spray, caught by the wind, lashed her resolute face.

Then she raised the paddle on high, before casting it far into the turbulent flood. Fascinated by this gleaming guide, she watched it floating away in front, dancing merrily upon the silver-tipped waves.

'So I cast away my life.'

No mortal effort could now snatch them from the inevitable end. Still down they drifted, nearer—

closer to the frightful Niagara of tumult and death. Once again she bent, to gather in her arms the sobbing child. She twined the tiny arms round her neck; she nestled the cold cheek against his; she clasped him close to her heaving breast, and waited for the end.

Nor was it long in coming upon them. The canoe quivered as the great waves lashed and licked the frail sides. The paddle struck upon a black-jawed rock, glanced off quickly, hung trembling for a second on that unutterable brink, shone like a mirror in the moonlight—then disappeared. Below, the savage elements sucked it in, roared lustily, then tossed their white crests with fresh shrieks for other victims.

The livid-faced woman saw, and shuddered for the first time on that awful journey.

'It has shown me the way; I must follow.'

The canoe swung sullenly round, then darted like a bird towards destruction. It struck also upon the black rock, where spray flew high in clouds. Round again, gradually quickening in speed. Sideways it floated to the awful white line which marked eternity.

Her heart seemed to have ceased its feeble beat; the breath stifled her with hot gasps. Sky, river, forest had vanished, blotted out by a raging sea of red flames, boiling and hissing blood-like before her eyes. Memory came back on the torrent of that grim flood. The past lay outspread before the mind. Every small detail shot forth in sharp relief, each careless action writhed from the seething atmosphere of her horror and imagination.

'This is Death! How awful a thing it is.'

The cold winds snatched the foam from the waves, and tossed it above rock masses in furious revelry. The canoe had reached that awful line which marked the extinction of two lives. It shuddered upon the fearful brink. It hovered, like a bird of prey, before making the fatal plunge beneath. It trembled, and groaned again with the angry buffetings. It succumbed to the irresistible force, to the mighty, unseen hand drawing it down, down—and then—ah, then—

At the foot of the great rapids black rocks glistened in the moonlight; foam-flecked waves darted up to beat the air; angry waters rolled and tossed like wind-swept snow heaps, crying forth with the deep voice of thunder. Ice crystals still danced and shivered in the biting wind.

A blood-red gleam slowly fought its way from the north, ascending the heavens to dye the shafts of the auroral light a bright rose colour.

On either side of the river, black pines swayed beneath the eternal whisperings of the forest. The grim hand of winter slowly fringed the sombre tresses with silvery beauty.

The colours were black and silver, with red above. The blending of the first two made the complexion of mourning. Is not the last the colour of life's mystery? Red gold, red blood, red flush of shame, red blush of love. What else is there in life worth taking?

Onward rushed the Great Saskatchewan, with a sobbing and murmuring, while loose shingle hissed and rattled upon the shore, and leafless bushes swept the waters. Then the ice lord crept from drear confines of the Arctic, with the great chains in his white hand. Soon would he fasten down those clamouring waves to a long silence.

So, to this day, no Indian lands at that point, nor stretches his tent near the rocky ledge which faces the great rapids. And the name of the place is still called, *Menotah-toopah*—the passing place of the heart which knew not sorrow.

GLOSSARY

Bandy—Flow of language

Brace of bullets—Pair of aces

Bulldog—A large horse-fly possessing formidable jaws

Bummers—Idle loafers

Chores—Odd jobs

Corked—Greatly surprised

Coyotes—Prairie wolves

Craps—Dice

Croak off—Die

Cut didoes—To excessively enjoy, or make a fool of, oneself

Diddle—Get the better of

Dosh—Money

Gall—Impudence

Goldam—A local expletive

Goldeye—A small, highly edible fish, common in the Saskatchewan
Good—Physically well and strong

Heelhi-Manitou—The good, or great, Spirit
Hopping—Dying

Jag (Jamboree)—A drunken spree

Kanikanik (spelt in various other ways)—The red willow

Megrims—The 'blues'
Moonhead—Madman
Mosquito hawk—A large species of dragon fly
Muskegs—Moss swamps
Mutchi-Manitou—The lesser, or evil, Spirit

Nitchies—Natives

Quirk—Laugh

Raddled—Drunk
Razzle-witted—Crazy

Scrapping—Fighting or quarreling
Shaganappi—A rough, native-bred horse
Sharpshooters—Cigars
Shin plasters—Dollar bills, *i.e.*, money
Slick—Easy, pleasant, etc.
Snuff out—Die
Spoiling—Extremely anxious
Suds—State of depression

Totem—Every man is descended from some animal. This animal is known as the Totem. Thus one man's Totem may be a buffalo, another's a beaver, and so on
Truck—Miscellaneous articles
Twitter—Hurry

Wasayap—An Indian maid of old mythology
Waterlogged—Done for, beaten, etc.
Worth shucks—Not worth anything at all

THE END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MENOTAH: A TALE OF THE RIEL REBELLION

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