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Mystery Story for Boys, by
Ethel C. Brill**

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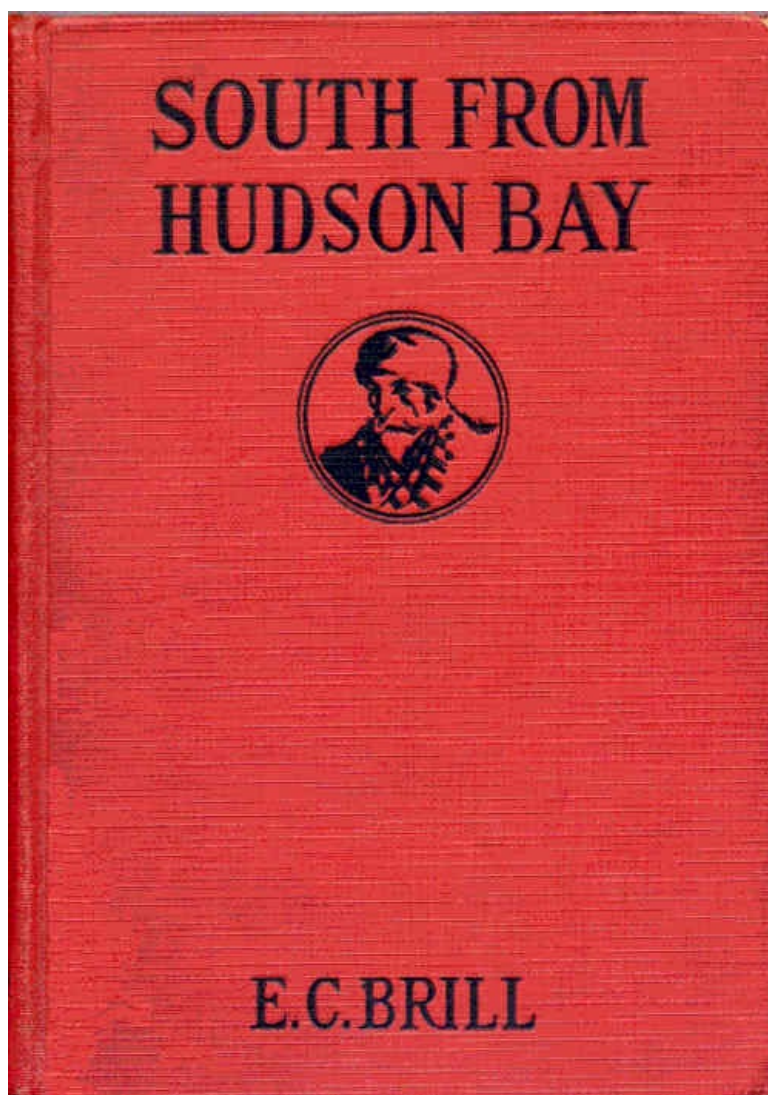
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STORY FOR BOYS ***





“WHEN LAROQUE’S BOAT REACHED THE
LANDING, THE SHORE WAS LINED WITH
PEOPLE.”

“South from Hudson Bay.” ([See Page 82](#))

SOUTH FROM HUDSON BAY

AN ADVENTURE AND MYSTERY
STORY FOR BOYS

BY
E. C. BRILL

ILLUSTRATED



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ADVENTURE AND MYSTERY

STORIES FOR BOYS

By E. C. BRILL

Large 12 mo. Cloth. Illustrated.

THE SECRET CACHE
SOUTH FROM HUDSON BAY
THE ISLAND OF YELLOW SANDS

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I

THE NEW LAND

Before Walter Rossel was wholly awake, even before he opened his eyes, he realized that the ship was unusually quiet. There was only a slight rolling motion from side to side, a dead roll. Was she caught in the ice again, or had she reached Fort York at last? Could it be that the long voyage was really over? Walter hurried into the few clothes he had taken off, and ran up on deck, hoping to see land close by.

He was disappointed. He could see nothing but gray water, a line of white where waves were breaking on a long bar, and the dim, shadowy forms of the other ships, hulls, masts, and spars veiled in dense fog. There was no ice in sight, yet all three vessels were riding at anchor.

Eagerly the boy turned to a sailor who was scrubbing the deck. Walter's native tongue was French, but he had picked up a little English during the voyage, enough to ask why the ships were at anchor, and to understand part of the man's reply. They had crossed the bar in the night, the sailor said, and were lying in the shallow water of York Flats. Over there to the south, hidden in the fog, was the shore.

The news that they had arrived off Fort York spread rapidly among the passengers on the *Lord Wellington*. Men, women, and children crowded on deck, gazed into the fog, questioned one another and the sailors in French, German, and broken English, and talked and laughed excitedly. A little boy of seven and his older sister, a bright-faced girl of thirteen with hazel eyes and heavy braids of brown hair, joined Walter and poured out eager questions.

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"They say we are at the end of our voyage," cried the girl, "but where is the land?"

Walter pointed to the south. "We'll see it when the fog lifts. Does your father know we are almost at Fort York?"

"Yes, he is coming on deck. There he is now."

A middle aged man, thin and somewhat stooped, was coming towards them, his pale face smiling and eager. "Well, my boy," he greeted Walter, "this is good news indeed. We shall soon be settled on our own farm. Think of that, children, our own farm, a far larger one than we could ever dream of having in Switzerland."

"Yes, Monsieur Perier," replied Walter, "the voyage is almost over, and—"

"Look, Walter," Elise interrupted. "The fog is thinner. See how red it is in the east. And look at that dark line, like a shadow. Can that be the shore?"

The fog was certainly thinning. A wider stretch of water had become visible, and the outlines of the other ships were clearer. Though steam power was coming into use for river navigation

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on both sides of the Atlantic, there were no ocean-going steamships in 1821. The *Lord Wellington*, the *Prince of Wales*, and the *Eddystone* were sailing vessels, sturdily built craft with extra heavy oak sheathing and iron-plated bows, suitable for cruising ice-strewn, northern waters. That all three had been in contact with the ice, their scraped and battered hulls betrayed. From each mizzen peak fluttered the British red ensign, and the mainmast head bore a flag with a red cross and the letters H. B. C., the flag of the Hudson Bay Company.

The immigrants aboard the *Lord Wellington* wasted scarcely a glance on the other ships. It was the land they were interested in. As the rising sun drank up the fog, and the shore line grew clearer, the eager faces of Elise and Walter sobered with disappointment. A most unattractive shore was revealed. It was low, swampy, sparsely clad with stunted trees, a desolate land without sign of human dwelling. Fort York could not be seen. It was fifteen or twenty miles in the interior, on the Hayes River.

Unpromising as the land appeared, it was land nevertheless, and everyone longed to set foot upon it. To the one hundred and sixty Swiss immigrants, the voyage had seemed endless. On May 30 they had sailed from Dordrecht in Holland. Now it was the last of August. For nearly three months they had been on shipboard. Delayed by stormy weather and crowding ice, they had spent a whole month navigating Hudson Straits and Bay. Luckily for them they did not realize what a long and toilsome way they had yet to travel before they reached their destination, the Selkirk Colony on the Red River of the North.

Though many of the new colonists looked thin, worn, and even ill from the hardships of the long voyage, they appeared to be neat, self-respecting folk, intelligent and fairly well to do. Some wore the peasant dress of their native cantons, but the majority were townspeople,—shopkeepers and skilled workmen. Mr. Perier was a chemist and apothecary.

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Walter Rossel had not one blood relation in the whole company, but he considered himself one of the Perier family. For the past two years, as an apprentice in Mr. Perier's shop, he had lived with them. When his master had decided to emigrate, he had offered to either release Walter from his apprenticeship or take the boy with him. Walter had decided quickly, and his father and stepmother had given their consent.

The Periers and Walter had breakfasted, packed their personal belongings, and were on deck again, when a small, open sailboat came in sight from the direction of the shore. It headed for the *Eddystone* and disappeared on the other side of that ship. Presently it reappeared, visited the *Prince of Wales*, and finally came on to the *Lord Wellington*.

As the little boat drew close, Elise, Walter, and Max looked curiously down on the crew of sun-tanned, bearded men, strangely dressed in hooded coats of bright blue or of white blanketing, bound about the waists with colorful silk or woolen sashes. The man in command came aboard, climbing the ladder up the side. He was broad shouldered and strongly built,

with reddish hair, bristly beard, and skin burned red-brown. With his blue coat and bright red sash, he wore buckskin trousers fringed at the seams, and the queerest footgear Walter had ever seen, slipper-like, heel-less shoes of soft leather embroidered in colors. They were Indian moccasins ornamented with dyed porcupine quills.

After glancing about him and inclining his head slightly in a general greeting, the newcomer shook hands with the Master of the ship and with Captain Mai, the man in charge of the Swiss immigrants, who had hurried forward to greet him. He went below with them, but remained only a few minutes.

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As soon as the red-haired man was overside again, the Swiss crowded around their conductor to ask when they were to go ashore. Captain Mai pointed to the other ships. Their sails were up and they were getting under way.

"A pilot has just gone aboard the *Eddystone*," he said. "We are to follow her."

Even before Captain Mai had finished speaking, the *Lord Wellington* was waking to activity. The anchors came up, the sails were set, and caught the breeze. In a few moments the immigrant vessel was following the supply ships towards the mouth of the Hayes River.

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II FORT YORK

The first view of Fort York was as disappointing as the first glimpse of shore. To Elise and Walter a fort meant massive stone walls and towers, rising from some high and commanding position. A stretch of log fencing in a bog was not their idea of fortification. It had the interest of novelty, however, for it was very different from anything they had ever seen before. The logs were set upright and close together, and above this stockade rose the flat, leaded roofs of the buildings. Near the fort stood a cluster of strange dwellings, quite unlike the Eskimo summer huts of stones, sod, and skins, with which the Swiss had become familiar since reaching Arctic waters. These queer skin tents were roughly cone-shaped, and the ends of the framework of poles projected at the peak. They were Cree Indian summer lodges. Up the wide board walk from the dock to the fort gates, men were carrying sacks and boxes. The unloading of the supply ships had begun.

The Perier family were among the last of the immigrants to go ashore. Very much like a homeless wanderer, motherless Elise Perier felt as she stood on the river bank beside her father, with Max clinging to her hand, and their scanty belongings piled around them. It was good to be on land again of course, but this was such a strange land. In spite of cramped quarters, poor food, seasickness, and the other hardships of the voyage, the *Lord Wellington* seemed almost

homelike compared to this wild, barren country. Elise tried bravely to smile at her father and Walter, but she felt as if she must cry instead.

Captain Mai was calling them. "Go right up to the fort, Perier. I want to get you all together."

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Walter picked up as much of the luggage as he could carry. Mr. Perier was looking doubtfully at a heavy wooden chest, when a boyish voice at his shoulder said in French, "Let me help, M'sieu. If you will put that on my back, I will carry it for you."

Walter dropped his own load, and he and Mr. Perier lifted the chest and placed it so it rested on the portage strap, as the young Canadian directed. Then the latter led the way up the walk. He was a slender, supple lad, not as tall as Walter, but he carried the heavy load with apparent ease. The Swiss boy admired the young fellow's strength as much as he liked his face, with its bright brown eyes and clean-cut features.

The log stockade proved to be more imposing and fort-like than it had appeared from the river. It was about twenty feet high, with bastions at the corners pierced with openings for cannon. The massive entrance gates stood open, and in front of them was a tall flagstaff, bearing the Company flag with the letters H. B. C. and the curious motto, "*Pro pelle cutem*,"—"Skin for skin." Entering the gates and passing within the double row of stockades, their guide led the Perier family among workshops and cabins to an inner court, which was surrounded with substantial log structures where the officers lived and where the merchandise and furs were stored. In this court the Swiss were gathered.

Mr. Perier tried to thank the friendly lad, but he shook his head. "It is nothing, nothing, M'sieu," he replied, a quick smile displaying his even, white teeth. "I must not linger. There is much to do." And he was off at a run.

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When all of the Swiss were assembled, one of their leaders suggested that it was fitting they should give thanks to God that the dangerous ocean voyage was over and they were safe on land once more. They stood with bowed heads while he led the prayer. The lump in Elise's throat disappeared and she felt better.

In the meantime, Captain Mai had been arranging with the Chief Factor,—as the Hudson Bay Company officer in charge of the fort was called,—for quarters for the immigrants. There was not room for all in the buildings, so many of the men and boys would have to sleep in tents. A place in one of the houses was found for the Periers, but Walter was assigned to a tent with Mr. Scheidecker and his sons, German Swiss from Berne.

That first night on land was a miserable one for Walter. Fort York stood in a veritable bog or muskeg, firm and hard enough the greater part of the year, when it was frozen, but wet and soft in the short summer season. The ground was damp of course, and Walter's one blanket did not keep out the chill. To make matters worse, he and his companions were pestered by the bloodthirsty mosquitoes that bred in inconceivable hordes in the swampy lowlands.

But the discomfort of the night was quickly forgotten the next day.

A busy and interesting place the Swiss boy found York Factory, as the Hudson Bay men called the fort. It was not a factory in our common meaning of the word,—not a *manufactory*,—for nothing was manufactured there except boats for river traffic, dog sleds, wooden kegs, and such articles of use and trade as an ordinary carpenter, blacksmith, or tinsmith could make with simple tools. *Factory* in the fur trade meant a trading post in charge of an officer called a *factor*, a commercial agent who bought and sold.

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For more than a century York Factory had been the principal port of entry for the Hudson Bay Company. There the Company's ships from England brought the supplies and trade goods destined for all the widely separated posts in the interior. To York Factory, in bark canoes and wooden boats, down rivers and lakes, from all parts of the Company's great domain, came the bales of costly furs to be sorted and repacked and shipped. A considerable staff was employed at the place, a Chief Factor, a Chief Trader, a surgeon, several clerks and apprentice clerks, a steward, a shipwright, a carpenter, a mason, a cooper, a blacksmith, a tailor, laborers, cooks, and servants. The boatmen or *voyageurs* who went to and fro into the interior were hired independently for each trip.

Until he sailed for America, Walter had never even heard of the Hudson Bay Company or the fur trade. Everything in the fort was novel and interesting to him. A good-natured apprentice clerk, who spoke French readily, showed him the Indian store, a large room well filled with all sorts of goods used in the Indian trade, from bales of heavy blankets, blue and red woolens, calicos of every color, long-barreled trading guns, kegs of powder, and big iron and copper kettles, to drawers of useful little things, gun flints, fire steels, files, awls, needles, fish hooks, twine, beads of all imaginable tints, and ochre, vermilion, and other dry colors, used by the Indians to adorn both their handiwork and themselves.

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"I never saw so many different things in one shop," Walter commented.

The clerk laughed. "The worst of it is that we have to keep the closest account of it all. We must know what is in every package sent out and what post it goes to. Being a fur trader isn't all adventure I can tell you. There is a lot of office drudgery, with all the bookkeeping, invoicing, and checking of lists. We can't afford to make mistakes," he added soberly. "The very lives of the men in some far-away post may depend on their getting the right supplies. Why, last year——" He broke off suddenly, and switched to English. "I spoke to the Chief Trader about your proposal. He says it can't be done. It's not the policy of the Company to send voyageurs out to trade, especially on such long trips."

Walter had turned to see to whom the clerk was speaking. He had heard no footsteps, but there, close behind him, was a tall man in blue coat, deerskin leggings, and moccasins. In his surprise, the boy drew back a little and stood staring. Of all the men he had seen since coming

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ashore, this one was the strangest and most striking. He was tall, powerfully built, and very dark of skin, with high cheek bones and high-bridged nose. His long, coarse black hair, slick and shining with grease, was worn in what seemed to the Swiss boy a curious fashion for a man, parted in the middle and plaited in two braids bound with deerskin thongs and hanging one over each shoulder.

"You not give me goods?" The man's voice was peculiarly deep, not unmusical but of a hard, metallic quality. His small, dark eyes looked straight into the clerk's large blue ones.

The young man shook his head. "No, your plan is too wild, too much risk in it. That sort of thing is against the Company's policy."

The voyageur's brown face stiffened. His hard eyes seemed to catch fire as they rested first on the clerk and then, for a moment, on Walter. Without a word he turned and with long, soft-footed stride, left the room as noiselessly as he had entered it.

"Pleasant manners," commented the clerk. "He needn't have included you in his wrath."

"What did he want?" asked Walter. He had understood but little of the brief conversation.

"A lot of goods on credit. He claims to have great influence with the Sioux, and he wants an outfit to go and trade with them. Of course we can't let him have it."

"You don't trust him?"

"We don't know anything about him, except that he is a good voyageur. It's against the Company's policy to send voyageurs out to trade. And his scheme is a crazy one. The Sioux country is a thousand miles away. He said he would bring all the furs back here and take whatever commission we chose to give, but probably we should never hear of him or the goods again."

"Is he an Indian?"

"Half-breed I imagine. Finely built fellow, isn't he? Has the strength of a moose, they say. He is an expert voyageur."

"I don't like him," Walter commented.

"Neither do I, and I suppose he has a grudge against me now, though the refusal wasn't my doing of course. Well, I must stop talking and get to work checking this new stuff that has come in."

Thus dismissed, Walter wandered out into the court, through the open gates and down to the shore. Everywhere was bustle and activity. There was much to be done, and done quickly. With the least possible delay the ships must be unloaded and loaded again with the furs waiting packed and ready for the voyage to England. The little fleet must get away promptly while Hudson Straits were still open. All the goods and supplies received had to be checked, examined, and sorted. The things to be sent to trading posts in the interior were repacked for transport in open boats up the rivers, and every package was invoiced and plainly marked. Boats must be

made ready and equipped and provisioned, not only to carry the supplies and trade goods, but the one hundred and sixty new settlers as well. The twelve hours a day that the employees of the Company were required to work in summer, if necessary, were not enough. Most of the men were simply doing all they possibly could each day until the rush should be over.

Down by the river Walter found the young fellow who had carried Mr. Perier's chest. He was putting a new seat in one of the large, heavily built boats ranged along the bank. Looking up from his work, he greeted the Swiss boy with a cheery "*Bo jou,*" which the latter guessed to be the Canadian way of saying "*Bon jour*" or "Good day." Walter, who was handy with tools, offered his help.

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As they worked they talked. His new acquaintance's French was fluent, but Walter found it puzzling. To a Swiss, the Canadian dialect seemed a strange sort of French, differing considerably in pronunciation and in many of its words from his own native tongue. Yet Walter and Louis Brabant managed to understand each other fairly well.

"I suppose this is your home, here at the fort," said Walter.

"My home? *Non*, I live at the Red River."

"Why, that is where we are going!"

"You go to the Selkirk Colony at Fort Douglas. It is not there that I live, but at Pembina, farther up the river."

"Is Pembina a town?"

"Not what you would call a town. It is a settlement and there are trading posts there, a Hudson Bay post and a Northwest Company post. Now the two companies have united, one of the forts will be abandoned I suppose. You may be glad the fighting between them is over. There will be better times in the Selkirk Colony now. They have had a hard time and much trouble, those poor settlers!"

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"What do you mean by fighting,—and trouble?" asked the surprised Walter. "What is the Northwest Company? Isn't the Hudson Bay the only trading company? Doesn't it own all the country where the Indians and the fur bearing animals are?"

"Oh no," returned Louis with a smile and a shake of his head. "Farther south there is fur country that belongs to the United States. The Hudson Bay Company has no power there. It is true that the Company claims all the northern fur country, but the Northwest Company said they had a right to trade and trap there too, and that was how the trouble began. Have you never heard of the Northwest Company, and how for years they have fought the Hudson Bay men for the furs, and how they drove the settlers from the Selkirk Colony and captured Fort Douglas and killed the Governor?"

Walter shook his head in bewilderment, and Louis went on to tell, briefly and vividly, something of the conflict between the two great trading companies, and the disasters that

conflict had brought upon the settlers. The Swiss boy listened in amazement, understanding enough of the story to grasp its significance.

"But why didn't Captain Mai tell us all that?" he cried. "Why did he let us think that everything was all right?"

"Perhaps he thought you would not come if you knew. But those old troubles are all over. Last spring the two companies became one."

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Louis' story troubled Walter. He retold it to Mr. Perier and Mr. Scheidecker, and they carried it to other leading men of the prospective settlers. Several of them sought out Captain Mai and demanded to know why they had not been informed of all those wild doings in the colony. Unsatisfied by their conductor's explanations, they asked for an interview with the Chief Factor, and put their questions to him. He confirmed the statement that the fur-traders' rivalry and warfare were at an end. About five months before the arrival of the Swiss, the two great trading companies had united under the Hudson Bay name. The colony on the Red River would now have a chance to develop in peace.

In spite of this assurance, the Hudson Bay officer's replies to some of their queries left the Swiss in no happy mood. Mr. Perier was stunned to learn that they still had some seven hundred miles to travel, all the way through untamed wilderness. But he had no thought of turning back. He had signed an agreement with Captain Mai, and had paid for his family's passage,—a moderate sum, but he could ill afford to lose it. To pay their fare back again would leave him penniless. Fertile land, one hundred acres of prairie,—that would not have to be cleared,—had been promised him rent free for a year. After that he was to pay a rent of from twenty to fifty bushels of wheat from his crop, or he might buy the land outright for five hundred bushels. The offer was enticing, and he and Walter had made many plans for the future.

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III

THE SELKIRK COLONY AND THE RIVAL FUR TRADERS

What was the Selkirk Colony, and how did it happen that this party of Swiss had come so far to join it?

When Thomas Douglas, Earl of Selkirk, one of the famous Douglas family of the Scottish border, planned the settlement on the Red River of the North, his purpose was to find homes and livelihood for the poverty-stricken Scotch Highlanders. Hundreds of those unfortunate people had been turned out of their homes through changes in the system of management of the great landed estates in Scotland, and there was little opportunity in the old country for them to make a living. Though a Lowlander himself, Lord Selkirk had often visited the Highland glens. He knew the people, and had

learned their native Gaelic language. He sympathized with them in their misfortunes. Seeking for some way to help them, he realized that their only chance for prosperity and success lay in emigration to a country where land was cheap and plentiful. He had heard of the rich soil of the Red River valley, and decided that was the place to plant his colony.

The lower Red River valley was included in the vast domain of the Hudson Bay Company. The charter from King Charles II of England issued in 1670 had given to Prince Rupert and the "Company of Adventurers of England, trading into Hudson Bay"—"the whole trade of all those seas, streights, and bays, rivers, lakes, creeks, and sounds,—that lie within the entrance of the streights commonly called Hudson's Streights, together with all the lands, countries, and territories upon the coasts and confines of the seas, streights, bays, lakes, rivers, creeks, and sounds aforesaid, which are not now actually possessed by any of our subjects, or by the subjects of any other Christian prince or State." Not only did the royal charter grant the "Adventurers" the trade of that vast region,—which, in the widest interpretation of the terms, included a quarter or a third of the whole of North America,—but it conferred upon the Company the right to hold the land "in free and common socage" which means absolute proprietorship. Whether King Charles really had the right to give away this vast territory to anyone may be questioned, but the Hudson Bay Company claimed proprietorship under the charter.

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The Red River empties into Lake Winnipeg, and the northern end of the lake drains into the Nelson River which flows to Hudson Bay. Accordingly the valley of the Red was included in the territory claimed by the Company. However, before the time of this story, the purchase from France by the United States of a vast extent of country west of the Mississippi River,—the Louisiana Purchase—and the boundary treaties with the British government, gave the greater part of the Red River to the United States. Only the stretch from what is now the northern limit of Minnesota and North Dakota to Lake Winnipeg remained in English possession. It was to this lower part of the valley that Lord Selkirk wished to take his colonists. He knew well enough that the Hudson Bay Company would not be inclined to part with any of its domain for such a purpose, but he had set his heart upon planting his colony in that particular spot.

Accordingly he laid his plans to get possession of the required land. Quietly, by buying shares himself and persuading his friends to buy also, he obtained control over a majority of the stock of the great trading company. Then he offered to purchase a wide strip of land on the Red and Assiniboine rivers. As he controlled the majority of votes in the Company, he got what he wanted, about one hundred and sixteen square miles, of which he became absolute proprietor.

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The first settlers he sent over were of course Scotch Highlanders, with a few Irish. They arrived at Fort York in the autumn of 1811, too late to go to the Red River that year. The next summer they reached their new home on the

Red, and were followed within three years by other parties, numbering in all a little more than two hundred, most of them Scotch.

The troubles of the settlers were many and discouraging. Had the Earl of Selkirk been a more practical man he would scarcely have undertaken to plant a farming colony in the midst of a wilderness, hundreds of miles from any other settlement, and without communication with the civilized world except by canoe and rowboat over long and difficult river trails. Not all of the colonists' troubles were due to natural conditions however.

The Hudson Bay Company had a strong trading rival in the Northwest Fur Company. The latter was a Canadian organization with headquarters at Montreal, while the Hudson Bay Company was strictly English, its chief offices in London. The Northwest men had established trading posts along the Great Lakes and far to the west and north beyond Lake Superior. They had penetrated farther and farther into the country claimed by the Hudson Bay Company. The Hudson Bay men themselves had done almost nothing to develop trade in the interior, until the Canadian traders began to go among the Indians and secure furs that might otherwise have been brought to the posts on the Bay. Awakening to the realization that the Northwest Company was actually taking away the trade, the Hudson Bay men also sought the interior. In this way began a race and a fight for the furs that grew hotter and fiercer with each year. Everywhere on the principal lakes and streams of the west and northwest, rival posts were established, sometimes within a few hundred rods of each other.

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The rivalry between the fur traders was approaching its height when Lord Selkirk founded his colony. From the first, the Northwest Company opposed the scheme. The fur trader never likes to see the country from which the pelts come opened up to settlement. He knows that as the land is settled the wild animals disappear. Moreover Lord Selkirk was now the controlling power in the Hudson Bay Company, and the Northwesters suspected him of some deep laid plan to interfere with and ruin their trade. Several years before, they had established a post called Fort Gibraltar at the junction of the Red and the Assiniboine, and their route to the rich fur districts of the west lay up the latter river. They believed that the settlement was merely a scheme to cut off their trade. So they looked with unfriendly eyes upon the colony, and even persuaded a considerable number of the colonists to leave and settle on lands farther east in Canada. Most of the Northwest traders were of Scotch blood, many of them of Highland descent, and doubtless they honestly thought that their countrymen would find better homes elsewhere. The chance that the Red River settlement would ever succeed seemed, to practical-minded men, very slender indeed.

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The ill feeling between the two great trading companies and between the Northwest Company and the Selkirk settlement grew stronger and bitterer as time went on. Mistakes and high handed acts on both sides, in a land where there was no law, led at last to open conflict. In 1815

the colonists were driven from their homes and obliged to flee to the shelter of a Hudson Bay post at the northern end of Lake Winnipeg. The Hudson Bay men made reprisals by capturing the Northwesters' posts and interrupting their trade. The settlers were rallied and taken back to their homes, only to face a worse disaster the next year. An open fight between the men of Governor Semple of the colony and a party of half-breeds in the employ of the Northwest Company resulted in the killing of the Governor and his twenty followers, and the capture of their stronghold, Fort Douglas.

Lord Selkirk was in America at the time seeking from the Canadian government some means of protection for his colonists. Failing to get satisfaction from a government whose sympathies were with the Northwest rather than with the Hudson Bay company, he had hired, to guard his colony, one hundred men from two regiments of mercenary soldiers that had been disbanded after the War of 1812. While he was traversing Lake Superior on his way west with these men, he met canoes bringing word of the disastrous fight of Seven Oaks, the death of Governor Semple, and the capture of Fort Douglas. Skirting the shores of the lake, Lord Selkirk went to Fort William, the headquarters of the Northwest Company on Thunder Bay. There he demanded the release of the prisoners who had been brought from the Red River. The controversy that followed finally led to his taking possession of the fort. The fact that he had been appointed a magistrate for the Indian country and sought the arrest of the Northwesters who had taken part in or instigated the troubles at Fort Douglas, gave his action some color of legal right. From Fort William he went on to his disordered and devastated colony, and gathered together all the settlers who were willing to remain.

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In spite of all the settlement had been through, Lord Selkirk had no intention of giving up his plans. So many of the colonists had been driven or enticed away and would not return, that he sought to find others to take their places. It was then that he hit upon the idea of bringing over the steady, hard-working Swiss, who would, he believed, make the very best of settlers.

Captain Mai or May,—the English spelling of his name,—a Swiss who had served as a mercenary soldier in the British army, and other agents were sent to Switzerland to secure settlers. Throughout the cantons of Neuchatel, Vaud, Geneva, and Berne, they traveled, explaining the advantages of emigration to the Red River country. The pamphlets they distributed, printed in French and German, gave a highly colored and alluring description of that country with its many miles of fertile soil to be had for the asking. Like all emigration agents, Captain Mai and his assistants told all the good things about both country and colony and left out the bad. About the civil war between the fur companies and the troubles it had led to, they said nothing.

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Early in May 1821, about one hundred and sixty emigrants were gathered together at a small village on the Rhine near Basel. In great barges they were taken down the Rhine, a delightful trip on that famous river with its beautiful and striking scenery, to Dordrecht in Holland. There

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they embarked on the *Lord Wellington* for the trip to Hudson Bay. The voyage took far longer than they had realized it would take, the food provided was inferior to what they were used to, the drinking water became bad, and storms and ice caused delay. At Hudson Straits the *Lord Wellington* overtook the two Hudson Bay Company supply ships, and the three were held for three weeks in the ice with which the Straits were filled. The heavy swell coming in from the open ocean and rushing between the icebergs, caused rapid tides and currents in which sailing ships were almost helpless. Luckily the *Lord Wellington* escaped serious injury, but one of the supply ships was nearly wrecked and badly damaged by collision with a berg. Not far away were two other vessels also caught in the ice, the *Fury* and the *Hecla* carrying Captain Parry and his Arctic exploring expedition. The *Hecla* had one of her anchors broken and several hawsers carried away.

The Swiss emigrants were a hopeful, cheerful folk. They had been together so long they had become like a large family party, and they made the best of their hardships. When it was safe to do so, the young and active climbed down from the ship to the solid ice field, ran races, and even held a dance on a particularly smooth stretch. At last the ships succeeded in entering the bay. Skirting the barren shores, the three vessels destined for the Hudson Bay post reached anchorage off York Factory in safety.

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IV THE START FROM FORT YORK

Finding transport for so large a party of settlers taxed the resources of the Hudson Bay Company. Several new boats had to be built, and every one of the immigrants who could handle wood-working tools was called upon to help.

The boats were to be despatched in two divisions or brigades. Walter had taken for granted that he would travel with the Periers, but he found himself assigned to the first division, the Periers to the second. He asked to be transferred to their boat, but Captain Mai declared the change could not be made. Only young people were to go in the first brigade which was expected to make the best possible speed. Walter was young and strong and without family. The boy protested that he was one of the Perier family, he had come with them, and was to live with them in the settlement, but his protest was of no avail. Elise and Max were as much distressed as he was at the arrangement, and he had to comfort them with the assurance that they would all be together soon at the Red River.

It was well after noon on the day appointed for departure, when the start was made. The boat carrying the guide, who was really the commanding officer of the brigade, was propelled by oars out into the stream, and the

square sail raised. With shouts, cheers, and farewells, the long, open craft, well laden with settlers, supplies, and goods, was away up the river.

When Walter took his place he was pleased to find himself in the same boat with Louis Brabant. In spite of his disappointment at not traveling with the Periers, the Swiss boy was in high spirits to be away at last, headed for the wonderful Red River country where his fortune, he felt sure, awaited him. He waved his hat and shouted himself hoarse in farewells to those on shore.

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It was a picturesque crowd massed on the dock and fringing the river bank. Mingled with the Swiss were brown-skinned, long-haired post employees and voyageurs with bright colored sashes, beaded garters tied below the knees of their deerskin or homespun trousers, caps of fur or cloth, or gaudy handkerchiefs bound about their heads. A little to one side stood a group of Indians from the wigwams, in buckskin, bright calicos, blankets, feathers, and beadwork. One old Cree was proudly clad in a discarded army coat of scarlet with gold lace and a tall black hat adorned with feathers. The dress of the Swiss, though in general more sober, was brightened by the gay colors of shawls, aprons, and kerchiefs, of short jackets or long-tailed coats with metal buttons, and of home-knit stockings. As various as the costumes were the shouts and farewells and words of advice exchanged between boats and shore in a babel of tongues, English, Scots English, Swiss French, Canadian French, German, Gaelic, and Cree.

The sail was raised and caught the breeze. Sitting at his ease, Walter turned his attention to what lay ahead. The surrounding country was not very pleasing in appearance. Scantly wooded with a scrub of willow, poplar, tamarack, and swamp spruce, it was low and flat, especially on the west, where the York Factory stood between the Hayes and the Nelson rivers. The Nelson, Louis said, was the larger stream, but the Hayes was supposed to afford a better route into the interior. Certainly the latter river was not attractive, with its raw, ragged looking, clay banks, embedded with stones, its muddy islands, and frequent bars and shallows that interfered with navigation.

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The immigrants were not suffered to sit in idleness all that afternoon. There were two or more experienced rivermen in each boat, but the new colonists were required to help. When the wind went down before sunset, Walter expected to be called upon to wield an oar. But the current of the Hayes was too strong and rapid to be stemmed with oars. The boat was brought close to the bank, and the sail lowered. Standing in the stern, the steersman surveyed his crew. Walter, in the other end of the boat, had not noticed the steersman before. Now, he recognized the tall man with the braided hair, who had come up behind him so noiselessly in the Indian trading room at the fort.

In his deep, metallic voice the steersman began to speak, pointing first at one man, then at another. When his bright, hard little eyes alighted on Walter, and his long, brown forefinger pointed him out, the boy was moved

by the same strong, instinctive dislike, almost akin to fear, he had felt when he first looked into the half-breed's face. The fellow's French was so strange that Walter could not grasp the meaning. With a questioning glance, he turned to Louis Brabant.

"You are to go ashore," Louis explained. "Murray has chosen you in his crew. The tracking begins now."

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Walter had no idea what tracking might be, but he rose to obey. With several others, including Louis, he jumped from the boat to the muddy bit of beach. The steersman handed each a leather strap, and Louis showed Walter how to attach his to the tow-line and pass the strap over his "inshore" shoulder. Like horses on a tow-path, the men were to haul the boat, with the rest of the party in it, up stream.

The steep, clay banks were slippery from recent rains. Fallen trees, that had been undermined and had slid part way down the incline, projected at all angles. The willing, but inexperienced tracking crew slipped, stumbled, scrambled, and struggled along, tugging at the tow-line. With maddening ease the tall steersman, in the lead, strode through and over the obstacles, turning his head every minute or two to shout back orders and abuse. He seemed to have the utmost contempt for his greenhorn crew, but he tried to urge and threaten them to a pace of which they were quite incapable. Every time a man slipped or stumbled, jerking the tow-line, Murray poured out a torrent of violent and profane abuse, in such bad French and English, so intermixed with Gaelic and Indian words, that, luckily, the Swiss could not understand a quarter of it.

Walter understood the tone, if not the words. He grew angrier and angrier, as he strained and tugged at the rope and struggled to keep his footing on the slippery bank. But he had the sense to realize that he must not start a mutiny on the first day of the journey. He held his tongue and labored on. The boy was thin, not having filled out to his height, but he was strong. He was mountain bred, with muscular legs, good heart and lungs. Nevertheless when at last Murray gave the order to halt, only pride kept Walter from dropping to the ground to rest.

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The second shift was led by a fair-haired, blue-eyed man from the Orkney Islands, off the coast of Scotland, where the Hudson Bay Company recruited many of its employees. Before his crew were through with their turn at the tow-line, they came in sight, on rounding a bend, of the first two boats with bows drawn up on a stretch of muddy beach. Farther back on higher ground tents were going up and fires being kindled. Murray ordered out the oars, and boat number three was run in beside the others.

After the tent, bedding, and provisions for the night were unloaded, the tall steersman, without troubling to help with the camp making, took himself off. It was young Louis Brabant who took charge. He selected the spot for the one tent and helped to pitch it. Then he sent a man and a boy to collect fuel, and Walter and another into the woods to strip balsam fir branches for beds. Louis himself started the cooking fire, between two green logs spaced so that the big iron kettle

rested upon them. From a chunk of dried caribou meat,—so hard and dry it looked a good deal like sole leather,—he shaved off some shreds. After he had ground the bits of meat between two stones, he put the partly pulverized stuff to boil in a kettle of water. This soup, thickened with flour, was the principal dish of the meal. Several handfuls of dark blue saskatoon or service berries, gathered near by, served as dessert. By the time supper was ready, the young Canadian's swift, deft way of working, his skill and certainty, his good nature and helpfulness, had won the good will of everyone.

Walter asked Louis how long it would be before the second brigade left Fort York.

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"That I cannot tell. As soon as all is ready. You regret to be separated from your family?"

"They aren't really my family. I am apprenticed to Monsieur Perier."

"The young Englishmen who come over to be clerks for the Company," Louis remarked, "sign a paper to serve for five years. Is it so with you?"

"Something like that, and in return Monsieur Perier agrees to give me a home and teach me the business. When he decided to come to America, he really released me from the agreement though. He offered to treat me like his own son if I came with him."

"If you are twenty-one you can get land of your own in the Colony."

"I'm not sixteen yet."

"Is it so?" cried Louis. "Then we are the same age, you and me. Fifteen years last Christmas day I was born. So my mother told Père Provencher when I was baptized."

"My birthday is in February," Walter replied. "I thought you must be older than that. How long have you been a voyageur for the Company?"

"For the Hudson Bay Company only this summer. This is the first time I have come to Fort York. Last year, after my father died, I went to the Kaministikwia with the Northwest men. But always since I was big enough I have known how to carry a pack and paddle a canoe. The birch canoe,—ah, that is the right kind of boat! These heavy affairs of wood," Louis shrugged contemptuously. "They are so slow, so heavy to track and to portage. You have the birch canoe in your country? No? Then you cannot understand. When you have voyaged in a birch canoe, you will want no more of these heavy things."

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"Why does the Company use them?"

Louis shrugged again as if the ways of the Hudson Bay Company were past understanding. "The wooden boats will carry greater loads," he admitted, "and they are stronger, yes. Sometimes you get a hole in a canoe and you must stop to mend it. Yet I think you do not lose so much time that way as in dragging these heavy boats over portages."

The wavering white bands of the aurora borealis were mounting the northern sky before the camp was ready for the night. The one tent

carried by boat number three was given up to the women and children. Walter rolled himself in a blanket and lay down with the other men on a bed of fir branches close to the fire. The air was sharp and cold, and he would have been glad of another blanket. But he had been well used to cold weather in his native country, and had become still more hardened to it during the long voyage in northern waters.

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V THE BLACK MURRAY

Louis' voice, almost in Walter's ear, was crying, "*Leve, leve,—rise, rise!*"

Surely the night could not be over yet. Walter threw off his blanket, scrambled up, shook himself, and pulled out his cherished silver watch. It was ten minutes to five.

In a few moments the whole camp was stirring. Following the usual voyageur custom, the boats got off at once, without delaying for breakfast. After a spell of tracking, the Swiss boy was more than ready for the pemmican and tea taken on a small island almost in midstream. The Swiss lad had never tasted tea until he sailed on an English ship, but after the drinking water had turned bad, he had been driven to try the strange beverage and had grown accustomed to it. Tea was the universal drink of the northern fur country, where coffee was practically unknown. He was amazed at the quantity of scalding hot, black stuff the voyageurs could drink.

Pemmican, the chief article of food used in the wilderness, he had eaten for the first time at Fort York. The mixture of shredded dried meat and grease did not look very inviting, but its odor, when heated, was not unappetizing. He tasted his portion gingerly, and decided it was not bad. The little dark specks of which he had been suspicious proved to be dried berries of some kind. Walter had a healthy appetite, and the portion served him looked small. He was surprised to find, before he had eaten all of it, that he had had enough. Pemmican was very hearty food indeed.

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That was a day of back-breaking, heart-breaking labor towing the heavy boats up the Hayes. The clay banks grew steeper and steeper. Sometimes there was a muddy beach at the base wide enough for the trackers to walk on. Often there was no beach whatever, and they were forced to scramble along slippery slopes, through and over landslips, fallen trees, driftwood, and brush. Where tiny streams trickled down to join the river, the ground was soft, miry, almost impassable. The forest crowning the bank had become thicker, the trees larger and more flourishing. Poplars and willows everywhere were flecked with autumn yellow. The tamarack needles,—which fall in the autumn like the foliage of broad leaved trees,—were turning bronze, and contrasted with the dark green of

the spruce. There was more variety and beauty in the surroundings than on the preceding day, but Walter, stumbling along the difficult shore and tugging at the tow-line, paid little attention to the scenery. With aching back and shoulders and straining heart and lungs, he labored on. Each time his shift was over and he was allowed to sit in the boat while others did the tracking, he was too weary to care for anything but rest.

The boats were strung out a long way, some crews making better speed than others. Some of the leaders were more considerate of their inexperienced followers, though most of the voyageurs could scarcely understand why the Swiss could not trot with the tow-line and keep up the pace all day, as the Canadians and half-breeds were accustomed to. The steersman of boat number three drove his men mercilessly. When at the tow-rope himself, he kept up a steady flow of profane abuse in his bad French, almost equally bad English, occasional Indian and Gaelic. Even when seated in the boat, he grumbled at the slowness and lack of skill of those on shore, and shouted orders and oaths at them.

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At noon, when a short stop was made for a meal of cold pemmican and hot tea, Walter said to Louis, "If our steersman doesn't take care he will have a mutiny on his hands. You had better tell him so. We have kept our tempers so far, but we can't stand his abuse forever."

Louis shrugged. "I tell him? No, no. I tell *Le Murrai Noir* nothing, *moi*. It would but make more trouble. With a crew of voyageurs he would not dare act so. They will endure much, but not everything. Someone would kill him. As a voyageur the Black Murray is good. He is strong, he is swift, he knows how to shoot a rapid, he is a fine steersman. But as a man—bah! Being in charge of a boat has turned his head."

"He may get his head cracked if he does not change his manners."

"We would not grieve, you and me, eh, my friend? But this is certain," the Canadian boy added seriously. "*Le Murrai Noir* can hurt no one with his tongue. Heed him not, though he bawl his voice away. It is so that I do."

Of all the men in the boat, the one who found the tracking hardest was a young weaver named Matthieu. He was a lank, high-shouldered fellow, who looked strong, but had been weakened by seasickness on the way over, and had not regained his strength. Matthieu did his best, he made no complaint, but he was utterly exhausted at the end of his shift each time. The weaver was next to Murray in line, and much of the steersman's ill temper was vented on the poor fellow.

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Late in the afternoon, Murray's crew were tracking on a wet clay slope heavily wooded along the rim and without beach at the base. In an especially steep place Matthieu slipped. His feet went from under him. The tow-rope jerked, and Walter barely saved himself from going down too. Murray, his moccasins holding firm on the slippery clay, seized the rope with both hands and roared abuse at the weaver. Exhausted and panting, the poor fellow tried to regain his footing. Walter dug his heels into the

bank, and leaned down to reach Matthieu a hand, just as the enraged steersman gave the fallen man a vicious and savage kick.

The boy's anger flamed beyond control. He forgot that he was attached by the left shoulder to the towline. Fists doubled, he started for Murray. The rope pulled him up short. As he struggled to free himself and reach the steersman, one of his companions intervened. He was a big, strong, intelligent Swiss, a tanner by trade, who had assumed the leadership of the immigrants in boat number three. His size, his authoritative manner, his firm voice, had their effect on Murray. The half-breed paused, his foot raised for another kick.

"There must be no fighting here," said the tanner, "and no brutality. Rossel, help Matthieu up. He must go back to the boat."

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Murray began to protest that he would allow no man to interfere with his orders. The Swiss was quiet, but determined. The steersman had no right to work a man to death, or to strike with hand or foot any member of the party. The settlers were not his slaves.

Murray growled and muttered. His hard little eyes glowed angrily. When Louis shouted to the Orkneyman to bring the boat to shore to receive the worn-out Matthieu, the steersman opened his mouth to countermand the order, but thought better of it and merely uttered an oath instead. He could recognize the voice of authority,—when numbers were against him.

After Matthieu had been put aboard, the work was resumed. Murray, very ugly, plodded sullenly ahead. He seized every opportunity to abuse Walter, but the boy, now that one victory had been scored over the Black Murray, did not heed his words.

The sky had clouded over, and rain began to fall, a chilly, sullen drizzle. Yet the trackers toiled on. The oars were used only when crossing from one side of the river to the other to find a possible tow-path.

As darkness gathered, camp was made in the rain. The pemmican ration was eaten cold, but by using under layers of birch bark shredded very fine, and chopping into the dry heart of the stub of a lightning-killed tree, Louis succeeded in starting a small blaze and keeping it going long enough to boil water for tea.

After supper the tanner asked Walter to go with him to talk to the voyageur in charge of the entire brigade. Laroque, the guide, a middle-aged, steady-eyed French Canadian, listened to the complaint in silence, then shook his head gravely.

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"*Le Murrai Noir* is not the best of men to be in control of a boat,—that I know," he admitted, "but it was hard to find men enough. He can do the work, and do it well,—and there is this to say for him. You settlers know nothing of voyaging. You are so slow and clumsy it is trying to the patience. I find it so myself. *Le Murrai Noir* has little patience. It is you who must be patient with him."

"But he has no right to strike and abuse men

who are doing their best, men who are not even employees of the Company," protested the tanner.

Laroque nodded in agreement. "That is true."

"Can't you put someone else in as steersman of our boat?"

"No, there is no man of experience to be spared. Let the young man who is sick remain in the boat with the women and children, until he is strong again. I will speak to *le Murrai* in the morning, and I think things will go better. These first few days, they are the hardest for all."

Wet, chilled, aching with weariness, and a bit discouraged, Walter trudged back to his own camping place. Louis and the Orkneyman had laid the mast and oars across the boat and had covered them with the sail and a tarpaulin. Under this shelter the men spent the night, packed in so closely there was scarcely room to turn over.

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VI TOILING UP STREAM

Things did go better next day, as the guide had foretold. What he had said to Murray in that early morning talk, no one learned, but the steersman attempted no more kicks and blows. He took his revenge upon those who had complained of him by riding in the boat all day, devoting his whole time and attention to steering. Not once did he touch the tow-line, Louis taking his place. All the men, except the two voyageurs, were lame and muscle sore from the unaccustomed work, but they were gradually learning the trick of it. In comparison with trained rivermen, they made slow time, but they got along better than on the day before. To Walter it was a great relief to be freed from Murray's brutality. He was on his mettle to show the steersman that just as good progress could be made without him.

On the fourth day of the journey a fork in the stream was reached, where the Shamattawa and the Steel rivers came together to form the Hayes. There Murray and Louis took down the mast and threw it overboard. There would be no more sailing for a long way, Louis explained.

Up the winding course of the Steel the boats were hauled laboriously. The banks were higher than those of the Hayes, but less steep, affording a better tow-path. In appearance the country was far more attractive than the low, flat desolation around Fort York, and the woods were at their best in full autumn color. Utterly wild and lonely was this savage land, but by no means devoid of beauty. It seemed to the Swiss immigrants, however, that they were but going farther and farther from all civilization. Towns and farms, the homelike dwellings of men, seemed almost as remote as though on some other planet.

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Walter was surprised to see so little game in the wilderness, until he realized that the constant talking, laughing, and shouting back and forth must frighten every bird and beast. Wild creatures could not be expected to show themselves to such noisy travelers. Only the "whiskey-johneesh," as Louis called the bold and thievish Canada jays, dared to cry out at the passing boats and come about the camps to watch for scraps.

Just as the Swiss were growing used to the labor of the tow-rope, they were given a new task, portaging. Below the first really bad rapid, the boat was beached, everyone was ordered ashore, and the cargo unloaded. The traders' custom was to put all goods and supplies in packages of from ninety to one hundred pounds' weight. One such package was considered a light load. An experienced voyageur usually carried two. That the new settlers might help with the work, part of the food, clothing, and other things had, for this trip, been made into lighter parcels.

The Orkneyman was the first to receive a load. He adjusted his portage strap, the broad band across his forehead, the ends passing back over his shoulders to support his pack. Picking up a hundred pound sack of pemmican, Murray put it in position on the small of the Orkneyman's back, then placed another bulky package on top of the sack. The load extended along the man's spine to the crown of his head, and weighed nearly two hundred pounds, but the Orkneyman, his body bent forward, trotted away with it. It was the steersman's work to place the packages, and the ease with which Murray had swung the hundred pound sack into position revealed one reason why he had been chosen.

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Walter's pack of forty or fifty pounds did not seem heavy. He felt confident that he could carry it easily enough, and imitated the Orkneyman by starting off at a trot. The portage trail was an unusually good one, neither very rough nor very steep, yet the boy soon found that he could not keep up the pace. He slowed down to a walk. His burden grew heavier. The muscles of his neck began to ache. He tried to ease them a little, and his pack twisted, pulling his head back with a wrench. He stumbled, went down, strove to straighten his load and get up again. One of his companions, plodding along, overtook him, stopped to laugh, tried to help him, and succeeded only in dislocating his own pack. Louis had to come to the rescue of both. Walter's confidence in his own strength had diminished, and he had discovered several new muscles in his back and neck. Moreover he had learned that balancing a pack is an art not to be acquired in a moment.

Another forking of the streams had been reached, where the Fox and the Hill rivers joined to form the Steel. The Hill River proved shallower and more rapid than the Steel. Ledges, rocks, and boulders obstructed the current, and portages became so frequent that Walter got plenty of practice in carrying a pack. Sometimes the empty boats could be poled or tracked through the rapids or warped up the channel by throwing the line around a tree and pulling. In other places the men, standing in the water, lifted the heavy craft over the stones.

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Around the worst stretches they dragged it over the portage trails.

At Rock Portage, where a ridge extends across the river and the water rushes down in rapids and cascades between small islands, each boat and its cargo had to be carried clear over one of the islands. Then, to the great relief of the crews, they were able to row a short distance to Rock House, a storehouse for goods and supplies for the Selkirk Colony. There more pemmican, dried meat, flour, tea, and a little sugar were taken aboard. To make room for the provisions, some of the personal belongings of the settlers had to be unloaded, but the man in charge of Rock House promised to send the things to Fort Douglas at the first opportunity.

Traveling up stream had now become an almost continual fight with rapid waters through rough and rocky country. Walter's muscles were hardening and he was learning how to use his strength to the best advantage, but each night when camp was made, he was ready to roll in his blanket and sleep anywhere, on evergreen branches, on the hard planks of the boat, or on the bare ground.

How was Mr. Perier standing the tow-path and the portage, the boy wondered. The apothecary was far from robust. He had been so hopeful, too, looking forward so eagerly to the rich land of the Red River. He seemed to think of that land in the Bible terms, as "flowing with milk and honey." They would be too late to do any real farming this year, he had said, but they could plow their land and have it ready for seeding in the spring. Of course they would be provided with a house, fuel, and food for the winter. The contract he and Captain Mai,—in Lord Selkirk's name,—had signed, promised him such things on credit. He had brought with him some chemist's supplies; dried and powdered roots and other ingredients used in medicines. He and Walter would set up a shop and earn enough to buy whatever they needed during the cold weather. Walter had shared his master's hopefulness, but now, after questioning Louis about affairs in the Colony, he was beginning to doubt whether it would be so easy to make a fortune there as Mr. Perier believed.

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September was advancing. Most of the time the weather held good, but the nights were chilly and the mornings raw, often with fog on the river. One night, after the boat had been dragged through several short rapids, or "spouts," and carried over two portages,—the whole day's progress less than two miles,—snow fell heavily. When Walter, stiff with cold, crawled out from under the tarpaulin in the morning, the ground was white.

"This looks more like Christmas than September," he grumbled between chattering teeth. "I'm glad of one thing, Louis, we're headed south, not north."

"Oh, the winter is not quite so long at the Red River as in this country," Louis returned with a cheerful grin, "but it is long enough,—yes, quite long enough,—and cold enough too, on the prairie."

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So the journey went slowly on, rowing, poling, tracking, warping, and carrying the heavy boats

up stream, and there was little enough rowing compared with the poling and portaging.

Five or six miles had become a fair day's progress. In the worst stretches only a mile or two could be made by working from dawn to dark. The Swiss would have been glad to rest on Sundays, and had expected to observe the day as they were accustomed to, but the guide and the voyageurs would not consent. It was too late in the season, the journey was too long, the food supply too scanty, to permit the losing of one whole day each week. The immigrants had to be content with a brief prayer service morning and evening. The Swiss were Protestants, while all of the voyageurs, except two or three Orkneymen, belonged to the Roman Catholic church, so they worshiped separately. It surprised Walter at first to see the wild-looking rivermen kneeling with bowed heads repeating their "Aves" before lying down to rest. He never saw *le Murray Noir* in that posture, however. He wondered if the steersman was a heathen.

There were accidents in the brigade now and then. Once when the Orkneyman's shift were tracking, the rope broke and boat number three began to swing broadside to the current. At Murray's fierce yell of command, the men in the boat jumped into the water nearly to their waists and held it headed straight, while Louis, keeping his footing with difficulty in the swift current, carried the remains of the line to shore.

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The next day the boat ahead met with misfortune, while it was being poled through rapids. To avoid a great rock, the bowman turned too far out into the strong current. The rushing water swung the clumsy craft about and bore it down the rapids. It struck full on its side on a rock that rose well out of water, and was held there by the strength of the current. There were but two men in the boat, and it was separated from shore by a channel of rushing white water. The crew of number three turned their own craft in to shore, and ran to help. Walter, carrying the tow-line, reached the spot first and attempted to throw the rope to the imperiled boat. The end fell short. Then Louis tried his hand, but succeeded no better. He was preparing for another attempt, when the line was snatched from his hands, and Murray sent the coiled end hurtling out across the water and into the boat.

Growling and cursing, the half-breed took control of the rescue. Under his leadership, the men on shore succeeded in pulling the boat away from the rock, and warping it, half full of water, up the rapids. Walter's fondness for the Black Murray had certainly not increased as the days went by, but he had to admit that the brutal steersman knew how to act in an emergency.

The toilsome ascent of Hill River was over at last when camp was made late one afternoon on an island which Louis called Sail Island. The reason for the name became apparent when Murray, after carefully examining the trees, selected a straight, sound spruce and ordered Louis and the Orkneyman to cut it down. The spruce was to be trimmed for a mast. If a mast was needed, thought Walter, the worst of the journey must be over. The night was cold and snow threatened, but there was plenty of fuel, and the camp on

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VII NORWAY HOUSE

The first thing Walter did when he woke the next morning was to notice the direction of the wind. Though light it was favorable. That made a day of easy, restful sailing. The weary men sat and lay about in as lazy positions as the well-filled boat would permit, while the women busied themselves with knitting and mending. The journey was a hard one on clothes, even of the stoutest materials, but by mending and darning whenever they had a chance, and by washing soiled things out at night and hanging them around the fire to dry, the Swiss managed to keep themselves fairly neat and clean. They had not been in the wilds long enough to grow careless.

The following day's journey commenced with a portage. The brigade was going up the Jack River, which was short but full of rapids. All the rivers in this country were made up of rapids, it seemed to Walter. Then came another period of ease on Knee Lake, so called from an angle like a bent knee. About twenty miles were made that day, one of the best of the trip.

The hard work was not over by any means. On Trout River were some of the worst portages of all. A waterfall, plunging down fifteen or sixteen feet, obstructed the passage. The boats were unloaded and dragged and carried up a rugged trail, to be launched again over steep rocks.

On Holey Lake,—named from a deep spot believed by the Indians to be bottomless,—was Oxford House, a Hudson Bay Company post. The boats made a short stop there, then went on to pitch camp on one of the islands. The waters abounded in fish. With trolling lines Walter and his companions caught lake trout enough for both supper and breakfast. The fish, broiled over the coals, were a luxury after days of pemmican and hard dried meat.

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A narrow river, more portages, a little pond, a deep stream flowing through flat, marshy land, followed Holey Lake. In strong contrast was the passage called Hell Gates, a narrow cut with sheer cliffs so close on either hand that there was not always room to use the oars.

A whole day was spent in passing the White Falls, where everything had to be carried a long mile. Three of the crews made the crossing at the same time, crowding each other on the portage. The Swiss caught the voyageurs' spirit of good-natured rivalry and entered heartily into the contest to see which crew would get boat and cargo over in the shortest time. With a ninety pound sack of pemmican, Walter trotted over the slippery trail and won a grin from Louis.

"You will make a good voyageur when you have gone two or three voyages," said the young

Canadian.

By the time Walter had helped to drag the heavy boat across three rock ridges, which caused three separate waterfalls, he felt that one voyage would be quite enough. Yet he was not too tired to dance a jig when he learned that his boat had won.

Small lakes, connected by narrow, grassy streams, gave relief from portaging, tracking, and poling. Muskrat houses, conical heaps of mud and débris, rose above the grass in the swamps, and ducks flew up as the boats approached. The sight of those ducks made Walter's mouth water. His regular portion of pemmican or dried meat left him hungry enough to eat at least twice as much. He had not had a really satisfying meal since leaving Holey Lake. Yet he could do a harder day's work and be far less tired than at the beginning of the trip. His muscles had hardened, and he carried not one pound of extra weight. During the cold nights he would have been glad of a layer of fat to keep him warm.

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The boat was sailing along a sluggish, marshy stream, when Louis, who was in the bow picking the channel, raised a shout. "The Painted Stone," he cried, pointing ahead.

"I don't see any stone, painted or not," Walter returned, gazing in the same direction.

Louis laughed. "There used to be such a stone,—so they say. The Indians worshiped it."

"But why make such a fuss about a stone that isn't there?"

Again Louis laughed. "Do you see that flat rock? Perhaps it was painted once, I do not know, but it marks the Height of Land. All the way we have come up and up, but from there we go down stream,—until we come to Sea River, which is a part of the Nelson and takes us to Lake Winnipeg. Isn't that something to make a fuss about?"

"It's the best news I have heard in many a day," Walter agreed.

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A short portage at the Height of Land brought the boats to the Echemamis River, where they were headed down stream into a rush-grown lake, connected by a creek with the Sea River. This stream is a part of the Nelson, which rises in Lake Winnipeg, so the brigade had to go against the current to Lower Play Green Lake and Little Jack River.

From a log cabin on the shore of Little Jack, a bearded, buckskin-clad man came down to the water's edge. Louis called to ask if he had any fish. The man shook his head. The first boat had taken all he could spare. The fisherman, Louis explained, supplied trout and sturgeon to Norway House.

Many a time during the trip Walter had heard of Norway House, an important Hudson Bay Company post. "Isn't that on Lake Winnipeg?" he cried. "Are we so near the lake?"

"We shall be there to-morrow."

Before sunrise next morning, the voyageurs

bathed and scrubbed in Little Jack's cold, muddy-looking water. They appeared at starting time in clean, bright calico shirts, and new moccasins elaborately embroidered. Louis and the Orkneyman wore gaudy sashes. A broad leather belt girt the steersman's middle and held his beaded deerskin pouch. Around his oily black hair he had bound a scarlet silk handkerchief. The Orkneyman had trimmed his yellow beard. No hair seemed to grow on Murray's face. Possibly it had been plucked out, Indian fashion.

Little Jack River is merely a channel winding about among the islands that separate Lower and Upper Play Green lakes, extensions of Lake Winnipeg. Louis told Walter that the "play green" was on one of the islands, where two bands of Indians had been accustomed to meet and hold feasts and games of strength and skill.

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Not a hundred yards behind the guide's boat, number three came in sight of Norway Point, the tip of the narrow peninsula separating Upper Play Green Lake from Lake Winnipeg proper. Shouts and cheers greeted the log wall of Norway House and the flag of the Hudson Bay Company. The Swiss were in high spirits. Once more they were nearing a land where men dwelt. Their journey would soon be over, they believed. Not yet could they grasp the vastness of this new world.

As the boats drew near the post, dogs began to bark and men came running down to the shore. Voices shouted greetings in English and French, not merely to the voyageurs, but to the immigrants as well. Though the fur traders, trappers, and voyageurs were reluctant to see their wilderness opened up to settlement, yet the arrival of the white strangers, even though they were settlers, was too important a break in the monotony of life at the trading post for their welcome to be other than cordial. Moreover the white men and half-breeds at Norway House, and even the Indians camped outside the walls, were curious to see these new immigrants. So the Swiss were welcomed warmly by bronzed white men and dusky-faced mixed bloods, while the full blood Indians looked on with silent but intent curiosity.

The first boats to arrive made a stay of several hours at the post, and Walter, conducted by Louis, had a good chance to see the place. Like York Factory, Norway House consisted of a group of log buildings within a stockade, but it stood on dry ground, not in a swamp, and its surroundings were far more attractive than those of the Hudson Bay fort.

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As the two boys were coming out of the big gate, after their tour of inspection, Walter, who was ahead, caught sight of a tall figure disappearing around one corner of the stockade. He glanced towards the shore. The boats were deserted. The voyageurs had sought friends within the stockade or in the tents and cabins outside the walls. The Swiss were visiting the fort or wandering about the point.

"Do we take on more supplies here?" Walter asked his companion.

"If we can get them," Louis returned. "They can spare little here, they say. Are you so starved that you think of food all the time?" he

questioned smilingly.

"No, I'm not quite so hungry as that. I just saw Murray carrying a sack, and I wondered what he had." Louis looked towards the boats. "Where is he? I don't see him."

"He didn't go to the boat. He was coming the other way. He went around the corner of the wall."

"With an empty sack?"

"No, a full one."

Louis stared at the corner bastion. "He was going around there, carrying a full sack? You are sure it was Murray?"

"I saw his back, but I'm sure. He has that red handkerchief around his head, you know."

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"Well, it was not anything for us he was taking in that direction," Louis commented, "and we brought nothing to be left at Norway House. It is some affair of his own. He——"

"Ho, Louis Brabant! What is the news from the north?"

Louis had swung about at the first word. Two buckskin-clad men, one old, the other young, were coming through the gate. Louis turned back to reply, and Walter followed him to listen to the exchange of news between the newly arrived voyageur and these two employees of the post. The Swiss boy was growing used to the Canadian French tongue, and during the conversation he learned several things that surprised him.

Walter had taken for granted that the journey would be nearly over when Lake Winnipeg was reached. Now he was amazed to learn that he had still more than three hundred miles to go to Fort Douglas, the stronghold of the Red River colony.

"But how far have we come?" he cried.

"About four hundred and thirty miles the way you traveled," the leather-faced old man answered promptly.

"The rest of the voyage will not be so hard though," Louis said reassuringly. "There are few portages. If the wind is fair, we can sail most of the way. Of course if there are storms on the lake——"

"There are always storms this time of year," put in the old voyageur discouragingly.

The prospect of bad weather on Lake Winnipeg did not disturb Walter so much, however, as a piece of news which the old man led up to with the question, "How is it that settlers are still coming to the Colony on the Red River now that Lord Selkirk is dead?"

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"Lord Selkirk dead?" cried Walter and Louis together.

"But yes, that is what people say. I was at Fort Douglas in June, and everyone there was talking about it, and wondering what would happen to the settlement."

"They did not tell us that at Fort York," cried Walter. "When did he die? Since we left Europe in May?"

"No, no, the news could not come to the Red River so quickly. It was last year some time he died."

"You haven't heard of this before, Louis?" Walter turned to his companion.

"No, I heard nothing of it when I came down the Red River in the spring. I left Pembina as soon as the ice was out, and at Fort Douglas I took service with the Company, but I did not stay there long. They sent me on here to Norway House. I heard no such story. Perhaps it is not true, but only a false rumor started by someone who wishes to make trouble in the colony."

"That must be it," agreed Walter. "If Lord Selkirk died last year they would surely have heard it at Fort York. Captain Mai would have known it anyway before we left Switzerland. No, it can't be true."

But the old voyageur shook his head. "Everyone at Fort Douglas believed it," he said.

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VIII THE MISSING PEMMICAN

About the middle of the afternoon, Laroque the guide began to round up crews and passengers. His shout of "Embark, embark" was taken up by one man after another, and the idle sled dogs, that wandered at will about the post and the Indian village, added their voices to the chorus.

Walter and Louis ran down to the shore at the first call. Most of the Swiss obeyed the summons promptly. Their fear of being left behind was too great to permit taking risks. Several of the voyageurs, however, were slow in appearing. When they did come, they gave evidence of having been too generously treated to liquor by their friends at the post. After everyone else was ready to start, Laroque had to go in search of Murray. Carrying a bundle wrapped in a piece of old canvas, Black Murray came back with the guide, his sullen face set and heavy, his small eyes shining with a peculiar glitter. He showed no other sign of drunkenness, but walked steadily to the boat, placed his bundle in the stern, and stepped in.

Laroque sprang to his own place, oars were dipped, sails raised, and the boats were off, amid shouts of farewell and the howling of dogs. Leaving the handling of the sail to the Orkneyman, Murray remained stolidly silent in the stern. His steering was careless, even erratic, but no one ventured to try to take the tiller. Luckily the wind was light, the lake smooth, and the boats had not far to go. Camp was pitched on a beach of the long point, where the travelers had an unobstructed view down the lake to the meeting place of sky and water.

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"It seems as if we had come to another ocean," Walter confided to Louis. "Why do they call this Norway Point, and the trading post Norway House? What has Norway to do with Lake Winnipeg?"

"I have heard," Louis replied, "that some men from a country called Norway were brought over by the Company and stationed here. Then too I have heard that the point was named from the pine trees that grow here, because they look like the pines in that country of Norway. Which story is true I know not. The post has been here a long time, and always, I think, it has been called Norway House. When the Selkirk colonists were driven from the Red River by the Northwesters, they came this way and camped on the Little Jack River."

That night's camp was one of the most comfortable of the whole journey. The evening was fine, there was plenty of wood, and an abundance of fish for supper. The Swiss sat about their fires later than usual, talking of the journey, speculating on what was to come, and planning for the future. Nearly three weeks they had been on the way from Fort York. Now they looked out over the star-lit waters stretching far away to the south, and cheered their hearts with the hope and belief that the worst was over. At least they would not have to track up stream and portage around rapids for some days to come.

"How long will it take us to reach the Red River?" The question was asked over and over again, with varying replies from the voyageurs. Walter asked it of Louis, and the young Canadian shook his head doubtfully. If the weather was good, the winds favorable, they might go the whole length of Lake Winnipeg in a week, but if the weather should be bad, no one could tell how long they might be delayed.

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The autumn weather showed its fickleness that very night. The wind shifted, the sky clouded over, and the morning dawned raw and threatening. The breeze was almost directly east, however, a favorable direction for the travelers, whose route lay along the north and west shores. So the boats got away early, and, with sails raised, held to the southwest, well out from land. They made good progress before the brisk wind, but as it grew stronger the lake roughened. Along the north shore high cliffs towered, with narrow stretches of beach here and there at the base. Safe landing places were few, but the waves were growing dangerously high, and the open boats were too heavily laden to ride such rough water buoyantly.

Laroque changed his course, tacking in towards a bit of beach. Murray's boat was not far behind, and the half-breed handled it with skill and judgment. At just the right instant, he ordered the sail down, the oars out. The boat was run up on the sand without shipping a drop of water.

The rest of the brigade were some distance behind. They were forced to put in close under the cliffs, but by using the oars managed to reach the beach.

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"We'll have to open that last bag of pemmican," said Walter to Louis who was kindling a fire.

"Yes, but we must make it last through the

voyage.”

Walter brought the rawhide sack, and Louis cut the leather cord with which it was sewed. An exclamation of surprise and anger escaped him. “What devil’s trick is this? Look, Walter!”

Walter looked, in amazement. “Why, it’s not pemmican. How on earth—”

“It is a fraud, a cheat.” Walter had never seen Louis so angry. “Some fiend has filled this sack with clay and leaves and sold it to the Company for good pemmican.”

“See here, Louis.” Walter lowered his voice. “This isn’t the bag I carried over the portage at the White Falls.” He turned the sack over and examined the other side. “There is no Company mark. Our pemmican has been stolen and this trash left in its place.”

“No one from the other boats would steal our supplies.” Louis was puzzled. “It must have been done at Norway House. Yet I think the Indians would hardly dare to steal from a Company boat under the very walls of the post. And they did not take the tea. The Indians like tea so well they can never get enough.”

“Murray had a sack on his shoulder when I saw him dodge around the corner of the wall, and the sack had the Company mark.” Walter’s voice had sunk to a whisper. “But why in the world should he steal the provisions from his own boat?”

Louis was thoughtful. “There might be a reason, yes,” he said. “*Le Murray* might sell that pemmican for something he wanted. He has a bundle that he did not have before.”

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“But how could he?” Walter objected. “They would know at Norway House that there was something wrong if the steersman of one of the boats offered to sell them a sack of pemmican.”

“That is true, but he might have traded it to the Indians, or some Indian friend of his might have sold it for him. I would like to know what is in that bundle. He slept with his head on it last night.”

“Shall we tell Laroque about this?”

“That this sack is not good, yes, but not about *Le Murray*, no, not yet. We can prove nothing. It may not have been the pemmican he had.”

“I’m sure it was,” Walter insisted stubbornly.

Louis shrugged. “I am no coward, Walter, but I will not accuse *Le Murray* of stealing and then voyage in the same boat with him. We have yet far to go.”

Louis was right and Walter knew it. Together they went to Laroque and told him of the fraud, but said nothing about their suspicions of Murray.

The guide was much disturbed. He examined the sack of clay, and questioned Murray and the Orkneyman. Both disclaimed any responsibility. The Orkneyman agreed with the boys that the sacks brought from Fort York had all borne the Company mark. Murray said he had not noticed.

He had had nothing to do with provisioning the boats. If the Company had been cheated, that was no affair of his.

From his own supplies, Laroque lent boat number three a little pemmican for supper. The Swiss were indignant at the fraud. Some of them even wanted to return to Norway House and seek for the culprit.

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Before the scanty meal was over, rain began to fall. The beach was not a good camping ground. If the wind shifted to the south, the waves would wash over the narrow margin of sand and break against the perpendicular cliffs. To find a better place was impossible, for the lake was far too stormy to venture out upon. The boats were pulled well up, the tents pitched with one wall almost against the cliff, and the sails, masts, and oars converted into additional shelters. Luckily the campers were protected from the strong wind, which had become more northerly. But the water came down the cliffs in cascades, digging pools and channels in the sand and shingle.

Fortunately the worst of the storm did not last long. The rain became fine and light like mist driven by the wind, and before sundown ceased entirely. As the wind shifted farther towards the north, the water receded from the base of the cliff, leaving a wider stretch of sand. The lake was still too rough for the boats to go out, but as long as the wind remained in the north, the beach was a safe camping place.

A little dry driftwood had been collected and put under shelter before the rain began. So everyone was able to warm and dry himself before creeping between his blankets. Laroque assigned the voyageurs to watches, and cautioned each man to walk the beach while on guard and keep an eye on wind and waves.

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IX HUNGER AND COLD

The guide aroused the camp before daylight. Wind and waves had fallen, and the boats got away quickly. All day they went ahead under sail or oars along the north shore. Camp was made on a narrow ridge of sand separating a large bay from the main body of water. A contrary wind kept the boats at Limestone Bay,—as it was called from the fragments of limestone strewn along its shores,—until late the following day.

Among the reeds and wild rice ducks were feeding. The voyageurs succeeded in shooting a number of the birds, made a stew of some, and buried the rest, unplucked, in ashes and hot sand. A fire was kept going above them for several hours until they were well cooked. When they were taken out and the skins stripped off, Walter found his portion very good eating indeed.

Two days later the mouth of the Saskatchewan River was reached. Walter was beginning to understand why the length of time required to

traverse Lake Winnipeg could not be foretold. The lake is about two hundred and sixty miles long in a direct course, but the open boats were obliged to keep well in towards shore, making the journey upwards of three hundred. When the weather was favorable, sails were raised and good speed made, but the autumn gales had set in, and contrary winds were frequent. Skirting the shore in head winds and high waves was both slow and dangerous. Sometimes the boats had to be beached through surf, the men jumping into the water and dragging them above the danger line. By the time camp was pitched, both voyageurs and settlers were not only tired and hungry, but usually wet and chilled to the bone.

October came with unseasonable cold, even for that northern country. With darkness the temperature sank far below the freezing point. One night Matthieu the unfortunate went to sleep without drying his wet shoes and stockings, and frosted both feet so that they were sore for the rest of the journey.

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Whenever it was possible to go on, whether at daybreak, noon, or midnight, the boats were away. Meals were irregular and food scanty. Much of the time the lake was too rough for fishing, but sometimes ducks were shot. To Murray's boat the loss of the sack of pemmican was serious. The supplies were reduced to tea and a little barley meal.

The boats did not always make the same camping ground, though they tried to keep together. How far behind the second brigade might be, no one could guess. Walter worried about the Periers. Surely this must be a hard experience for Elise and little Max, and for Mr. Perier also.

For two days the guide's boat and Murray's were windbound on an exposed beach where everything had to be carried well above the water line.

Fishing was impossible in this open, wind-swept spot, but Louis shot a white pelican. The clumsy looking bird with its great pouched beak was a curiosity to Walter. If he had not been so very hungry he could not have eaten its fishy-tasting flesh.

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Suddenly the weather changed for the better. In less than eight hours after the boats got away from their enforced camping ground, the lake looked as if it had never been disturbed. There was not a breath of wind to catch the sail, not a wave, or even a ripple. Plying the oars, the crews held a course far out across the mouth of a bay. On and on they rowed, watching the sunset and the afterglow reflected in still water and the stars coming out one by one.

The southern half of Lake Winnipeg is very broken in outline, with many points and islands. One night, reaching the sheltered head of a deep, sandy bay with a high background of rocks and forest, the travelers found the sands covered thick with the dead bodies of insects.

"Grasshoppers!" exclaimed Louis. "They have come again!"

Walter was gazing up and down the beach in

amazement. "I never knew there could be so many grasshoppers in the world," he said. "Where did they all come from?"

"From the prairie to the south. They're not ordinary grasshoppers like the big green ones. These are smaller and a different color, and their horns,"—Louis meant their antennæ,— "are short. I never saw this kind till three years ago, and then they came all of a sudden. They ate up everything. Ugh, how they smell! We can't camp here."

The place was indeed impossible as a camping ground. The boats put off again to seek a spot where the waves had washed the shores clean of the remains of the dead insects. Louis was right when he said that they were not ordinary grasshoppers. They were the dread locust,—the Rocky Mountain locust. At the camp fire that night, the Canadian boy told Walter and his companions how the locusts had come to the Red River valley.

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"I was at Fort Douglas with my father," he began. "We had just come down from Pembina with some carts. Everything looked well on the settlers' farms. The grain was in the ear and ripening. Then came the grasshoppers. These short-horned grasshoppers fly much higher than the ordinary kind. Their wings are stronger. They came in great clouds that darkened the air as if real clouds were passing across the sun. Late in the afternoon they began to alight, such hordes of them you can't imagine. Men, women, and children ran out into the fields, crushing grasshoppers at every step, the flying creatures dashing against them like hailstones. The poor settlers could do nothing against such an army. They saved a few half ripe ears of barley, the women hiding them under their aprons, but that was all. By the next morning everything was gone."

"Do you mean that the grasshoppers ate the crops?" asked Walter, scarcely able to believe what he had heard.

"They ate everything green," Louis replied impressively, "not only the grain and the gardens, but every green blade of grass on the prairie."

"And they have come again this year," said Matthieu the weaver slowly, "and perhaps they have again taken everything." His voice sounded discouraged.

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"I fear it," was Louis' grave response.

"What did the settlers do for food?" asked Walter. "Did Lord Selkirk supply it?"

Louis shook his head. "That was a hard winter. Most of the colonists went to Pembina, where they could hunt the buffalo. They got some food from the Company and some pemmican from the Indians. But they had almost no seed for the next year. In the spring they sowed the little barley they had saved, and it came up and promised well. Then the young grasshoppers hatched out from the eggs left in the ground the year before, and ate it all. So again the settlers were without meal for the winter. The Governor sent M'sieu Laidlaw and other men into the Sioux country, up the Red River and down the

St. Peter to the great Mississippi where there is a settlement called Prairie du Chien. It was a hard journey in winter on snowshoes, but they came back in June with more than three hundred bushels of seed wheat, oats, and peas. The seeding was too late for a good crop last year, but this year they hoped for a big one."

"And the grasshoppers have come again," Matthieu repeated dully.

Around points and among islands the boats threaded their way, hugging the shore most of the time, risking traverses across the mouths of bays when the weather permitted.

No food was left in Murray's boat, nothing but a little tea. Fishing had to be resorted to, often with poor luck. Few animals were seen, though the howling of wolves had come to be a familiar sound at night. Flocks of ducks and geese passed high overhead, but to shoot them the hunters had to seek the marshy places in bays or at stream mouths. Bad weather caused so much delay that to take advantage of calm water or favorable wind everyone was compelled, more than once, to go breakfastless or supperless. Walter was reduced to skin, muscle and bone. He felt a constant gnawing hunger, was seldom warm except when exercising, and found his hard-won muscular strength diminishing. An hour's pulling at the oar almost exhausted him. He wondered at Murray, on whose strength and endurance starvation seemed to have no effect. Even Louis admitted weakness and had lost some of his cheery high spirits.

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At last the low shore at the south end of the lake, a long point of shingle and sand, came in view. When the water was high and the wind from the north, much of the long sand bar was covered, but luckily the lake was calm when the guide's boat reached the point. Murray's craft followed Laroque's closely.

Sharing one gun between them, Louis and Walter went, with some of the others, hunting for their supper. They rowed along the sand spit to the marsh which was alive with birds,—ducks, geese, tall herons, and many other smaller kinds. In a little pond several graceful, long-necked swans were feeding. Walter did not think of firing at swans, but Louis had no scruples. He brought one down with his first shot.

At sunset the hunters returned to camp with four fat geese, one of which Walter had killed, two swans, and eighteen or twenty ducks. A party from one of the other boats brought in almost as many. For the first time in many days Walter had a chance to really satisfy his appetite. Wrapped in his blanket, he slept soundly on his bed of sand, untroubled by hunger dreams.

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X THE RED RIVER AT LAST

The mouth of the Red River divides into several

channels that wind through the marsh. The guide chose one of the main waterways, of good depth and gentle current, and the oarsmen, eager to reach the settlement, pulled with a will. They had some forty miles, by water, yet to go.

"Why do they call it *Red River*?" Walter asked Louis. "Not from the color of the water?"

"It is from the Indian name, *Miscousipi*," was the reply. "I have heard that when the *Saulteux* and the *Sioux* fought a great battle on the banks, the water ran red with blood. Both nations claim the valley as a hunting ground."

"Then it can hardly be a good place for settlers if the Indians fight over it," Walter said doubtfully.

"There are only *Saulteux* and *Crees* on the lower river now. The *Sioux* no longer dare venture here. The upper river is the dangerous country."

Where the marsh gave way to firmer ground, in an open space on the low bank of a creek coming in from the west, stood a group of Indian lodges. As the boat passed, the Swiss boy looked with interest at the low, round topped structures of hides and rush mats.

"Those are *Saulteur* wigwams," Louis explained.

"No one seems to be at home to-day."

"No, but they intend to come back or they would have taken down the lodges. There was a fight in this place many years ago. A band of *Crees* came down that stream, and the old people and children camped here, while the young men went to *Fort York* with their furs. That was before the *Hudson Bay Company* had posts in this part of the country. While the braves were all away, the *Sioux* came and killed the old people and took the children captive. So the stream is called *Rivière aux Morts*—the river of the dead."

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"What a fiendish thing to do," Walter exclaimed, "and cowardly."

Louis shrugged expressively. "It is the Indian way of fighting. The *Sioux* are not cowards, but fiends, yes. And so are the *Crees* and the *Saulteux* in war. I say it though my grandmother was an *Ojibwa*."

"Have you Indian blood, Louis?" Walter asked in surprise. "I supposed you were pure French."

"I am *bois brûlé*, as we mixed bloods are called from our dark skins, and I am not ashamed of it. My father, he was pure French, and my mother is half French, but her mother was *Ojibwa*, *Saulteur*. Perhaps I do not look so Indian as *le Murrai Noir*." Louis lowered his voice. "They say he is at least half *Sioux*."

"*Sioux*! Well, he certainly doesn't act like a white man."

"He has the worst of both the white man and the Indian I think."

As the boats went on up stream, the banks became higher and covered with trees, not willows and aspens only, but elms and oaks and maples. The frosty weather had practically stripped the trees of what leaves the locusts had

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left, yet no wide view was possible, for the river ran through a narrow trench with steep sides.

At the foot of a stretch of rapids camp was made, and a number of small fish caught for supper. Early in the morning the ascent was begun. The fall was slight, but the current was strong, and the channel sown with boulders and interrupted by ledges. After the boats had been tracked through, the voyageurs delayed for the scrubbing and hair trimming that preceded their approach to the dwellings of men. Again they put on their best and brightest shirts, sashes, and moccasins, which they had carefully stowed away after leaving Norway House.

After he was washed and dressed, Louis, with an air of secrecy, drew Walter aside. "I have seen the inside of Murray's big package," he whispered.

"You have? How did that happen?"

"He left the package in the boat. I opened it."

"What did you find?"

"Little things,—awls, flints, fish hooks, net twine, beads, all wrapped in red or blue handkerchiefs. I had no time to unwrap them, but I could feel some of them. I wonder what he wants of all those things."

Walter remembered the conversation in the Indian room at Fort York. "Can't he sell them to the Indians for furs?" he asked.

"The Company will not permit a voyageur to trade. Sometimes, it is true, they may send a man out to buy skins. Perhaps they might send Murray, but I do not think so, and he would need more goods, a whole canoe or cart or sled load."

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"But the Company refused to let him have them," Walter explained. "At Fort York he asked for a lot of goods, on credit, so he could go trade with the Sioux."

"The Sioux?"

"Yes, I heard the clerk tell him that the Chief Trader wouldn't give him the goods. The clerk said it was a crazy scheme. Murray must have stolen our pemmican and exchanged it, or got someone else to do it for him, at Norway House. He must have wanted those things badly to be willing to go hungry for them."

"He can endure hunger like an Indian," Louis returned, "and one of the voyageurs in Laroque's boat has been sharing his food with him. I saw him do it. He is afraid of Murray for some reason. It may be you are right about his selling the pemmican. The Indians want all those little things. They are eager to get them. He might begin—"

"Embark, embark!"

The two boys hurried towards the boat. As they went, Walter whispered, "Are you going to tell about that package?"

"I think so. Not to Laroque, but to the Chief Trader at Fort Douglas."

When Murray stepped into the boat, he stooped

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to examine his bundle. Would he discover that it had been opened? It was an anxious moment for Louis and Walter, but the steersman took his place without even looking in their direction. Walter would not have thought of opening Murray's package. But the Canadian boy's upbringing had been different.

The banks bordering the rapids were gravelly, the growth thinner and smaller. Then came lower, muddy shores, and Walter got his first glimpse of the prairie. On the west side, only a few trees and bushes edged the river. The country beyond stretched away flat and open, but it was not the fertile, green land the Swiss boy had heard about. The plain was yellow-gray, desolate and dead looking. In one place a wide stretch was burned black. Could this be the rich and beautiful land Captain Mai had described?

Walter's disappointment was too deep for expression. All he said was, "I thought the prairie would be like our meadows at home. It doesn't look as if anything could grow here."

"Oh, things grow very fast, once the ground is broken," Louis assured him. "Wheat, barley and oats, peas and potatoes, everything that is planted. And the prairie grass is fine pasture. The buffalo eat nothing else. It is as I feared though. The grasshoppers have taken everything. But the grass will grow again. It is coming now. Look at that low place. It is all green. Wait until spring and then you will see. The prairie is beautiful then, the fresh, new grass, and flowers everywhere."

"And the grasshoppers come and eat it all up," Walter added dejectedly.

"They may never come again. No one at Fort Douglas or Pembina had ever seen the short horned grasshoppers till three years ago. And they didn't come last year. Perhaps we shall never see them again."

Walter knew that Louis was trying to cheer him, and he felt a little ashamed of his discouragement. He put aside his disappointment and forebodings, and tried to share in his friend's good spirits. In a few hours the long journey would be over, and that was something to be thankful for. He hoped it was nearly over for Elise and Max and their father. The second brigade could not be very far behind.

The current was not strong and there were no rocks, so making their way up stream was not hard work for the boat crews. The first person from the settlement who came in sight was a sturdy, red-haired boy of about Walter's own age, fishing from a dugout canoe. He raised a shout at the appearance of the brigade, and snatching off his blue Scotch bonnet or Tam-o'-Shanter, he waved it around his head. Then he paddled to shore in haste to spread the news.

Log houses came in view on the west side of the river at the place Louis called the Frog Pond. Lord Selkirk himself, when he had visited the settlement four years before, had named that part of his colony Kildonan Parish, after the settlers' old home in Scotland. The little cabins were scattered along the bank facing the stream, the narrow farms stretching back two miles across the prairie. From the river there

was but little sign of cultivation and scarcely anything green to be seen.

From nearly every house folk came out to watch the brigade go by. Roughly clad, far from prosperous looking they were, in every combination of homespun, Hudson Bay cloth, and buckskin. Some of the men wore kilts instead of trousers, and nearly all waved flat Scotch bonnets. Walter's heart warmed to these folk. Like himself they were white and from across the ocean, though their land and language were not his own. One bent old woman in dark blue homespun dress, plaid shawl, and white cap reminded him of his own grandmother.

All the Swiss were waving hats and kerchiefs, and shouting "*Bon jour*" and "*Guten Tag*," the women smiling while the tears ran down their cheeks. The long journey with all its suffering and hardships was over,—so they believed. At last they had reached the "promised land." As yet it did not look very promising to be sure, but they would soon make homes for themselves. The thin face of Matthieu, the weaver, who had been so disheartened when he heard about the grasshoppers, was shining with happiness.

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XI FORT DOUGLAS

"Where do we land, Louis?" asked Walter.

"At Fort Douglas, where Governor Sauterelle lives."

"I thought the Governor's name was Mc-something."

"It is McDonnell, but people call him Governor Grasshopper because, they say, he is as great a destroyer as those pests."

"What do they mean?"

"They do not like their Governor, these colonists. You will soon hear all about him."

A few cabins, set down hit or miss, less well kept than those on the west bank, and interspersed with several Indian lodges, came in view on the east shore. Black haired, dark skinned men and women, and droves of children and sharp nosed dogs were running down to the river.

"*Bois brulés*," Louis explained, using the name he had given himself. It means "burnt wood" and is descriptive of the dark color of the half-breed.

The boat made a turn to the east, following a big bend in the river. "This is Point Douglas, and there is the fort," said Louis, pointing to the roofs of buildings, the British flag and that of the Hudson Bay Company flying over them. Point Douglas had been burned over many years before, and was a barren looking place. The fort, like York Factory and Norway House, was a mere group of buildings enclosed within a

stockade.

When Laroque's boat reached the landing, the shore was lined with people; Hudson Bay employees, white settlers, and *bois brulés*. As each craft drew up to the landing place, the boatmen sprang out to be embraced and patted on the back by their friends. The new settlers' warmest reception came from a group of bearded, bold eyed, rough looking, white men. When one of these men spoke to Walter in German, and another in unmistakably Swiss French, the boy's face betrayed his astonishment.

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The first man, a red-faced fellow with untrimmed, sandy beard, laughed and switched from German to French. "Oh, I am a Swiss like you," he explained, "though I have not seen Switzerland for many a year. I am a soldier by trade, and I served the British king. We DeMeurons are the pick of many countries."

Walter did not like the man's looks. He had seen swaggering, mercenary soldiers of fortune before, and he was not sorry when his bold-mannered countryman turned from him to make the acquaintance of his companions.

The voyageurs were hastily unloading. They had reached the end of the journey and were in a hurry to be paid off. Murray did not even wait for the unloading. Carrying his big bundle, he strode quickly towards the fort. Louis looked after him, swung a bale of goods to his back, and trotted up the slope.

Seeing no reason why he should stand idle when there was work to do, Walter shouldered a package and followed. As he reached the gate, three men came through, and he stepped aside to let them pass. The leading figure, a red-faced man of middle age and important air, cast a sharp glance at the boy. Walter's clothes betrayed him.

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"Ye're na voyageur." The man spoke peremptorily in Scotch sounding English. "Put down that packet and follow me. I've a few words to say to a' of ye."

Walter had learned enough English to understand, and the tone warned him that obedience was expected. He left his load lying on the ground, and followed down the slope towards the river. From the red-faced man's dictatorial manner, the boy guessed him to be Alexander McDonnell, the "Grasshopper Governor." He was obeyed promptly, but the sullen, even angry, looks on the faces of the half-breeds and Scotch settlers who made way for him, showed that he was not popular. Only the ex-soldiers seemed boldly at their ease in his presence.

The new colonists were quickly gathered together so that the Governor might address them. To make his meaning plain, he used both English and French. His manner was abrupt, yet what he said was reasonable enough, discouraging though it was to the newcomers. After a few words of welcome to the Selkirk Colony and an expression of hope that the Swiss would be industrious and would prosper accordingly, he told them frankly that they had come at an unfortunate time. The settlement

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was ill prepared for them. The grasshoppers had utterly destroyed the crops. The food supply for the coming winter was inadequate. There was not enough to feed the colonists already established. Most of the settlers, old and new, must spend the winter farther up the Red River at Fort Daer, the Colony post at the mouth of the Pembina. Game animals, especially the buffalo upon which the people must depend for food until new crops could be grown, were much more abundant and easily reached near Fort Daer. Pemmican could be obtained there from the *bois brulés* and the Indians. Some of the settlers had already gone. Every one of the newcomers able to endure the journey must leave on the morrow. They might pitch their tents near Fort Douglas for the night. Fuel for their fires would be supplied and food for the evening meal and for the journey to the Pembina. More than this the Governor could not promise. At the Pembina they would find timber for cabin building, game for the hunting. Some other necessaries might be bought at Fort Daer. In the spring they could return, and land for farming would be assigned to them. The Swiss had arrived at a bad time when the Colony could do little for them. They would have to do the best they could for themselves.

It was a sober and depressed group of immigrants who listened to Governor McDonnell's speech. In spite of what they had heard and seen of the ravages of the locusts, they had clung to the hope that their worst troubles would be over when they reached Fort Douglas. They had expected to be housed and fed for a little while at least, until they could make homes for themselves on their own land. Now that dream was over. They must go on,—all of them who could go on. And when they reached a stopping place at last, it would be only a temporary one, with the doubtful prospect of depending on hunting for a living, and perhaps starving before spring. No wonder discouragement and foreboding rested heavily upon their hearts. Even Walter Rossel, young and strong and hopeful, was dismayed at the Governor's words.

The Swiss were a steadfast and courageous people. They soon roused themselves to make the best of a bad situation. Food and fuel for the night at least had been promised them. They left the future to Providence, and set about pitching camp. Heretofore the voyageurs had done part of that work. Now, having reached the end of their journey, having unloaded the boats and been paid off, they joined their own friends at Fort Douglas or crossed the river to the *bois brulé* settlement on the east bank. Only Louis Brabant lingered to lend encouragement and help to those whom the long journey had made his friends.

After their first curiosity, the old settlers showed little interest in the new. To the Scotch and Irish, the Swiss were foreigners in speech and ways. The colonists knew from experience the hardships of the voyage across the ocean and of the wilderness trip from Fort York. They could understand the discouraging situation in which the newcomers found themselves, but they could do little or nothing for them. They were not hard hearted, but, pinched for food themselves, they could not be overjoyed at the coming of all these

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additional hungry mouths to be fed. Had the Swiss been actually starving, the old settlers would have shared with them the last pint of meal and ounce of pemmican, yet they could scarcely help resenting the arrival of the strangers. Why did the heirs of Lord Selkirk keep on sending settlers without providing for them even the barest necessities? No wonder the old colonists grumbled and growled. If their attitude towards the new was not actually unfriendly, it was far from cordial or encouraging. Only the ex-soldiers mingled freely with the Swiss, and even invited certain families to their cabins.

Walter did not like the appearance and manner of these men, but they aroused his curiosity. "Who are the DeMeurons?" he asked Louis. "How did they come here, and why do they call themselves by that name?"

"They came with Lord Selkirk when he recaptured Fort Douglas from the Northwesters. They were soldiers brought over from Europe to fight for the King in the last war with the Americans. After the war they were discharged and Lord Selkirk engaged about a hundred of them to protect his colony. Because most of them had belonged to a regiment commanded by a man named DeMeuron, the settlers call them all DeMeurons. Lord Selkirk gave them land along the *Rivière la Seine*, which comes into the Red about a mile above here, but they do little farming, those DeMeurons. They would rather hunt. I blame them not for that. The other colonists have no love for them."

"I don't like their looks myself," Walter replied, "but they seem kinder to strangers than anyone else here is."

"The DeMeurons are all bachelors," Louis explained with a grin. "They seek wives to keep their houses and to help them farm their lands, and perhaps they think Swiss girls will work harder than *bois brulés*. So they are kind to the fathers and brothers that they may not be refused when they propose marriage to daughters and sisters. Soon there will be weddings I think."

"I should hate to see a sister of mine marry a DeMeuron," was Walter's emphatic comment. He changed the subject. "Have you found out," he asked, "if it is true that Lord Selkirk is dead?"

"Yes, it is true. He died, they say, a year ago last spring."

"Then who owns the Colony now, the Hudson Bay Company?"

"I don't quite understand about that," was the doubtful reply. "I asked one of the Company clerks at the fort and he said that the land and everything belong to Lord Selkirk's heirs. But M'sieu Garry, the Vice-Governor of the Company, as they call him, was here during the summer, and with him was M'sieu McGillivray, a big man among the Northwesters, and now, since the two companies are one, of the Hudson Bay also. They were much interested in the settlement, the clerk said, and made plans about what should be done."

"Lord Selkirk was one of the owners of the

Company, wasn't he?" Walter questioned. "Then his heirs must own part of it. Perhaps the Company is going to run the Colony for them. Does Governor McDonnell belong to the Company?"

"That I don't know. It was Lord Selkirk who made McDonnell governor. Truly it is *he* who runs the Colony now, with a high hand."

Mention of Governor McDonnell brought Walter's own personal problem uppermost in his thoughts. "Do you suppose they will really send us on up the river to-morrow?" he asked.

"Yes, truly. It is the only place for you to go. Here you would starve before spring. Perhaps a few may stay, those the DeMeurons have taken into their cabins. You, Walter, will go of course, and I am glad. Pembina is my home, and we go together."

"But I can't go until the Periers come," the Swiss boy protested. "I intend to stay with them wherever they are, and I ought to wait for them."

Louis shook his head. "I think the Governor will not let you. What good would it do? As soon as the second brigade arrives, they will be sent on to Pembina. You can wait for them there as well as here. Come with me to-morrow. My mother will make you welcome, and we will find a place for your friends. Perhaps we can have a cabin all ready for them. They would be glad of that."

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XII BY CART TRAIN TO PEMBINA

Louis slept with friends on the other side of the river, Walter remaining with his country people. The weather was sharp and cold, but Governor McDonnell's promise of fuel and food was fulfilled. After a hearty meal, the newcomers, in spite of their disappointment, passed a more comfortable night than many they had endured during the long journey. They were somewhat disturbed, however, by the sounds of revelry borne on the wind from Fort Douglas. That the voyageurs and their friends would celebrate hilariously, the Swiss had expected, but not that such wild revels would take place within the fort walls, where lived the Governor and his household.

"The Colony is short of food, so they say," Matthieu the weaver complained bitterly, "but the folk in the fort must have plenty to eat and drink and make merry with."

Walter clung to the hope that the departure for Pembina might be delayed until after the arrival of the second boat brigade. But early in the morning word came from Fort Douglas that the Swiss must make ready to leave at once. The boy resolved to ask the Governor to let him remain. He went up to the fort, and felt encouraged

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when he was admitted at the gate without question, but his request to see the Governor met with flat refusal. The Governor was busy and could not be disturbed. He had given his orders and those orders must be obeyed. Walter was well and strong and able to travel. He had no friends in the settlement to take him in. Well, then, he must go on to Pembina.

Finding it useless to plead his cause to the Governor's underlings and impossible to get to McDonnell himself, the angry, discouraged lad left the fort. He found Louis Brabant at the Swiss camp, and poured out his story wrathfully. "I have a notion to stay here anyway," he concluded stubbornly. "I can find someone who will give me lodging for a few days."

"Yes," Louis admitted. "At St. Boniface, across the river, I can ask my friends to take you in, but if the Governor learns you have disobeyed his command he will be most angry."

"What can he do to me? I have a right to be here."

"Perhaps, but when the Governor is angry, he does not think of the rights of others. You would have to go anyway, tied in a cart as a prisoner, or he would shut you up in the fort, or send you out of the Colony."

"Where could he send me except to Pembina?" Walter questioned, still unconvinced.

"To Norway House,—to be taken to Fort York in the spring and sent back to Europe in a ship," was the startling reply. "Oh, yes, as Governor of the Colony, he could do all that."

"But surely he wouldn't do it, for such a little thing?"

"Governor 'Sauterelle' does not think it a little thing when he is disobeyed. He is not gentle to one who opposes his will. No, no, Walter, you must not think of it. At Pembina you will be far enough away to do as you please, but not here. Come, you shall stay at my home, and we will find a place for your friends and make all ready for them. It won't be long until they join you."

Reluctantly Walter yielded to the Canadian boy's advice. He did not want to yield, but, if what Louis said of the Governor was true, the risk of disobedience was too great. He himself had seen enough already of Alexander McDonnell to realize that he was not the kind of man to be lenient with anyone who disobeyed his orders. So the Swiss boy set about getting his own scanty belongings ready for the journey. He had taken for granted that the party would travel by boat, but he had returned to the camp on the river bank to find his companions' baggage being loaded into carts.

Clumsy looking things were those carts,—a box body and two great wheels at least five feet tall, with strong spokes, thick hubs, and wooden rims three inches wide and without metal tires. Between the shafts, which were straight, heavy beams, a small, shaggy, sinewy pony, harnessed with rawhide straps, stood with lowered head and tail and an air of dejection or sleepy indifference.

"What queer vehicles," Walter exclaimed. "Are we to travel overland?"

"Yes, the journey is much shorter that way. By water, following the bends of the river, is almost twice as far. You never saw carts like these before? No, I think that is true. The *bois brûlés* of the Red River invented this sort of cart. It is made all of wood, not a bit of metal anywhere. Every man makes his own cart. All the tools he needs are an axe, a saw, and an auger or an Indian drill. I have a cart at home I made myself, and it is a good one. In this country you must make things for yourself or you have nothing."

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Examining one of the queer contrivances, Walter found that Louis had spoken the simple truth. No metal had been used in its construction. Wooden pegs and rawhide lashings took the place of nails and spikes. Even the harness was guiltless of a buckle. The carts were far from beautiful, but they were strong and serviceable. The Swiss boy, who knew something of woodworking, admired the ingenuity and skill that had gone into their making. Enough vehicles had been supplied to transport the few belongings of the Swiss and to allow the women and children to ride. Now other carts,—with the families and baggage of the Scotch settlers who were leaving for Pembina,—began to arrive at the rendezvous, the discordant squeaking and screeching of their wooden axles announcing their approach some time before they came in sight.

It took so long to gather the cart train together and make everything ready for departure, that Walter kept hoping for the appearance of the boat brigade. But not a craft, except a canoe or two, came into view around the bend of the river, and no songs or shouts of voyageurs were heard in the distance. The boy, still determined to plead his cause, kept a lookout for Governor McDonnell, but he did not appear. He left the carrying out of his commands to his assistants.

The start was made at last. At the sharp "*Marche donc!*" of the drivers, the sleepy looking ponies woke into life and were off at a brisk trot. The carts pitched and wobbled, each with a gait of its own, over the rough, hard ground, the ungreased axles groaning and screeching in every key. The discord set Walter's teeth on edge, as he walked with Louis beside the vehicle the latter was driving.

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At the head of the column the guide in charge, Jean Baptiste Lajimonière, rode horseback, followed closely by the cart carrying his wife and younger children. The whole family had come from Pembina a short time before to have the newest baby christened by Father Provencher, the priest. Behind the Lajimonières, the train stretched out across the plain, the two wheeled carts piled with baggage and household belongings or occupied by the women and children sitting flat on the bottom, their heels higher than their hips. The drivers sat on the shafts or walked alongside. The Swiss men and boys went afoot, but some of the Scotch and Canadians rode wiry ponies and drove a few cattle. The riders used deerskin pads for saddles and long stirrups or none at all. Spare cart horses ran loose beside their harnessed companions.

Not all of the Swiss were in the party. Several families, taken into the cabins of the DeMeurons, had been allowed to remain. Matthieu and his wife also stayed behind. The baby was ill and Matthieu himself scarce able to travel. The Colony had started a new industry, the manufacture of cloth from buffalo hair, and the weaver was to be given employment. When Walter learned that Matthieu was to remain, the boy entrusted to him a letter for Mr. Perier, explaining how he had been forced to go on to Pembina.

Leaving Point Douglas, the cart train turned southeast, traveling a little back from the west bank of the river, along a worn track across open prairie. Beyond the narrow valley, scattered cabins could be seen among the trees on the east side.

"That is St. Boniface settlement," Louis told his companion. "Père Provencher is building a church there."

About a mile south of Point Douglas, the carts approached the junction of the Assiniboine River with the Red, the place Louis called *Les Fourches*, the Forks. On the north bank of the Assiniboine stood a small Hudson Bay post, and not far from it were piles of logs for a new building or stockade.

"The Company is going to make a new fort," Louis explained. "M'sieu Garry and M'sieu McGillivray chose this spot. There was an old Northwest post, Fort Gibraltar, here, but five years ago M'sieu Colin Robertson, a Hudson Bay man, seized it, and Governor Semple had it pulled down. The logs and timber were taken down river to Fort Douglas. Fort Gibraltar had been here a long time, and so has this trading house. *Les Fourches* is an old trading place. Men say there was a fort here a hundred years ago, when all Canada and the fur country were French, but nothing is left of those old buildings now."

The cart train halted near the trading post, as some of the men had business there, and Louis asked Walter to go with him to see the Chief Trader. "At Fort Douglas I told a clerk how our pemmican disappeared and about *le Murrain's* package of trade goods. *Le Murrain* had received his pay and had left the fort. The clerk knew not where he had gone. He told me to report the affair to M'sieu the Chief Trader here. Come with me, and we will tell what we know."

The men of the little post were busy outfitting boats to go up the Assiniboine with goods and supplies for stations farther west, but the two boys had a few minutes' conversation with the Chief Trader. Louis told the story and Walter corroborated it. The trader looked grave and shook his head perplexedly. The charge against Murray,—stealing supplies and exchanging them for goods with which to trade on his own account,—was a serious one. Could it be proved? The trader did not doubt the story of the contents of the bundle, but Murray might have come by the things honestly and for a legitimate purpose.

"He is due here to-day to go with the Assiniboine brigade," the trader explained, "but I have seen nothing of him. You have no proof that he took

the pemmican and substituted the bag of clay. If he denies it, the only thing I can do is to report the matter to Norway House at the first opportunity. They ought to know whether anyone exchanged pemmican for goods while your brigade was there. Of course Murray didn't make the bargain himself. Someone else did it for him. It won't be necessary to mention your names at present, to Murray I mean. You would find the Black Murray a bad enemy."

"Yes," Louis agreed. "He does not love either of us now. I thank you, M'sieu."

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"The thanks are due to you, from the Company, for reporting this matter. Don't you want to sign for the Assiniboine voyage? We can use you both."

Walter shook his head. He had had quite enough voyaging for the present. Louis answered simply, "No, M'sieu. I go to my mother at Pembina."

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XIII THE RED-HEADED SCOTCH BOY

Instead of continuing on the west bank of the Red River and crossing the Assiniboine, the cart train turned to the east, followed a well-traveled track down to the Red, and forded that river below the Forks. The country just south of the Assiniboine was marshy and thickly wooded with willows and small poplars. By following the east bank of the Red the almost impassable low ground was avoided.

The carts were now on the St. Boniface side, where the stream that Louis called *Rivière la Seine*, and the Scotch settlers, German Creek, entered the river. Some of the DeMeuron cabins were near at hand, and the Swiss who were to remain there were on the lookout for a chance to say good-bye to their friends. Walter saw again the red-faced ex-soldier who had boasted that he and his comrades were the pick of many countries. He carried a gun on his shoulder and looked as if he had been drinking. The boy liked him even less than before.

The carts crossed the creek, which was narrow and shallow where it joined the river. Ten or twelve miles farther on, they forded the Red again, above the mouth of the *Rivière la Sale*, a small, muddy stream coming in from the west.

Their way now lay across the open prairie west of the Red River; treeless plains such as the Swiss immigrants had never seen before. Trees grew along the river bank only. The few elevations in sight seemed scarcely high enough to be called hills. This was the fertile, rich soiled land of which the new settlers had been told. Its grass ravaged by locusts, dried by the sun, withered by frost, in some places consumed by sweeping fires; the prairie showed little outward sign of its fertility. The immigrants gazed across

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the yellow-gray expanse and the unsightly black stretches, and shook their heads wonderingly and doubtfully. Many a heart was heavy with homesickness for native mountains and valleys.

Walter Rossel was not a little heartsick, as he walked beside the loaded cart or took a turn at riding on the shafts and driving the shaggy pony. He was trudging along, absorbed in his own thoughts, when he was startled by the sudden dash of a horse so close that he instinctively jumped the other way. Looking up, he saw a freckled, red-haired lad in a Tam-o'-Shanter, grinning cheerfully down from the back of the wiry, black pony he had pulled up so short it was standing on its hind legs. Instantly Walter recognized the horseman. This red-headed boy was the first of the settlers he had seen when the brigade approached the Scotch settlement of Kildonan. He was the fisherman who had waved his blue bonnet to the boats.

The Scotch lad was greeting Louis as an old friend, and the Canadian responded smilingly. "*Bo'jou*, Neil MacKay," he cried. "So your family goes again to Pembina."

"What else can we do?" was the question. "We must eat, and there is sure to be more food at Pembina this winter than at Kildonan. We will hunt together again, Louis."

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"Yes, you and I and my other friend here, Walter Rossel."

Walter and Neil responded to this introduction by exchanging nods and grins. The red-haired lad dismounted, and, leading his pony, fell into step by Walter's side. The conversation of the three was carried on principally in French. The Scotch boy had learned that language during his first winter at the Red River. That winter, and several of the succeeding ones, he had spent at Pembina. Among the French and *bois brulés* he had had plenty of practice in the Canadian tongue. Indeed he spoke it far better than English, for his native speech was the Gaelic of northern Scotland. Already familiar with Louis' Canadian French, Walter had little difficulty in understanding Neil, except when he introduced a Gaelic word or phrase.

The Scotch boy answered the newcomer's questions readily and told him much about the Colony. Neil had come from Scotland with his father and mother, brothers and sisters, before he was nine years old. He was just fifteen now. When the MacKays and their companions had reached the Red River, they had found the settlement deserted, the houses burned. The settlers were gathered together again and spent the winter at Pembina, returning to Fort Douglas in the spring. Then came Cuthbert Grant and his wild *bois brulé* followers. Governor Semple was killed and Fort Douglas captured for the Northwest Company. The colonists, including the MacKays, were compelled to go to Norway House. They had returned when Lord Selkirk and his DeMeurons arrived and had gone on with their farming.

There were some two hundred settlers at Kildonan now, Neil said, and about a hundred DeMeurons along German Creek. How many Canadians and *bois brulés* really belonged at St. Boniface it was hard to tell, they came and went

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so constantly. "They do little farming on the east side of the river," the boy remarked. "Hunting and fishing are more to their taste. I don't blame them. They can get enough to eat more easily that way. Raising crops here is discouraging work. You will learn that soon enough."

"Isn't the soil good?" asked Walter. "We were told it was rich."

"Oh, the soil is all right, after you get the ground broken. Breaking is hard work though, when you have nothing but a hoe and a spade. There is scarcely a plow in the Colony. There hasn't been an ox till just lately. The Indian ponies aren't trained for farm work. Things grow fast once they are planted, but what is the good of raising them when the grasshoppers take them all? I would go to Canada, as so many have done, or to the United States, but my father is stubborn. He won't leave Kildonan. He has worked hard and he doesn't want to give up his land. Yet if the grasshoppers keep coming every year, they will drive even him away." Neil shook his red head, his face very sober.

The settlers, he went on to say, had no sheep and few pigs. Until a few weeks before, they had had no cattle. Alexis Bailly, a *bois brulé* trader had come, during the summer, clear from the Mississippi River with a herd of about forty.

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"He got a good price for the beasts," Neil commented, "but he deserved it, after bringing them hundreds of miles through the Sioux country. Why the Indians didn't get every one of them I can't understand."

"It was a great feat truly," Louis agreed. "But most of those cattle will be killed for food this winter."

"I'm afraid so. It will be hard times in the Colony, and everyone is deep in debt to the store now."

"The prices are high there I hear," Louis remarked.

"High? Yes, and that's not the worst of it. The Colony store isn't run honestly. So many of the settlers can't read or write, it is easy to cheat them. My father can write and he keeps account of everything he buys, but they won't let him have anything more until he settles the bill they have against him. Half of that bill is for things he never had, and he swears he won't pay for what he didn't buy."

"I should think not," cried Walter indignantly. "Why doesn't he appeal to the Governor?"

Neil laughed shortly. "He tried, but it did him no good. If the Governor doesn't do the cheating himself, he winks at it. Governor 'Grasshopper' is one of the Colony's worst troubles. He thinks he is a little king, with his high-handed ways, and the court he keeps at Fort Douglas, and the revels he holds there."

"We heard something of that last night."

"Aye, it's no uncommon thing. McDonnell is not the man to be at the head of the Colony. We're all hoping he won't last much longer. Many complaints have been made to the Company, to

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Nicholas Garry and Simon McGillivray when they were here in the summer, and even by letter across the sea.”

The prairie track the carts followed ran well back from the wooded river banks. As the sun was setting behind a far distant rise of land across the plain, the guide turned from the trail. The squeaking carts followed his lead, bumping, pitching, and wobbling over the untracked ground. Supposing that Lajimonière was seeking the shelter of the woods, Walter was surprised when the guide reined in his mount at a distance of at least a half mile from the nearest trees. His cart stopped also and the flag it bore was lowered, as a signal to the rest of the train. Camp was to be made on the prairie in the full sweep of the sharp northwest wind.

“This is a poor place it seems to me,” the Swiss boy commented. “Farther over, among the trees, there would be shelter, and plenty of wood.”

“Lajimonière prefers the open. It is safer.”

“What is there to fear?”

“Nothing probably, but we can’t be sure.” Neil MacKay spoke quietly but seriously. “Out here on the prairie, we can see anyone approaching.”

“You mean Indians? I thought the Saulteux and Crees were friendly.”

“They are. Lajimonière is thinking about Sioux. Whether the Sioux are friendly or not is an open question just now. Didn’t you hear what happened at Fort Douglas a few weeks ago?”

“The visit of the Sioux?” questioned Louis. “I was told of it last night at St. Boniface. It was a most unfortunate affair.”

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“What was it?” Walter asked. “I didn’t know the Sioux ever came to Fort Douglas. Louis told me their country was farther south.”

“So it is,” replied the Scotch lad. “A Sioux seldom ventures this far down the Red River nowadays, but a party of them did come clear to the fort a while ago. They said they had heard how fine the Company’s goods were and what generous presents the traders gave. So they came to pay a visit to the Hudson Bay white men. They were friendly, almost too friendly. They expected drink and gifts. The Governor was away, and one of the Company clerks was in charge. He didn’t know just what to do with such dangerous guests. He told them there wasn’t any rum in the fort, and gave them tea instead. Then he fed them and distributed a few trinkets and little things. If they would go back to their own country, he said, the Company would send traders to them with goods and more presents.”

“The Company will get into trouble with the American traders if goods are sent to the Sioux country beyond the border,” Louis commented.

“Yes, but he had to promise something to get rid of the fellows. If they stayed around, he was afraid of trouble with the Saulteux. The Sioux seemed satisfied when they left the fort. But several Saulteux were hiding in ambush in the fort garden. They fired on the Sioux, killed two, and wounded another, then escaped by

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swimming the river and dodging through the willows. Of course the Sioux were furious. They said the white men had given the Saulteux powder and shot to kill friendly visitors. One of them boasted to a *bois brulé* from St. Boniface,—who is part Sioux himself and speaks their language,—that they were going back to the fort to scalp the clerk. The half-breed went right to the fort with the story. Things looked serious. If the party of Sioux had been larger they might have attacked the fort or massacred all of us, but they knew they were far outnumbered. Somehow they learned that the men in the fort had been warned of their plot. They decamped suddenly, and nothing more has been seen of them. Probably they have gone back to their own country, but no one knows. They may be hiding somewhere waiting for a chance to attack any Saulteur or *bois brulé* or white man who comes along.”

Louis nodded soberly. “When an Indian seeks revenge he is not always careful what man he strikes. Lajimonière does well to camp in the open.”

Neil’s story had sent a chill up Walter’s spine. Hardship he had become used to during the journey from Fort York, hardship and danger from the forces of Nature; water and wind, cold and storm. But this was the first time in his life that real peril from enemy human beings had ever confronted him. He had known of course that there might be danger from Indians in this wild land to which he had come, but he had never actually sensed that danger before. He glanced towards the woods, and saw, in imagination, half naked, copper colored savages concealed in the shadows and watching with fierce eyes the approaching carts.

Although camp was pitched out of musket range from that belt of trees, the woods nevertheless must be penetrated. The beasts must be taken to the river. Water and fuel must be brought back. After listening to Neil’s story, Walter was surprised at the apparent light-hearted carelessness of the men and boys who started riverward with the horses and cattle. Neil had a cow and three ponies to water, and he offered one of the latter to Walter.

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“Ride the roan,” he advised, “if you’re not used to our ponies. He is older and better broken.”

Neil took for granted that Walter wanted to go with Louis and himself, and the Swiss boy, who was far from being a coward, did not think of declining. He had not been on a horse for several years, but before his apprenticeship to Mr. Perier, he had been used to riding. The roan was unusually well broken and sedate for a prairie pony. Though obliged to ride bareback and with only a halter instead of bridle and bit, Walter had no trouble with the animal. The horse knew it was being taken to water and needed no guidance to keep with the other beasts.

The boy could not help a feeling of uneasiness as he approached the woods, and he noticed that Louis, though he seemed to ride carelessly, kept one hand on his gun. The irregular cavalcade of mounted men and boys and loose animals passed in among the trees,—sturdy oaks, broad topped elms, great basswoods, which Louis

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called *bois blanc*,—white wood,—and Walter *lindens*. All were nearly leafless now, except the oaks, which retained part of their dry, brown foliage, but the trunks stood close enough together to furnish cover for any lurking enemy. Without alarm, however, the animals threaded their way through the belt of larger growth to the river bank. The steep slopes and narrow bottom were covered with smaller trees and bushes, aspen poplar, wild plum and cherry, highbush cranberry, saskatoon or service berry, prickly raspberry canes, and, especially along the river margin, thick willows.

Following a track where wild animals had broken a way through the bushes and undergrowth, dogs, cattle, horses, and men made their way down the first slope, along a shelf or terrace, and on down a yet steeper incline to the river bottom. The sure-footed, thirsty beasts made the descent in quick time, and crashed eagerly through the willows to the water. The Red River ran sluggishly here. It was smooth and deep, with muddy shores. In the dried mud along the margin were the old tracks of the animals that had broken the trail down the slope.

When the boys had dismounted to water their horses, Louis pointed out the prints, which resembled those of naked feet. "Somewhere near here," he said, "the bears must cross. They have regular fords. Once in the fall I watched a band of bears cross the Pembina. I was up in a tree and I counted nineteen, old and young, but I was too far away for a good shot."

The bear tracks led up stream. Leaving the horses to bathe and splash, Louis and Walter, who preferred to drink at a less muddy spot, pushed their way among the willows. A hundred yards up stream, they came to a bend and shallows, caused by a limestone cliff.

"This is the bears' fording place," said Louis, "and a good one too. Not only bears but men have been here," he added quickly, "and not long ago. Look."

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On the bit of beach at the base of the cliff lay a little heap of charred wood and ashes. Near by, clearly imprinted in the damp sand, were foot tracks and marks that must have been made by the bow of a boat.

"Indians?" questioned Walter, the chill creeping up his spine again.

"Or white men," Louis returned. "These are moccasin prints, but the color of the feet inside those moccasins I know no way to tell. There were two men, that is plain, and one is tall, I think, for his feet are long. They were voyaging, those two, and stopped here to boil their tea. They have not been gone many hours. That fire was burning since last night's frost." The Canadian boy's tone was careless. His curiosity had in it no suggestion of fear.

Walter was more concerned. "Those Sioux," he ventured. "Do you suppose——"

"No, no," came the prompt reply. "The Sioux had horses. They didn't come by river. Sioux seldom travel by water. These men were white, or *bois brulés*, or Saulteux, or other Ojibwas. They had a

birch canoe. No clumsy wooden boat or dugout made that mark." Louis examined the footprints again. "That one man is a big fellow truly. See how long his track is." The boy placed his own left foot in the most distinct of the prints. "He must be as tall as *le Murrai Noir*."

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XIV PEMBINA

Without alarm or hint of lurking enemy, men and beasts made their way slowly up the steep river bank and through the woods to the prairie. The carts, shafts out, had been arranged in a circle, and within this defensive barricade camp had been pitched. Families fortunate enough to have tents had set them up. Others had devised shelters by stretching a buffalo skin, a blanket, or a square of canvas over the box and one wheel of a cart. The ponies, hobbled around the fore legs or staked out with long rawhide ropes, were left to feed on the short, dry prairie grass, and to take care of themselves, but the few precious oxen and cows were carefully watched and guarded against straying.

With the fuel brought from the woods fires were kindled within the circle. Kettles were swung on tripods of sticks or on stakes driven into the hard ground and slanted over the blaze. Pemmican and tea had been supplied to the Swiss. The older settlers had, in addition, a little barley meal for porridge and a few potatoes which they roasted in the ashes. Louis and Walter eked out their scanty supper with a handful of hazelnuts that had escaped the notice of the squirrels in the woods. The autumn was too far advanced for berries of any kind.

After the meal, Walter made the acquaintance of the MacKay family, Neil's burly, red-bearded father, his mother, his two sisters, and next younger brother. The eldest brother, who was married, had gone to Pembina nearly a month earlier. Mrs. MacKay, a tall, thin woman with a rather stern face, spoke little French, but with true Highland hospitality she made Walter and Louis welcome to the family fire. Wrapped in a blanket and knitting a stocking, she sat on a three-legged stool close to the blaze. At her right was her older daughter patching, by firelight, the sleeve of a blue cloth capote. On the other side, the father was mending a piece of harness, cutting the ends of the rawhide straps into fine strips and braiding them as if he were splicing a rope. Neil too was busy cleaning and oiling his gun, and his younger brother, a sandy-haired lad of ten, was whittling a wooden arrow. The two little children had been put to bed in a snug nest of blankets and robes underneath the cart. The sight of this family gathering around the fire gave Walter a feeling of homesickness and loneliness that brought a lump to his throat. The feeling deepened as he and his companion strolled from cart to cart and fire to fire. Everyone in the camp but Louis and himself had his own family circle, and Louis was on the way to home and mother.

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It was the Lajimonières who gave the two boys the warmest welcome and made the Swiss lad forget his homesickness. They were old friends of the Brabant family, and Louis called Madame Lajimonière "*marraine*." She had acted as his godmother when Père Provencher baptized him. Indeed she was godmother to so many of the Canadian children at St. Boniface and Pembina that the younger members of the two settlements seldom called her by any other name. There was no Indian blood in Marie Lajimonière, and she had lived in the valley of the Red River longer than any other white woman. Several years before the first band of Selkirk settlers had reached the forks of the Assiniboine and the Red, she had come with her husband to the Red River country from Three Rivers on the St. Lawrence. When, in 1818, the Roman Catholic missionaries, Father Provencher and Father Dumoulin, had arrived in the Selkirk Colony, Madame Lajimonière had received them with warmth and enthusiasm. She was a devout member of their church, and she gladly stood sponsor for the Canadian and *bois brûlé* children brought to the priests for baptism. Louis had a warm affection for his *marraine*, and Walter took an immediate liking to her and her family.

One of the Lajimonière children was a girl of about Elise Perier's age, a slender, black-haired, red-cheeked girl named Reine. When Reine, somewhat shyly, questioned the Swiss boy about his long journey from Fort York, he told her of Elise and Max and Mr. Perier, and how anxious he was about their welfare.

"Oh, we will all help to make them comfortable and happy when they come to Pembina," Reine eagerly assured him. "It will be delightful to have a new girl, just my age, who speaks French. The Scotch girls are so hard to talk to, when you don't know their language or they yours. I shall like your sister I know, and I hope she will like me."

At Louis' urging, Jean Baptiste Lajimonière told Walter of the greatest adventure of his adventurous life. In the winter of 1815 and '16 he had gone alone from Red River to Montreal. He carried letters to Lord Selkirk,—who had come over from England,—telling how the Northwesters had driven away his colonists. All alone, the plucky voyageur faced the perils and hardships of the long wilderness journey. He came through safely, to give the letters into Lord Selkirk's own hands and relate to his own ears the story of the settlers' troubles. Lajimonière told his tale well, and the boy forgot his own perplexities as he listened. Not until the story was finished did Walter realize how late the hour was, long past time to seek his blanket. Madame Lajimonière and the children had already disappeared under their buffalo skin shelter, Louis had stolen quietly away, and the whole camp was wrapped in silence.

Walter thanked the guide, said good night, and hurried back to his own camping place. The horses and cattle had been brought within the circle and picketed or tied to cart wheels. The settlers were taking no chance of Indian horse thieves making away with their beasts. Everyone in the camp, except the guards stationed outside the barricade, was sleeping, and the fires were burning low. The night was dark, without moon

or stars. How lonely and insignificant was this little circle of carts, with the prairie stretching around it and the vast arch of the sky overhead! The flickering light of the fires, only partly revealing picketed beasts, clumsy carts, and rude shelters, seemed merely to intensify the darkness, the vastness, the loneliness beyond.

Not a wild animal, except a few gophers, had been seen all day; the cart train was too noisy. But now the wind that swept the prairie brought a chorus of voices, the high-pitched barking of the small prairie wolves, and the long-drawn howling of the big, gray timber ones. The dogs answered, until their masters, waking, belabored them into silence. The camps along the rivers and the shores of Lake Winnipeg had seemed remote enough from civilization, but not one had impressed the mountain-bred lad with such an overwhelming sense of loneliness as did this circle of carts on the prairie.

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He found Louis already asleep, and crawled in beside him. There he lay, listening to the wolves and, when their howlings ceased for a time, to the faint and far-away cries of a flock of migrating birds passing high overhead. Then he drifted away into sleep.

The approach of dawn was beginning to gray the blackness in the east when every dog in the camp suddenly began to growl. The horses grew restive, neighing and moving about. Startled wide awake, Walter, thrilling at the thought of a Sioux attack, asked his comrade what the matter was. Louis did not know. He had thrown aside his blanket and was crawling out from under the cart. As Walter followed, he heard the guide calling to the watchers beyond the barricade. The guards replied that all was quiet on the prairie. They could see nothing wrong, discern no moving form.

For a few minutes everyone in the camp was awake, anxious, excited, but nothing happened, no war whoop came out of the darkness. The dogs ceased growling, the ponies neighing, and soon all was silence again. What had caused the alarm, whether prowling wild beast or skulking man, or the mere restlessness of some sleepless dog or nervous horse, no one could tell.

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The camp was astir before the sun was up, and the first task was to water the horses and cattle. Louis remained behind to get breakfast while Walter rode the pony to the river.

The late start from Fort Douglas made getting to Pembina that day impossible. After plodding along the prairie track and crossing several small streams, the cart train passed a cold and stormy night in the open beyond the wooded bank of a muddy creek that Louis called Rivière aux Marais. Pembina was reached next day in a driving storm of rain, sleet and snow.

The Pembina River took its name from *anepeminan*, the Ojibwa term for the shrub we call highbush cranberry. The junction of the Pembina with the Red was an old trading place. The Northwest men had established themselves there before the close of the eighteenth century, and in the early years of the nineteenth all three rival companies, the Northwest, the Hudson Bay, and the New Northwest or X. Y. Company, as it was called by the old Northwesters, maintained

posts a short distance from one another. Those old posts were gone,—burned or torn down,—long before the time of this story. The two forts then standing had been built at a later date. Fort Daer, the Selkirk Colony post, dated from the autumn of 1812, when the first of the colonists, under the leadership of Miles McDonnell, had come to the Pembina to winter. It stood on the south bank of that river near where it empties into the Red. Just opposite, across the Pembina, was a former Northwest fort, which had become, since the uniting of the companies, a Hudson Bay trading post.

Some of the Scotch settlers and all of the Swiss except Walter were to be lodged at Fort Daer until they could build cabins of their own. Louis had asked Walter to be his guest. The cart he was driving, which was not his own, was loaded with the household goods of some of the settlers, and had to be taken to Fort Daer. After leaving the fort, the two boys, carrying their scanty belongings in packs, made their way to Louis' home. The little village of log cabins was not actually on the Pembina, but near the bank of the Red a mile or more from the junction point. The arrival at Fort Daer of a cart train from down river was an important event, but the abominable weather curbed curiosity, and the boys saw few people as they made their way against the storm to the Brabant cabin.

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Louis' mother, hoping that he might have come with the party from Fort Douglas, was on the lookout for him. Before he could reach the door, it flew open. Followed by the younger children and three shaggy-haired sled dogs, Mrs. Brabant ran out into the sleet and snow. Very heartily Louis hugged and kissed her. When he presented his companion, she welcomed Walter warmly. The children greeted him shyly. The dogs, inclined at first to resent his presence, concluded, after a curt command and a kick or two from the moccasined toe of Louis' younger brother, to accept the newcomer as one of the family.

To the Swiss lad, weary, soaked, and chilled through, the rude but snug cabin with a fire blazing in the rough stone fireplace, promised a comfort that seemed almost heavenly. He had not spent a night or even eaten a meal inside a building for many weeks. The warmth was so grateful, the smell from the steaming kettle that hung above the blaze so appetizing, that for a few minutes he could do nothing but stand before the fire, speechless, half dazed by the sudden transition from the wet and the bitter cold.

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He was roused by Mrs. Brabant who offered him dry moccasins and one of the shirts she had been making for Louis during his absence. Walter had a dry shirt in his pack, but he accepted the moccasins gratefully. His shoes were not only soaked, but so worn from the long journey that they scarcely held together. The cabin, one of the best in the settlement, boasted two rooms, and Louis' mother and sisters retired to the other one while the boys changed their clothes. As soon as they were warm and partly dry, supper was served.

The household sat on stools and floor in front of the fire, each with his cup and wooden platter.

From the bubbling pot standing on the hearth Madame Brabant ladled out generous portions. The rich and savory stew was made up of buffalo meat, wild goose, potatoes, carrots, onions, and other ingredients that Walter did not recognize but enjoyed nevertheless. It was the best meal he had tasted in months, and he ate until he could hold no more.

The hunters had returned only a few days before from the great fall buffalo chase, and there was abundance of meat in the settlement. It was during the autumn hunt two years before that Louis' father had been accidentally killed, and the Brabant family had not accompanied the hunters since that time, but Mrs. Brabant's brother had brought her a supply of fresh and dried meat and pemmican. The goose thirteen-year-old Raoul had shot, and the potatoes and other vegetables were from the Brabant garden. The grasshopper hordes had missed Pembina. Mrs. Brabant expressed sympathy for the poor Selkirk colonists who had lost all their crops. She listened with lively interest to the boys' account of the trip from Fort York, and asked the Swiss lad many questions about his own people.

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Walter was so grateful for shelter, warmth, food, and the kindly welcome he was receiving that he could not have been critical of the Brabant family whatever they had been. As it happened, he liked them all heartily. He was to discover, within the next few days, that this household was considerably superior to most of those in Pembina. The interior of the cabin was neat and clean, differing markedly in this respect from many of the *bois brulé* dwellings. Her straight black hair, smoothly arranged in braids hanging over her shoulders, her dark skin, and high cheek-bones betrayed the Ojibwa in Louis' mother, but in every other way, especially in her ready smile, lively speech, and alert movements, she seemed wholly French. She wore deerskin leggings with moccasins, but her dark blue calico dress, belted with a strip of bright beadwork, was fresh and clean. Her little daughters were dressed in the same fashion, except that Marie, the elder, who was about ten years old, wore skirt and tunic of soft, fringed doeskin, instead of calico. The dark eyes of both little girls sparkled when Louis, unknitting a small bundle wrapped in a red handkerchief, handed each one a length of bright-colored ribbon, one red, the other orange, to tie in their long black braids. For his mother he brought a silk handkerchief, a gilt locket, and a packet of good tea, the kind, he had been told, the Chief Factor at Fort York drank. Raoul was made happy with a shiny new knife.

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Louis and Walter were tired enough to take to their blankets early. Mrs. Brabant and the girls slept in a great box bed, made of hand-hewn boards painted bright blue, that stood in the corner of the room where the fireplace was. In the smaller room, which was nothing but a lean-to shed with a dirt floor, was a curious couch for the boys. It was made of strips of rawhide stretched tightly on a frame of poles, and was covered with buffalo robe and blankets. This cot Louis shared with Walter, who found the rawhide straps not nearly so hard as bare ground. Raoul rolled himself in a robe and lay down in front of the fire.

XV THE OJIBWA HUNTER

Walter was anxious to get a place ready for the Periers, but he found that every one of the fifty or sixty log cabins in Pembina was full to overflowing. Indeed he marveled at the number of men, women, and children of all sizes that could be packed into a one-room cabin. The houses were built of logs chinked with clay and moss, and roofed with bark or grass thatch, and few had more than one room.

A straggling, unkempt place was the settlement, the cabins set down hit or miss, with cart tracks wandering around among them. The tracks and dooryards were deep in mud, which was stiff with frost when the boys started out that morning. As the sun softened the ground, Walter found walking in the sticky stuff something like wading through thick glue, it clung to his moccasins so. Gardens were rare. The surroundings of most of the cabins were very untidy, cluttered with broken-down carts, disorderly piles of firewood, odds, ends, and rubbish of all sorts. Shaggy, unkempt ponies, hobbled or staked out, and wolfish looking sled dogs, running loose, were everywhere.

The people were most of them *bois brulés* whose hair, skin, and features showed all degrees of mixed blood from almost pure white to nearly pure Indian. They seemed good-natured and very hospitable. The merrymaking in celebration of the return of the hunt was not yet at an end. Everywhere Louis and his companion were urged to share in a feast of buffalo meat, to join in a gambling game or in dancing to the scraping of a fiddle. So pressing were the invitations that declining was difficult.

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The neatest, best kept buildings in the village were the mission chapel and presbytery. Father Dumoulin was setting a good example to his flock by cleaning up his garden patch. Looking up from his work, he greeted Louis by name. The priest was a striking looking man, tall and strong of frame, his height emphasized by his long, straight, black cassock. His face was strong too. Walter, though not of Father Dumoulin's church, felt instantly that here was a man to command the respect of white men, half-breeds, and savages. When the priest learned that the boy was one of the newly arrived immigrants, he asked a number of questions.

Near Fort Daer, in the edge of the woods bordering the river, a cluster of better kept cabins housed some of the more thrifty of the Scotch. In one of the largest and best of the houses, the two lads found the MacKay family settled for the winter. Neil was eager to arrange for an immediate buffalo hunt, but Louis replied that he could not go for a while. There were things he must do for his mother, and Walter did not want to be away when his friends arrived.

From the MacKay cabin the boys went on to Fort Daer. Like all the forts in that part of the world,

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Daer and Pembina House, the old Northwest post, consisted of log stockades enclosing a few buildings. They stood on opposite sides of the Pembina and the land about each had been cleared of most of its trees and bushes. The Pembina was a good-sized stream, deep, sluggish, and like the Red, colored with the mud it carried. At Fort Daer Walter talked with some of his countrymen, who were feeling somewhat encouraged. They had been well fed, and were grateful for warmth and shelter. Real winter, the bitterly cold winter of this northern country, might come at any moment now to stay.

If Walter was to hunt to help supply himself and the Periers with food, he needed a gun. With Louis he went to the Company store at Pembina House to buy one. He could not pay for it in money, but hoped that he might get it on credit, paying later in buffalo skins and other furs. The Hudson Bay Company frowned on fur hunting as well as on Indian trading by the colonists, but the settlers would be obliged to hunt that winter if they wished to eat. Louis thought that if Walter agreed to turn over to the Company the pelts of the food animals he killed, and not to engage in barter with the Indians, he might arrange for a gun and ammunition.

The two were explaining Walter's needs, when an Indian burst suddenly into the room. His buckskin clothing was covered with mud. Blood matted his black hair and stained one dark cheek which was disfigured by a great scar. His eyes glittered, and his manner was wild and excited. The boys thought for a moment that he was going to attack the trader. The Indian, however, had no weapons,—no gun, hatchet, or knife. He began to talk rapidly, angrily. Walter could not understand a word of Ojibwa, but he could see that the Indian's speech startled both Louis and the trader. The latter replied briefly in the same tongue, then darted out of the door, the Ojibwa after him. Before Walter could voice a question, Louis was gone too. The Swiss boy turned to follow, hesitated, and decided to stay where he was.

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In a few moments Louis was back again. "What is it? Are the Sioux coming?" Walter asked anxiously.

"No, unless this affair is the work of spies."

"What affair? Could you understand what he said?"

"Most of it. He was so wild it was hard to follow him. He has been attacked. He was down at the river loading his canoe. Two men came along. While one was talking to him, the other stole up behind him, knocked him over the head, and 'put him to sleep.' When he came to his senses, the goods he had just bought and his gun and knife were gone. There was a hole cut in his canoe. Of course he may be lying. He may have hidden the things and made up the story."

"Why would he do that?"

"To get a double supply of goods and ammunition. The trader believes him though. He is sending men in search of those two fellows."

When the trader returned he added further details to the story. The Ojibwa, he said, was an

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honest, trustworthy hunter, who had been bringing his furs to the Company for several years. He had come alone from Red Lake to get his winter's supplies and ammunition. Having finished his bargaining, he was loading his boat at the riverside when another canoe, with two men, appeared, coming up stream. One of the men shouted a greeting in Ojibwa, they turned their boat in to shore, jumped out, and engaged him in talk. Entirely unsuspecting of treachery, Scar Face was answering one man's questions, when the other struck him from behind and knocked him senseless.

"Does he know the fellows?" questioned Louis.

"He never saw them before."

"Could they be Sioux passing themselves off as Ojibwa?"

"No, one was a white man, he says, and the other,—the man who attacked him,—was in white man's clothes, but looked like an Indian. He wore his hair in braids, had no beard, and spoke like a Cree. He was a very tall man, strong and broad shouldered."

"Do you think he is telling the truth?"

"I'm sure he is. Scar Face is a reliable fellow, always pays his debts, and has never tried to deceive us in any way. You saw the blood on his face. He has a bad cut on the side of his head. One of our men is dressing it for him. No, he isn't lying. His description of the men is good, and he was not in the fort when they were here."

"They have been here? You know who they are?"

"I think so; beyond doubt. Two fellows answering to the description were here this morning and bought some tobacco. They said they had just come from St. Boniface with a letter for Father Dumoulin. The white man is a DeMeuron, a red-faced fellow with a sandy beard. I don't know his name. The other one is a *bois brulé* voyageur called Murray."

"Not Black Murray?" cried Walter.

"That's the name he goes by. You know him?"

"*Vraiment*, we know him," put in Louis emphatically. "So he did not go up the Assiniboine with the western brigade, but came this way. He must have started before we did, to get here by water so soon. We found his tracks and those of his companion, where they had landed to boil their kettle. They were ahead of us then. He wasted little time at Fort Douglas, *le Murrai Noir*."

"Whatever possessed him to attack that Ojibwa?" queried the puzzled trader.

"I think I can guess," replied Louis slowly, "though I know not for sure. He wanted the Ojibwa's supplies. He plans, I think, to become a trader. To trade he must have some goods to commence with. This is not the first time he has obtained them dishonestly." Louis told the story of the missing sack of pemmican and Murray's bundle of trade articles.

The Hudson Bay man listened intently and nodded thoughtfully. "That must be what the

rascal is up to. Well, I have sent men out on horseback, up and down the Red River. The thieves haven't come by here on the Pembina. They're not likely to show themselves in the neighborhood of the forts. Perhaps they will be caught, though I doubt it. They have a good start and there is plenty of cover to hide in until the going is safe. It is useless to try to overtake them by canoe."

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XVI LETTERS FROM FORT DOUGLAS

The white man and the half-breed were not caught. Had the thieves trusted merely to speed in paddling, the men sent out from the post must have overtaken them. Even down stream, canoemen, obliged to follow every bend and twist of the river, could not make as good time as mounted men riding along the bank. Probably the two had crossed to the other shore and had concealed themselves and their canoe until the search was over. There was little chance that Pembina settlement would see or hear anything more of them for a long time.

The Ojibwa being a skilful hunter whose goodwill was worth retaining, he was supplied with another outfit. He went away contented with his treatment at the post, but seething with desire for vengeance on the men who had robbed him.

When questioned, Father Dumoulin said that the white man, Kolbach, had brought him a letter from his superior, Father Provencher, at St. Boniface. "The Father said in his letter," Dumoulin explained, "that Kolbach had just come to tell him that he was going to Pembina. He asked if the Father had any message to send me. So Père Provencher wrote hastily, while Kolbach waited. Kolbach is a DeMeuron, a German Swiss. He is a wild, unruly fellow who comes but seldom to confession. I felt surprised that he had taken the trouble to do Père Provencher and myself a kindness."

Louis and Walter had failed to find an unoccupied cabin that could be made ready for the Periers. When Louis suggested that they set to work at once to build one, his mother interposed. It would be better to wait, she insisted, until the Periers arrived. They could stay in her house for a few days. The cabin would be a little crowded to be sure, but there would be room enough to make three extra ones comfortable. "Then M'sieu Perier can decide where he wishes his house and can help to build it," she concluded.

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Walter rather doubted if the apothecary would prove of much help in cabin building, but he yielded to Mrs. Brabant's decision. He knew she would do everything in her power for the comfort of the homeless immigrants.

While he waited for the coming of his friends,

Walter helped Louis prepare the Brabant home for winter. They put fresh mud chinking in the holes between the logs, mended the bark roof, cut firewood and hauled it in Louis' cart. The cart itself had to have one new wheel rim. The rim, which was about three inches thick, was made in sections, and put together without nails. Louis wanted a new dog sled, and Walter would need snowshoes. For the sled, thin oak boards were bent at one end by steaming them over the big kettle, and lashed together. Louis called the affair a *tabagane*, the French version of an Indian word. Nowadays we spell it *toboggan*.

The snowshoe frames were of birch wood bent to the required racket form, the toes turned up a little to prevent tripping. The netting of sinew, Louis explained, must be put in with the greatest care. Where the weight of the foot would rest he used a fine mesh of *babiche* or twisted sinew. The ankle and toe loops he was careful to make just the right size to slip on and off easily, yet not too loose to hold the foot in the proper position. Walter had been trained to use his hands, and he was deft and sure with them. He made one of the shoes himself, and did a workmanlike job. Learning to walk with the awkward things might be more difficult than making them, he thought.

Louis examined his dog harness and shook his head. "The beasts need a new harness truly," he said, "but that will have to wait until we can kill a buffalo, and get fresh *shaganappy*."

Though the buffalo hunt had been postponed, Walter found plenty of opportunity to use his new gun. Migrating flocks of water fowl passed every night, and many of them stopped to rest and feed by day along the rivers and in the marshes. It was the boys' duty to keep up the food supply by shooting as many ducks and geese as possible. The weather was now cold enough so the birds could be kept several days. Those that the Brabant and MacKay families could not use were disposed of at Fort Daer. Neil MacKay and Raoul Brabant, who was almost as good a shot as his elder brother, were included in the hunting party.

Every day Walter watched for the Periers. Whenever he heard the creaking of a cart, he hoped that another brigade was arriving from Fort Douglas. He never went a mile from the settlement without wondering if his friends would be there when he came back. As the days passed, he grew more and more anxious. Had disaster overtaken the boats of the second division?

One day, just at dusk, as the four hunters were returning along the bank of the Pembina, there came to their ears, faintly at first, from the prairie to the north, the screeching of ungreased axles. As the noise grew louder, the boys realized that such a squawking and screaming could never come from two or three carts only. A whole brigade must be approaching. Leaving the woods along the river, the lads started across the prairie to meet the cart train. They could hear it much farther than they could see it in the gathering darkness.

Louis was the first to make out a line of black objects against the sky. He and Walter were some distance ahead of their companions when

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they met the guide of the brigade riding in advance. Louis shouted a question and the reply in Canadian French came promptly:

"We come from Fort Douglas. We bring some of the new colonists."

At the guide's words, Walter dropped his gun and his birds and ran towards the carts. He was too impatient to wait for them to come to him. The first vehicle belonged to the guide and his family, but walking beside the second was someone Walter knew, Johan Scheidecker. He and the Scheidecker boys had shared the same tent at York Factory. As he greeted Johan, Walter looked eagerly around for some sign of his friends.

"Where is Monsieur Perier?" he demanded.

"He is not with us."

"Not with you? Why, what has happened?"

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"Nothing,—to the Periers," was Johan's reassuring reply. "They remain at Fort Douglas. A man named Kolbach has taken them into his house. I have a letter for you that will explain it all." He handed Walter a folded packet of coarse paper.

The boy was dumbfounded. The possibility that the Periers might not come on to Pembina had never occurred to him. It was too dark to read his letter, so he fell into step beside Johan and questioned him.

"Are they all right? How did they stand the trip? Are they well?"

"About as well as any of us."

Even in the darkness Walter could see that Johan was very thin. His voice was husky, and he plodded along with drooping shoulders and bent head. "We were all nearly starved, and some of us were sick, when we reached Fort Douglas," he explained. "Elise and Max were as well as any, but Perier himself had a bad cough. One of the soldiers who live above the fort, a Swiss, took them into his house. My sister Marianne stays behind too. She was married to one of those soldiers the morning we left. Tell me, can we get food at Fort Daer?" he asked abruptly.

"Oh, yes. Wait a moment." Walter had remembered his gun and birds. He ran to where they lay, and, returning, thrust the two fat geese into Johan's hands. "Take them," he cried. "They are good eating and we have more."

Walter did not accompany the cart train to Fort Daer. He and the Brabant boys made speed to the cabin, where, by the light of a candle of buffalo tallow, he read his letters. There were two, one from Mr. Perier, the other from Elise. Mr. Perier's was brief. The trip had been a very hard one, but he and the children had come through safely. Matthieu had given him Walter's note, and he appreciated the boy's thought for their comfort. It seemed best, however, for them to remain at Fort Douglas. He was suffering with a bad cold and was scarcely able to travel farther. One of the DeMeurons had shown them great kindness. He had offered to share his cabin with them and had assured them that by

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hunting and fishing he could provide food for all.

"I am disappointed," Mr. Perier wrote, "that I cannot open a shop. All my chemical and medical supplies were lost when our boat was wrecked. I saved only a few packages of herb seeds that I was carrying in my pockets. I intend in the spring to plant an herb garden. Through Matthieu I hope to obtain a place in the buffalo wool factory for the winter. Do not think that you must come back here to be with us. It would not be wise. If you have found food and shelter, remain where you are till spring. Then you can return and we will begin cultivating our land. You need not be concerned for us, for we have fallen among friends. Our nearest neighbor will be Marianne Scheidecker who is to be married to-morrow to one of the ex-soldiers. Several of them have found wives among our Swiss girls. I would not want a daughter of mine to marry in such haste. I am glad Elise is still a little girl."

Elise's letter, dated November 4th, the day of arrival at Fort Douglas, told more of the journey. The second division had traveled slowly, and with many delays. On September the twentieth another boat from Fort York, carrying the Rev. John West, the English clergyman of the Selkirk Colony, had overtaken the Swiss. The first of October the weather had turned very cold, and some nights the travelers had nearly frozen, especially when everything was so wet or frost covered that the fires would not burn. In a storm on Lake Winnipeg, the boat the Periers were in was wrecked.

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"No one was drowned," wrote Elise, "but we were all soaked, and we lost most of our food and blankets and other things. The men had to cut down trees and split them into boards to mend our boat, and that took a long time. It rained and snowed, and the nights were terribly cold. M. West gave Max and me one of his blankets. We had plenty of wood for fires, but very little food left, only some barley that we boiled. The weather was so stormy the men could not catch fish, but they shot a few birds. We ate a big owl and a raven that M. West shot. It was a week before we could go on. Then Samuel Scheidecker was taken sick and died, and we stopped at an island to bury him. I feel so sorry for the Scheideckers. By the time we came to the mouth of the Red River we were starving, but there were Indians there, and the chief, Peguis, gave us dried fish."

Elise went on to say that her father had a bad cough and needed a warm place to stay. So Sergeant Kolbach had kindly taken them in. "This house is only one room with a loft above that has a floor of loose boards and a ladder instead of a stairway. But there is a fireplace, and it is warm and dry. M. Kolbach sleeps in the loft and lets us have the room. It is rather dirty, but I have cleaned it up a little and will do more to-morrow. We shall be comfortable here and kind Mr. West wants Max and me to go to his school and learn English. We miss you very much, Walter, but Father says you must not come back here till spring. We are going to be all right now. It is so good to be warm and dry and have enough to eat, and in the spring we can be together again."

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Walter read this letter aloud to Louis and his

mother. "The poor child!" Mrs. Brabant exclaimed again and again. At the close Louis said earnestly, "That is a brave little girl, your little sister."

Walter was disappointed that his friends were not coming to Pembina, but relieved to know that they were safe and comfortable. He was quite ready to go back to Fort Douglas and share any hardships they might have to undergo, but Mr. Perier had forbidden him to do so. Apprentices in those days seldom thought of disobeying their masters. Moreover Walter felt that his return to Fort Douglas would probably do more harm than good. There was no employment for him, no way to earn a living, and very likely the Governor would not let him stay. Louis was strongly against his going back.

Walter was not wholly at ease about his friends. "I wonder," he pondered, "if that DeMeuron really will provide for them. What will happen if he doesn't keep his promise?"

"If there is not food for them they will be sent on here to Pembina later."

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"Could they make the trip when the snow is deep and the weather very cold?"

"Oh, yes. By dog sled the journey is easier and, if the trail is good, quicker than by cart. Dogs can travel where ponies can not. Write to your friends and tell them if all is not well to send word to you here, and you and I will go get them. Ask someone at Fort Daer to send your letter the first time anyone goes to Fort Douglas. Every week or so someone comes and goes between the two forts. What is the name of that DeMeuron they live with?"

Walter glanced at Mr. Perier's letter. "Kolbach, Sergeant Kolbach. Louis," he exclaimed, "that was the name of the man with Murray!"

"Kolbach, yes, that was surely his name."

"I wonder if he can be the same man who spoke to me when we landed at Fort Douglas. He had a red face and a sandy beard. I don't like it, Louis, their living with that fellow!"

"No," the Canadian boy agreed thoughtfully. "We must go to Père Dumoulin and ask him about that Kolbach. He may be a wild fellow, and yet be good to your friends. Oh, yes, that is quite possible."

The two boys went to see the priest the next morning. They found him at the mission in the little room that served him as bedroom, living-room and study.

"Père Dumoulin," Louis asked, "was the man who brought you that letter from Fort Douglas Sergeant Kolbach?"

"Sergeant Kolbach? Oh no," came the prompt reply. "It was Fritz Kolbach, the sergeant's brother."

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Walter felt relieved. "What kind of a man is Sergeant Kolbach?" he inquired.

"Why do you ask?" The priest looked at the boy keenly.

Walter explained, and Father Dumoulin listened with interest.

"Sergeant Kolbach," he said thoughtfully, "is a very different person from his younger brother. The sergeant is a man of influence among the DeMeurons. I do not know him well, but I should think him a somewhat domineering man, used to authority and fond of exercising it, but he is quieter, more self-controlled, more steady going than most of the DeMeurons. He has usually exercised his influence over his fellows in the interest of law and order. I know no reason why you should fear that he will not treat your friends well, since he has chosen to take them into his house."

"His brother lives with him?" asked Louis.

"I do not think so. Every DeMeuron has his own land, and the Kolbachs are too unlike to live together peaceably."

Reassured by Father Dumoulin's information, Walter did not think of disobeying Mr. Perier's instructions. At Fort Daer the lad obtained a few sheets of paper, and, borrowing quill pen and ink from a good-natured apprentice clerk, he wrote a letter to Mr. Perier and another to Elise, addressing them in Sergeant Kolbach's care. The clerk promised to send them at the first opportunity.

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XVII CHRISTMAS AT PEMBINA

There was no reason now why Walter should hesitate to be away from the settlement, yet the proposed buffalo hunt was postponed again. The animals were far from Pembina that autumn. For miles to the south and west, the prairie had been swept by fires started by careless Indians or half-breeds who had allowed their camp fires to spread. In that blackened desolation there was no feed for buffalo. The boys had expected to go beyond the burned country in search of the herds, but, before they were ready to start, a heavy fall of snow made horseback travel impossible. Storm winds swept the prairie, and Louis shook his head at the prospect.

"This will drive the beasts yet farther away," he said. "They will go where the snow is not so deep and where there are trees for shelter. We could travel with dog sleds of course, but we might search for long to find buffalo, and to hunt them on foot is much more difficult than on horseback. But perhaps this snow will not last."

With the coming of deep snow Walter was given his first lessons in snowshoeing and dog driving. Learning to walk with the clumsy rackets was not easy, he found. He got more than one tumble before he mastered the art. Driving a dog sled looked simple enough, when Louis hitched up his dogs and took his little sisters for a ride. The three animals differed considerably in size, appearance and breed, but worked well together. Hitched tandem, they were off with a

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dash, the little bells on their harness jingling merrily. They followed a trail already broken by other sleds, and Louis ran alongside shouting and flourishing his whip. After a turn on the prairie, they were back again.

“Come, you shall have a ride now,” Louis said to Walter, as the little girls,—cheeks red and black eyes sparkling,—unrolled themselves from the fur robes.

Curious to try this new mode of travel, Walter seated himself on the robes. “*Marche donc*,” cried Louis, and the team was away, the toboggan slipping smoothly over the well-packed trail. Running alongside or standing behind Walter on the sled, Louis urged his dogs to their best speed. When, after a first spurt, they slowed to a steadier pace, he suggested that Walter try driving.

“Stay where you are. You don’t need to get up. There must be weight to hold the *tabagane* down.” Handing Walter the whip, Louis stepped off the sled.

Louis seemed to manage the team easily, and Walter had no doubt of his own ability to drive. He shouted to the dogs in imitation of his friend, and, waving the long whip high in air, flicked the leader’s back with the lash.

The dogs must have noticed the difference in the voice. They must have sensed the awkwardness and inexperience of the new driver. Without warning, the leader,—a woolly haired, bushy tailed beast with fox-like head and sharp pointed ears,—swerved from the trail into untracked snow. In vain Walter tried to get him back on the track. The dogs were out for a frolic and they had it. They bounded and floundered through the soft spots and raced across hard packed stretches. The prairie, Walter discovered, was by no means so smooth as it looked. The wind had swept the snow into waves and billows. The toboggan mounted the windward side of a snow wave, balanced on the crest, and bumped down abruptly. Shouts and commands were of no avail. Walter could but cling to the swaying, jouncing, skidding sled, and let the dogs go where they would.

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Suddenly the beasts concluded they had had about enough of the sport. It was time for the grand climax. With a quick turn, they swung about towards home. The toboggan turned too, clear over, and Walter went sprawling. When he picked himself up, the provoking animals were sitting quietly in the snow, more or less tangled up in their traces, tongues hanging out, laughing at him. Louis, shouting hilariously, came running up on his snowshoes to right the toboggan.

For a moment Walter was angry. “You knew what would happen,” he cried accusingly. “What did you do to make them act that way?”

“No, no,” laughed Louis. “I did nothing. Askimé knew you had never driven before, and so he played you a trick. He is a wise dog, Askimé, but he deserves a beating.”

The leader of the team was a hardy, swift, intelligent beast, almost pure Eskimo, as his name indicated. The other dogs were of more mixed breed. Both had sharp muzzles and thick,

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straight hair, brown with white spots on one, dark wolf-gray on the other. Louis was proud of the husky, whom he had raised from puppyhood. Nevertheless he picked up his whip and started towards Askimé.

Walter, his flash of anger past, intervened. "No, don't thrash him. He was just having a little fun. He has taken the conceit out of me, but I'll get even with him yet. I'll learn to drive those dogs and make them behave."

Louis was still grinning. "Truly you will learn," he hastened to say, "and—well—perhaps," his grin broadened, "I might have told you more before you tried this first time. Next time it will go better."

It did go better next time, and before the winter was over, Walter could handle the dogs satisfactorily, though they never obeyed him as well as their real master.

The snow remained, and the buffalo did not return to the neighborhood of Pembina. Winter had set in in earnest, but Walter was used to cold winters and the Brabant cabin was snug and comfortable. Even the bitter winds that swept the prairie could not find an entrance between the well chinked logs.

The Swiss lad cherished the hope of spending Christmas with the Periers. He planned to go to the Selkirk settlement with a dog train that expected to leave Fort Daer December twenty-first or twenty-second, but he was disappointed. A hard snowstorm, a genuine blizzard, with a high wind out of the north, prevented the sleds from getting away, and he was forced to remain in Pembina.

On Christmas morning he went with the Brabant family to Father Dumoulin's mission. There was no Protestant church in Pembina, he liked and respected Father Dumoulin, and he did not want to hurt Mrs. Brabant and Louis by refusing to go with them. The boy was surprised to see how crowded the mission chapel was with the Canadians and *bois brulés*, men, women, and children. Very reverently and devoutly the rough, half savage hunters and voyageurs joined in the service and listened to the priest's words.

The rest of the day the simple, light-hearted people of Pembina celebrated in a very different fashion, feasting, dancing, gaming, and drinking. Gambling and fondness for liquor were the besetting sins of the half-breeds as well as of the Indians, though Father Dumoulin was trying hard to teach them to restrain these passions.

Walter had come to know the rough, wild, but generous and hospitable *bois brulés* well. He could not decline all their invitations to join in the merrymaking. Moreover he was young, and homesick, and he wanted to share in the festivities. He went with Louis and Neil MacKay to several of the cabins during the afternoon and early evening, where the three ate as much as they could manage of the food pressed upon them. The gaming was carried on principally by the older men, the younger ones preferring to dance. With a little diplomacy, drinking could be avoided without giving offence. Louis and Neil, as well as Walter, had been brought up to be temperate. They did not hesitate to take part in

the dancing.

Never had Walter seen such lively, agile jigging as some of the lithe, muscular, swarthy skinned half-breeds were capable of. Men and women were arrayed in their best, and the dark, smoke-blackened cabins were alive with the gay colors of striped shirts and calico dresses, fringed sashes, gaudy shawls, silk and cotton kerchiefs, ribbons, and Indian beadwork.

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After dancing until they were weary, the three boys slipped away early, before the fun grew too fast and furious. Walter found it good to be out in the clean, cold air again, away from the heat and smoke and heavy odors of the tightly closed cabins.

The night was a beautiful one, clear and windless. To the north and northeast, from horizon to zenith, wavering, flashing bands and masses of light flooded the sky. Parting with Neil, Louis and Walter trudged through the snow towards the Brabant cabin. Both were absorbed in watching the aurora borealis, the ever changing rays and columns and spreading masses of white, green, and pale pink light, fading out in one spot only to flash up in another, in constant motion and never alike for two moments in succession. But when he turned from the beauty of the night to enter the cabin, there swept over Walter, in a great wave, the homesickness he had been holding at arms' length all day. He thought of the Christmas of a year ago in Switzerland, and he was heartsick for the mountains and valleys and forests of his native land,—so different from these flat, monotonous prairies,—heartsick for his own people and their speech and ways. What kind of a Christmas had this been for Elise and Max, he wondered. Were they homesick too?

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XVIII MIRAGE OF THE PRAIRIE

Early in the New Year, Louis, Neil and Walter set out for the Pembina Mountains or the Hare Hills, as that ridge of rough land was sometimes called. New Year's day, ushered in with the firing of muskets, was another occasion for merrymaking and hilarity in the settlement. Indeed the feasting, dancing, and gaiety had scarcely ceased day or night since Christmas. Many a *bois brulé* family had shared their winter supplies so generously with their guests that they had almost nothing left and would have to resort to hunting and fishing through the ice. Though they might starve before spring, the light-hearted, improvident half-breeds did not grudge what had been consumed in the festivities. They would do the same thing over again at the first opportunity.

The rapid decrease of supplies in the village gave Louis and Neil excuse for a hunting trip, and Walter was ready and eager to go along. At the Pembina Mountains they would be sure to find both game and fur animals, Louis asserted.

He had been there the winter before and had found good hunting. On that trip he and his companion had come across an old and empty but snug log cabin that had been built by some hunting or trading party. He proposed to return to the old camp and stay several weeks.

Walter was the more ready to go because, on the last day of the old year, he had received word from the Periers that they were getting along all right. The letter, from Elise, was brought by a half-breed who had come from St. Boniface to be married on New Year's day to a Pembina girl. Her father's cough was much better, Elise wrote. He was working at the buffalo wool factory with Matthieu. Max had been disappointed to find that Mr. West's school was a good two miles from Sergeant Kolbach's home, too far for the little fellow to go and come in cold weather. "But we are both of us learning some English without going to school," Elise added.

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The cabin was warm, and they had enough to eat, principally pemmican, and fish caught in nets set under the ice in the rivers. "You know I did not like pemmican," wrote Elise, "but now I am used to it. For Christmas we had a feast, a piece of fresh venison, and a pudding made with some wheat flour M. Kolbach had saved and with a sauce of melted sugar, the sugar the Indians make from the sap of the maple tree. Have you eaten any of that sugar, Walter? It is the best thing I have tasted since we came to this new land. You wrote to me that I must tell you if everything here did not go well. Of course it is not like home in Switzerland. We are not as comfortable or as happy as we were there, and sometimes Max and I are very lonely and homesick. Father does not complain of the hardships and is always planning what we are going to do when spring comes. We keep warm, we are well, and we have enough to eat, though we long for bread with butter, and milk, and cheese. I get the meals and wash and mend our clothes and keep the house clean. M. Kolbach says it is more comfortable than before we came. I can't really like M. Kolbach, though I know I ought to, it is so good of him to have us here. He is rather harsh to Max sometimes, but not to me, and yet I feel a little afraid of him. Isn't it strange that we can't like people by just trying to, no matter how hard we try? But I am very grateful to M. Kolbach for taking care of us."

This part of the letter troubled Walter a little, but, reading it over a second time, he concluded that Elise was merely homesick. Kolbach was very likely a rough sort of man, but he must have a kind heart or he would not do so much for strangers. There was no mention of the younger brother. Probably Elise knew nothing of him. Father Dumoulin thought Fritz Kolbach might not be on very good terms with the Sergeant. Perhaps after the robbery of the Indian, Fritz had not returned to St. Boniface. Undoubtedly the trader at Pembina had sent an account of that affair to Fort Douglas. Kolbach and Murray might not dare to show their faces there.

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The day of their start for the Pembina Mountains, Louis and Walter were up before dawn. The morning was still and very cold. After packing their few supplies and belongings on the toboggan, the boys passed a long rawhide rope,

or *shaganappy*, back and forth over the load and through the loops of the leather lashing that ran along the edges of the sled. Before the work was done their fingers were aching. They were glad to go back into the cabin for a breakfast of hot pemmican and tea.

As he went out again, Walter paused on the threshold to stare in amazement. The sun was not yet above the horizon, but the whole world had changed. He seemed to be standing in the center of a vast bowl. On every hand the country appeared to curve upward. And the distance was no longer distant! Groves of bare branched trees, streams, heights of land that he knew to be miles away had moved in around the settlement until they seemed only a few rods distant. To the west the line of hills,—Pembina Mountains,—that he had never glimpsed, even on the clearest day, as more than a faint blue line on the horizon, loomed up a mighty, flat-topped ridge. Once before, in December, Walter had seen the landscape transformed, but it was nothing to compare with this. Louis, familiar from childhood with the mirage of the prairie, declared he had never known such an extraordinary one.

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Awed and wondering, the two lads stood gazing about them. Turning to the east, they watched a spreading ray of crimson light mount the sky from the soft, low lying, rose and gold bordered clouds at the horizon. The sun was coming up. As the horizon clouds reddened and the rim of the glowing disk appeared, an exclamation from his companion caused Walter to wheel about.

Louis was pointing at two men and a dog team gliding through the air,—upside down! Every detail was startlingly clear, capotes with hoods pulled up, sashes, buckskin leggings, snowshoes. The driver with the long whip looked very tall. He belabored his dogs cruelly. It seemed to Walter that he ought to hear the man's shouts and curses, the howls and whines of the abused beasts. He could see their tracks in the snow, and a fringe of trees beyond them,—everything inverted as if he himself were standing on his head to watch men and dogs moving across the prairie. As he watched, the figures grew to gigantic stature, the outlines became indistinct. They vanished altogether. The sun was above the clouds now. The distance grew hazy. Only part of the chain of hills was visible. Louis turned to Walter, excitement in his voice.

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"I think those men go to the mountain too," he said. "Do you know how far away they are?"

Walter shook his head. He felt quite incapable of estimating distance in this fantastic world, where things he knew to be miles away were almost hitting him in the face.

"At least fifteen miles," declared Louis impressively.

"Impossible. We couldn't see them so plainly."

"And yet we have seen them. The mirage is always unbelievable."

"What is it anyway, Louis? What causes it?"

The Canadian lad shrugged his shoulders. "The Indians say the spirits of the air play tricks to

bewilder men and make them wander off the trail to seek things that are not there. Once I asked Father Dumoulin and he said the spirits had nothing to do with it. He called it a false effect of light, but that does not explain it, do you think?"

Again Walter shook his head.

"This I have noticed," Louis went on. "I have never seen the mirage in winter except at dawn or sunset. In summer I have seen it in the middle of the day when it was very hot and still. But why it comes, winter or summer, I do not know."

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Neil's arrival stirred the others to action. The dogs were harnessed and good-byes said to Louis' mother and sisters and rather sulky younger brother. Raoul wanted to go too, but one of the boys was needed at home.

Fresh and full of spirits, the dogs set off at such a pace that the boys had all they could do to keep up. When they left the trail and took to the untracked snow, speed slackened considerably. Louis now went ahead of the team, though track breaking was hardly necessary. Underneath an inch or more of dry, loose stuff, almost like sand, the snow was well packed and held up the dogs and sled. The line of hills had vanished, but the mirage did not entirely disappear and the landscape resume its natural appearance until the sun had been up nearly two hours.

The day was cold, much colder than the lads realized at first, for, when the start was made and for some time thereafter, there was not a breath of wind. All three wore fur caps and mittens, woolen capotes, and thick knit stockings under their moccasins. Walter had possessed none of these things when he came to Pembina, but Mrs. Brabant had made him a capote from a Hudson Bay blanket and a cap and mittens from a rather well worn bearskin. She had knit warm, new stockings for both boys from yarn bought at the trading post. A prickling feeling in his nose was Walter's first warning that his flesh was freezing. Stooping for a handful of snow, he rubbed the prickly spot to restore circulation, and pulled the hood of his capote farther around his face.

Their course at first lay to the north of the Pembina River, over flat prairie without an elevation high enough to be called a hill. On that January morning, the whole plain was a stretch of dazzling white. In the distance it appeared level, but it was actually made up of rolling snow waves. It was, Walter thought, like a great lake or sea, the waves of which had suddenly frozen while in motion and turned to snow instead of ice.

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XIX BLIZZARD

As the sun rose higher the wind began to blow. The loose surface snow was set in motion, crawling and creeping up the frozen waves. The

wind gained in strength, and everywhere the plain seemed to be moving. The glitter was less trying to the eyes now, for the sun had grown hazy. Louis glanced up at the sky, shouted to his dogs, sent his long whip flying through the air and flicked the leader with the lash.

"A storm comes," he called to his companions. "We must make haste and reach the river where it bends to the north."

With the increase of speed, Walter, less experienced in this sort of travel than his comrades, found keeping up difficult. Neither with nor without snowshoes was he the equal of the swift, tireless Louis. Neil too was his superior on snowshoes, though on bare ground Walter could outrun the Scotch boy. In spite of all his efforts he fell behind. Seeing his difficulty, Louis suggested that he ride for a while, standing on the rear of the sled. Glad though he was of a few minutes' rest, Walter did not ride long. The northwest wind soon chilled him through, and he was forced to run to warm himself.

The dogs' pace was slackening. The course was due west, and the wind, striking them at an angle, slowed their progress. The surface snow, caught up by the gale, drove against and swirled about beasts and boys.

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Walter plodded after the others, head lowered, capote hood pulled down over his cap to his eyes. Suddenly he realized that the fine, driving, blinding stuff that struck against him with such force and stung wherever it touched his bare skin, was not merely the fallen snow whipped forward by the wind. Snow was falling,—or being lashed down upon him,—from above. The sunshine was gone. The distance, the sky were wholly blotted out. He and his comrades were in the grip of a hard northwest storm, a genuine prairie blizzard.

Louis was having his hands full trying to keep a straight course. All landmarks blotted out, the wind was the only guide, and the dogs were continually edging away from the bitter blast. The French boy, of a naturally kind disposition and brought up by a good mother and a father who had no Indian blood, was far more humane than most dog drivers. He never abused his beasts, and he punished them only when discipline was necessary. Now, however, he was compelled to use the whip vigorously to keep them from swinging far to the south. Shouts and commands, drowned out by the roaring of the wind, were of little avail.

Dogs and boys struggled on in the driving wind, the bitter cold, and the blinding snow; and the struggle saved them from freezing. The snow was coming so thick and fast they could see only a few feet in any direction. Following behind the toboggan, Walter could not make out Askimé or the second dog. The third beast, next to the sled, was but a dim shape. Louis and Neil took turns going ahead of Askimé. While one was breaking trail, the other wielded the whip and tried to keep the dogs in the track.

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Plodding on through a white, swirling world, fighting against wind and snow, his whole mind intent on keeping the shadowy, moving forms in sight, his feet feeling like clogs of wood, his

ankles and calves aching with the unaccustomed exercise of snowshoeing, Walter lost all count of time. When the sled stopped, he kept on blindly and nearly fell over it.

Louis seized him by the arm and shouted, "We can go no farther. We can't keep a straight course. We must camp here."

Walter tried to look about him. He could see nothing but wind-driven snow, not a tree or hill or other sign of shelter. "We'll freeze to death," he protested huskily.

"No, no, we will be safe and warm. Kick off your snowshoes and help Neil dig."

Walter obeyed, slipping his feet from the thongs. Following the Scotch lad's example, he seized one of the shoes and, using it as a shovel, began to scoop up snow. Louis unharnessed the dogs and unlaced the hide cover, almost freezing his fingers in the process. Hastily dumping the supplies in a heap, he turned the sled on its side, and joined the diggers. In the lee of the toboggan, which kept the drifting snow from filling the hole as fast as they dug it out, the three boys worked for their lives. Down through the dry, loose surface, through the firm packed layer below, to the hard frozen ground, they dug. Scooping out the snow, they tried to make a wall, though the wind swept it away almost as rapidly as they piled it up.

Working steadily at their best speed, they succeeded at last in excavating a hole large enough to hold all three. The heap of supplies had been converted into a mound, the toboggan into a drift. Burrowing into the mound, the boys pulled out robes and blankets, hastily spread them at the bottom of the hole, and threw in their supplies. A long pole, that Louis had added to the load just before starting, was laid across the hole, one end resting on the toboggan. Clinging to the hide cover to keep it from blowing away, they drew it over the pole and weighted down the corners with a keg of powder, a sack of bullets, and the steel traps. After the edges of this tent roof had been banked with snow to hold it more securely, the three lads crawled under it.

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When he had recovered his breath, Walter asked, "What has become of the dogs?" He had not noticed them since Louis took off their harness.

"Do you think they are lost then?" said their master with a grin. "No, they have buried themselves in the snow to keep warm. They have earned a meal though, and they shall have it." Seizing three of the frozen fish he had brought for the dogs, Louis crawled out into the storm to find and feed them.

He was back in a few minutes, huddling among the robes and blankets. The hole was none too large. When they sat up straight, their heads nearly touched the hide cover, and all three could not lie down at one time. But in the snug burrow, with the snow-banked sled to windward, they did not feel the wind at all.

Knowing that they might have to camp where there was no fuel to be found, Louis had included a few small sticks among their supplies.

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Shaving one of the sticks into splinters, he struck his flint and steel and kindled a tiny fire on the bare ground in the center of the shelter. In the cover above he cut a little hole for the smoke to escape. Small though the blaze was, it sent out heat enough to thaw the boys' stiff fingers and feet, and its light was cheering in the dark burrow. Louis melted snow, made tea, and thawed out a chunk of frozen pemmican.

By the time the meal was over, Walter found himself surprisingly warm and comfortable. He had not supposed he could be so comfortable in such a crude shelter. He was drowsy and wanted to take a nap, but one fear troubled him and made him reluctant to yield to his sleepiness.

"If the snow covers us over, won't we smother in this hole?" he asked.

Louis shook his head. "There is no danger, I think. Often men overtaken by storm camp in the snow like this, and I never heard of anyone being smothered. There is not much snow on our tent now. It banks up against the toboggan and blows off our roof. But even if we are buried in a drift, we can still breathe I think, and we won't freeze while we have food and a little wood to make hot tea."

"And the dogs?"

"They will sleep warm, covered by the snow."

Reassured, Walter settled himself as comfortably as he could manage in the cramped quarters, and went to sleep. When he woke, he found the others both sleeping, Neil curled up in his thick plaid, and Louis in a sitting position with his head down on his knees. The fire had gone out, and in spite of the blanket in which he was wrapped and the buffalo robe spread over Neil and himself, Walter felt chilled through. It was too dark in the hole for him to see the figures on his watch. Trying to rub some warmth into his cramped legs, he roused Louis.

"How long have I been asleep? Is it night?"

"I think not yet," replied Louis, answering the second question. "It grows colder. I will make a fire and we will have some hot tea."

To clear a space for the fire, Louis unceremoniously rolled Neil over and woke him. The Scotch lad growled and grumbled at being disturbed, but the prospect of hot tea restored his good humor. Looking at his watch in the light of the tiny blaze, Walter discovered that it was not yet five o'clock. The storm still raged over them.

"Do we get something to eat with this?" Neil asked, as Louis poured the steaming tea into his tin cup.

"Not now. We have only a little wood. We must not keep the fire burning. Warm your fingers and your feet well before it burns out."

Louis was the leader of the expedition, and Neil did not question his decree. The three drew their blankets and robes closer about them, and made the most of the hot drink and the tiny fire. They were not sleepy now, so they talked, huddled together for warmth.

After a time conversation lagged. They grew silent, then drowsy. Walter dropped off, and woke to find Louis kindling another little blaze. It was after nine, and the three made a scanty meal of thawed pemmican before going to sleep again.

During the night Walter woke several times to rub his chilly body and limbs and snuggle closer to his companions. A buffalo robe and a blanket lay between him and the ground, his capote hood was drawn over his fur cap, he was wrapped in a blanket, and with his companions, covered with another robe, yet in his dreams he was conscious of the cold. He did not think of complaining. He had slept cold many a night since leaving Fort York. In the midst of this howling blizzard, he was thankful to be as comfortable as he was and in no immediate danger of freezing.

XX A NIGHT ATTACK

It must have been instinct that roused Louis and set him to shaving kindlings from the last stick of wood, for there was no change in the darkness of the hole to indicate that morning had come. The smoke no longer found a way out through the hide cover. Though the wood was dry and the blaze small, Walter was half choked and his eyes were smarting by the time the tea and pemmican were ready.

"We are covered with snow," said Louis as, in changing his position, he struck his head against the sagging roof. "But I think the storm is over."

He was right. When the three crawled out from under the hide and burrowed their way through the drift that covered all but the wind-swept peak of their shelter, they found that the flakes had ceased to fall. The wind still blew, though not so hard, and swept the dry, fallen snow up the wave-like drifts, but the sky was clear and flushed with the red of sunrise. It was a world of sky and snow, for the swirling clouds of fine, icy particles blotted out the distance.

The boys did not stand gazing about them for long. The morning was too bitterly cold for inaction, and they wanted to be on their way. Floundering through the drifts, they found the dogs buried in the snow, and pulled them, whining piteously, out of their warm nests. Each animal bolted his frozen fish, then burrowed for another nap.

Dismantling the almost buried shelter, digging out the toboggan and loading it took some time. To fasten the cover over the load, Neil had to take off his fur mittens to handle the stiffened lacings, and frosted four fingers. He was, as he said, "ready to howl" with the pain when the blood began to circulate in them. In the meantime Louis and Walter had dug out the whining dogs. Once in the harness, they ceased their protests. At the crack of the whip and their

master's shout of "*Marche, marche,*" they were off willingly enough.

"I hope you know where we are and where we're going, Louis," said Neil as he fell into line. "I don't."

"I think that must be the river over there where those trees are," Louis replied. "We cross it and go on to the west and cross it again. It makes a great bend to the north."

The dogs were headed for the line of woods, dimly visible through the blowing snow. The trees proved to be on the bank of the Pembina, which was crossed without difficulty. The ice was thick and solid beneath its snow blanket. Beyond the river was open prairie again, a succession of snow waves, up and down, across and through which, boys and dogs made their way westward. Both Louis and Neil went ahead to break the track. Askimé, the intelligent leader of the team, seemed to sense his responsibility and kept close behind the snowshoes.

Walter brought up the rear. His ankles were lame, the muscles of his calves strained and sore from the snowshoeing of yesterday. He found the going quite hard enough, even in the trail made by two pairs of rackets, three dogs, and a loaded sled. The sky was clear blue overhead, the blowing snow particles glittered in the sunlight, but the sun seemed to give out no warmth. The north wind was piercingly cold. The strenuous exercise kept body and limbs warm, but in spite of his capote hood Walter had to rub and slap his face frequently. His hands grew numb in his fur mittens.

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Only one stop was made, about mid afternoon, when they reached an *île des bois*, or wood island. The thick clump of leafless small trees and bushes, though broken and trampled by buffalo, furnished plenty of fuel and some protection from the wind. The boys kindled a fire, not a tiny flame but a big blaze that threw out real heat. Close around it they crouched to drink hot tea and eat a little pemmican.

Heartened by food and drink, they smothered their fire with snow that there might be no danger of its destroying the little grove, and resumed their march. Higher land came into view through the blowing drift, and Louis scanned it eagerly. He admitted that he did not know just where he was.

"We should have crossed the river again before this," he said. "Without knowing it we have edged away from the cold wind and gone too far south. I fear we cannot find the old cabin to-night."

"We must find fuel and shelter," was Neil's emphatic reply.

It was after sunset when the cold and tired travelers reached an abrupt rise of wooded ground. Skirting the base of this tree-clad cliff, they came to a steep-sided gully, where a small stream, now frozen over and snow covered, broke through. The narrow cut was lined with boulders, but trees and bushes bordered the stream and grew wherever they could find foothold on the abrupt sides among the stones. The gully was drifted with snow, but it would

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provide protection from the bitter wind.

Leaving his comrades with the sled, Louis explored until he found a suitable spot, where the almost perpendicular north slope cut off the wind. A huge boulder, partly embedded in the bank, would serve as the east wall of the shelter. He shouted to his companions, who joined him with sled and dogs.

"We will dig out the snow behind this big stone," he explained, "and pile it up to make a wall on the other two sides. When we have put the toboggan and the hide cover over the top, we shall have a good warm lodge."

The three set to work at once, Walter almost forgetting his lameness and weariness in his eagerness to complete the queer hut. When it was all done but the roof, Neil left the others to unload the sled, while he took the ax and climbed the bank to cut firewood.

Before the shelter was finished, darkness had come, and the howling of wolves echoed from the hills above. On the narrow strip of frozen, sandy ground that had been uncovered, a robe was spread. The fire was kindled against the big boulder, which reflected the heat. To the cold and tired boys, the hut seemed very snug. Wrapped in blankets, they huddled before the blaze, warm and comfortable, even though the heat did not carry far enough to make much impression on the two snow walls.

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By the time Walter had eaten his portion of melted pemmican and drunk two cups of hot tea, he was so sleepy he could not keep his eyes open. Neil too was nodding, and Louis was not much wider awake. They replenished the fire, and stretched out side by side, feet to the blaze, and heads wrapped in their capote hoods.

An excited barking and howling waked Walter suddenly. How could three dogs make such an unearthly racket? With a sharp exclamation, Louis freed himself from his blanket. In a flash Walter realized that the dogs were not guilty of all that noise.

Louis was gone, Neil was following. Walter sprang up, felt for his gun, and could not find it. The fire was still smouldering. Remembering that wild animals were supposed to be afraid of fire, he seized a stick that was alight at one end. As he crawled from the shelter, he knew from the sounds that the wolves were attacking the dogs.

The loud report of a gun drowned out for an instant the snarls and growls. The dark forms of the beasts could be seen against the white snow, but the light was too dim down in the gully to show friends from foes. Louis had fired into the air.

Before the echoes of the shot had died away, Walter flung his blazing firebrand, with sure aim. It landed among the dark shapes. There was a sharp snarl, a quick backward leap of a long, thin body. Neil risked a shot. The snarling creature made a convulsive plunge forward, and fell in a heap. Black figures, three or four of them, were moving swiftly up the gully.

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Louis fired again, then called commandingly,

"Askimé, back!"

The brave husky had started in pursuit of the wolves. At his master's command, he paused, hesitated, turned. Louis ran forward to seize the dog.

Askimé had been hurt, but not seriously. One of the wolves had got him by the throat, but the Eskimo's heavy hair had protected him and the skin was only slightly torn. The other dogs were uninjured. The actual attack had but just begun, when Walter flung his firebrand. The blazing stick had struck Askimé's attacker on the head, and had made him loose his hold. It had frightened the rest of the beasts. Then Neil's quick and lucky shot had killed the one wolf almost instantly. The dead animal proved,—as the voices of the pack had already betrayed,—that the attackers were not the small, cowardly prairie beasts, but big, gray timber wolves.

"It was you, Walter, who saved Askimé's life," Louis exclaimed gratefully. "I didn't dare take aim. I couldn't tell which was wolf and which dog. I fired over their heads, hoping to frighten the wicked brutes. But you saved Askimé. Come, brave fellow," he said to the dog. "You shall sleep in the lodge with me the rest of the night."

"Will the wolves come back, do you think?" asked Walter.

"If they do, the dogs will warn us. But I think they will not trouble us again. They have lost their leader, and they are well frightened."

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The boys were so thoroughly aroused that it was some time before they could go to sleep again. But they heard no more of the wolves, and finally dropped off, first Neil, then Louis, and finally Walter. Between his two companions, Walter slept more warmly than on the night before, though he woke several times when the fire had to be replenished.

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XXI THE BURNED CABIN

Before sunrise Louis was stirring and woke the others. When Walter tried to move, he found his ankles and calves so stiff and sore that he wondered if he could possibly go on with the march. Of course he must go on. Louis and Neil seemed as spry as ever. He would not hold them back. Pride helped him to set his teeth and bear the pain of getting to his feet and moving about. His first few minutes of snowshoeing were agony. As he went on, some of the stiffness wore off, but sharp darts of pain stabbed foot, ankle, or leg at every step. Doggedly he trudged behind the toboggan, thankful that trail breaking through the deep snow prevented speed.

Keeping to open, level ground at the foot of the hills, Louis watched for familiar landmarks. The day was clear and cold. Going north and northwest, the party traveled against the piercing wind. The boys walked with heads

lowered. The dogs, every now and then, veered to one side or stopped and turned about in their traces. Most drivers would have beaten and abused the poor beasts for such behavior, but Louis was not without sympathy for them. He himself had to turn his back to the wind occasionally. With a fellow feeling for the dogs, he encouraged rather than drove them. Askimé did his best, and the others were usually ready to follow him.

What he had seen so far of the Pembina Mountains was a disappointment to Walter. He could not understand why anyone should dignify mere low ridges and irregular, rolling hills with the name of mountains. Nevertheless, after weeks of open prairie, the rolling, partly wooded land looked good to him. He felt more at home in broken country.

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The wind-driven surface snow obscured the distance, so that landmarks were difficult to recognize. In a momentary lull, a line of woods, winding out across the plain, was revealed. Louis paused in his trail breaking, and turned to call to his comrades.

"There is the river again," he cried. "We came too far to the south, as I thought."

"Is the cabin on the river bank?" asked Walter, hoping that the long tramp was almost over.

"No, it is in the hills about a mile beyond," was the rather discouraging reply.

Walter's heart sank. He had been wondering at every step how long he could go on. Could he keep going to that line of trees and then on for another mile or more? He must of course, no matter how much it hurt.

Louis, sure of the way now, led to and across the river, then turned to the northwest into the broken, hilly country. There they were less exposed to the sweep of the wind, but in other ways the going was harder. It seemed to Walter that they must have gone at least three miles beyond the river, when he heard Louis, who had rounded a clump of leafless trees, give a cry of dismay. Following their leader, Walter and Neil entered a snug, tree-protected hollow, backed by a steep, sandy slope. And all three stood staring at a roofless, blackened ruin.

Louis was the first to recover himself. "This is bad, yes, but the walls still stand, and the chimney has not fallen."

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"We can rig up some sort of a roof," Neil responded. "It will be better than camping in the open."

Walter said nothing. He had expected to find a cabin all ready for occupancy, where they could make themselves comfortable at once. Cold and suffering sharply with the pain in his feet and legs, his bitter disappointment quite overwhelmed his courage.

"Someone has camped here since the blizzard. There are raquette and sled and dog tracks, but it is strange,"—Louis, turning towards Walter, forgot what he intended to say, seized a handful of snow, made a lunge at his friend, and clapped the snow on his face. "Your cheek is frozen. It is

all white. Rub it,—not so hard, you will take the skin off. Let me do it. Neil, cut some wood, dry branches. We will make a fire the first thing we do, even if we have no roof over our heads.”

Neil took the ax from the sled, and started to obey Louis’ order, while the latter skilfully rubbed and slapped Walter’s stiff, white cheek, until it began to tingle.

The log walls of the old cabin were intact. The door, of heavy, ax-hewn planks, was only charred. It stood ajar, and Louis pulled it wide open and went in, Walter following. There was no snow within, but the hard earth floor was strewn with the fallen remains of the roof. Had there been a plank floor to catch fire, the inside of the house would certainly have been burned out, and the walls would probably have gone too. As it was, the logs were merely blackened, the top ones charred a little. Two bed frames, a stool made of unbarked sticks, and the stone and clay fireplace and chimney were unharmed.

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“We will make a fire, warm ourselves and unload the *tabagane*. Then we must build a new roof.”

Louis was not satisfied with the appearance of Walter’s frozen cheek. As soon as the fire was kindled, he melted some snow, removed the warm water from the blaze and added more snow until it was like ice water. He bade Walter bathe his cheek with the cold water and keep on bathing it until the frost was drawn out. Noticing the stiffness of his friend’s movements and the signs of suffering in his face, Louis guessed his other trouble.

“You have a pain in the legs?” he inquired. “It is the *mal de raquette*. Everyone not used to snowshoeing has it if he travels long. It is very painful. Take off your moccasins. Warm your feet and legs and rub them. That will help.”

Walter was glad to obey. He expected to do his share in unloading the sled and roofing the cabin, but when Louis saw how inflamed and swollen the Swiss boy’s ankles and insteps were, he refused to let him help. Walter must remain quiet. His work would be to sit on a buffalo robe before the fire and keep the blaze going.

The roof the others constructed was only a temporary affair. It was almost flat, slanting a little towards the rear, as the back wall was slightly lower than the front. Poles and bark were the materials, weighted with stones to keep them from blowing away. Such a covering would not stand a strong wind, but the cabin was well sheltered. In a hard rain the roof would probably leak, and heavy snow might sag it or break it. But it would serve for a while at least, and it was the best the boys could do in haste and with the materials at hand. By nightfall they had a cover over their heads, flimsy though it was.

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As they were eating their evening meal before a warm blaze, Neil said thoughtfully, “I wonder how this cabin caught fire. The fellows who camped here can’t have been gone long, yet when we came the fire was out and everything cold.”

“Yes,” agreed Louis. “Even the ashes on the hearth were cold.”

"Probably it broke out in the night," Neil suggested. "Sparks from the chimney started it. But how *could* they, with the roof covered with snow?"

"If there had been snow on it, it would not have burned so easily," Louis returned.

"This place is too sheltered for the wind to blow the snow off the roof. Someone must have cleaned it off. Perhaps the weight was breaking it down."

"Well, it burned anyway," Walter put in. "All we know is that there was a fire, and that some other party was here before we came. Do you remember those men we saw in the mirage, Louis?"

"Yes, we thought they were coming to the mountain. Whoever it was who camped here, we owe him a grudge. He burned our roof and stole our beds. Antoine and I made those beds last winter." One of the first things Louis had noticed on entering the house was that the stretched hides, which had taken the place of springs and mattress, were gone from the rustic cots. The hides had been cut off with a knife.

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The bed frames being of no use, the boys lay down on the buffalo robe before the fire. Louis and Neil slept soundly, but the pain in Walter's feet and legs and frosted cheek made him wakeful and restless.

His lameness and his sore face kept him at home the next day when the others went out to seek for game and signs of fur animals. That was a long day for Walter. Enough wood had been cut to last until evening, and he kept the fire going. He cleaned out the remains of the burned roof which cluttered the floor, arranged the scanty supplies and equipment more neatly, drove some wooden pegs between the logs to hang clothes and snowshoes on, mended a break in the dog harness, and did everything he could find to do. The cabin had one window covered with oiled deerskin that let in a little light, and the open fire helped to illuminate the dim interior.

Dusk had come when the hunters returned, bringing two big white hares. Rabbit stew would be a welcome change from pemmican. They had set traps and snares, had seen elk tracks, and had found, among rocks at the base of a tree, a partly snow-blocked hole Louis thought might be a bear's winter den.

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XXII THE PAINTED BUFFALO SKULL

The life of the three boys in their lonely cabin in the hills settled down to a regular routine. Louis and Neil were out every day hunting and visiting their traps, but it was nearly a week before Walter's lameness wore off so that he could tramp and climb with his comrades. The skin

peeled from his frosted cheek, leaving it so tender that he had to keep it covered with his capote hood when out in the cold.

The cabin was in need of furniture. Besides the bed frames, Louis and his companion of the winter before had made two rough stools, but one had been burned. Before he was able to hunt, the Swiss boy, who was handy at wood working, fashioned two more stools. His only tools were an ax, a small saw, and a knife, but the stools were strong and solid, if not ornamental. A table the lads did not miss. At meal times they sat before the fire, their plates on their knees, their cups on the earth floor beside them, the cooking utensils on the hearth.

The first day that Walter went any distance from camp, he and Louis, entering a partly wooded hollow among the hills, came suddenly upon a herd of six or eight large, handsome deer. It was the first time Walter had ever seen wapiti or elk. He was surprised and excited, the trigger of his flintlock trade gun pulled hard, and his shot went wide. Louis, cooler and more experienced, fired just as the herd took fright at the report of Walter's gun. A yearling buck fell, and he was jubilant at his happy shot. The pemmican was almost gone, and the boys had been living on hares and squirrels. Frozen and hung in a tree out of reach of the dogs, the elk meat would keep until every eatable scrap had been consumed.

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It proved lucky for the lads that they had such a good supply of fresh meat. That night a storm commenced that lasted more than three days. It was worse than the blizzard they had encountered on their way to the hills. Even in the sheltered spot where the cabin stood the wind howled and shrieked through the trees, bending them low and beating and crashing the leafless limbs against one another. It threatened to blow the roof off, and whirled the snow in among the trees, to drift it high against the windward side of the house.

Any attempt to reach the trap lines would have been the wildest folly. Neil tried once to go to the near-by creek for water, but the storm drove him back. He decided that snow water was quite good enough for him. When the supply of fuel ran low, a tree close to the lee side of the house was felled. Cutting it up was a troublesome and strenuous task even in the shelter of the cabin.

While the wood pile was being replenished, the elk carcass was blown from the tree where it hung. It was brought inside. The corner farthest from the fire proved quite cold enough to keep the meat fresh. The dogs whined and scratched at the door, but Louis let in Askimé only. He knew it would be almost impossible to prevent the beasts from getting at the venison, if all three were admitted. On the sheltered side of the house, buried deep in the snow, the thick-haired dogs would not freeze.

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Preparing the pelts occupied part of the boys' time. At this task Louis was expert and Neil not unskilled. The work did not appeal to Walter, though he was ready to lend a hand when necessary. He had not been brought up to the fur trade, and he had already concluded that he had no wish to be a trapper. He was willing enough to hunt, especially when food was

needed, but traps seemed to him mere instruments of torture. He said nothing to his comrades of this feeling. Their training and way of looking at life were in many ways different from his. But he was resolved to find some other way of making a living in this new land. He was willing to do farming, tinkering, repair work, even to act as a voyageur for the Company.

When time began to hang heavy on the boys' hands, Walter suggested that Neil give him some lessons in English. They had no paper, pens, or pencils. With a charred stick Neil wrote on the flat hearth stone such common English words as he knew, explaining the meaning. His father had taught him to read and write a little English,—as much as he knew himself,—but Neil's education was very limited, his spelling erratic, and his pronunciation that of the Highland Scot. Louis watched and listened with keen interest. He had even less education than the Scotch boy. Louis could read only enough to make out the markings on bales of goods and pelts. His writing consisted in copying those marks and signing his name.

When Walter had written his letters to the Periers and had read theirs aloud, Louis had admired and envied his knowledge. Noticing the Canadian boy's interest in the lessons, Walter offered to teach him to read his native tongue, French. Among the Swiss lad's few possessions was a small Bible that had belonged to his mother, the only thing he owned that had been hers. He had always carried it about with him, and now he used it as a text-book. Louis entered into the new task with enthusiasm and surprised Walter by learning rapidly. In fact Louis proved quicker than Neil, whose restless nature disinclined him to study of any kind. In physical activity the Highland boy delighted, but working his mind bored and wearied him. Louis, however, grew so interested that even after the storm was over, he spent a part of every evening in a reading lesson by firelight.

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A period of clear, cold weather followed the blizzard. There was little wind, but more than once the stillness of the night was shattered by a sharp crack, almost like the report of a musket, when, in the intense cold, some near-by tree split from freezing. In hunting and visiting the traps the boys felt the cold far less than at a higher temperature with wind. Fingers and faces became frost-bitten quickly though, and Walter had to be careful of his frosted cheek.

Following the trap lines necessitated long tramps, sometimes of twelve or fifteen miles, through the hills. Accompanying his comrades, Walter learned something of the lay of the land. He found that the cabin was located on what Louis called "the first mountain," a rough and partly wooded plateau that rises rather abruptly from the prairie of the Red River valley; which is really not a valley but a plain. This hilly plateau is about eight miles across its widest part, and reaches its greatest height a mile south of where the Pembina River cuts a deep valley through it. On the west of the plateau is the "second mountain," an irregular ridge. Though the second mountain rises nowhere more than five hundred feet above the first, it is wild and rugged. Walter was forced to admit that in some places, especially where the streams that

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crossed it had eroded steep-walled ravines, three or four hundred feet deep, it was almost mountain-like on a small scale. To a mountain-bred boy this was mere hill country, but he felt more at home in it than he had felt anywhere since coming to the strange new world. Climbing was a real joy to him, and he loved to choose the steepest rather than the easiest routes.

As game grew scarce in the vicinity of the cabin, the boys pushed their trap lines farther and farther into the hills, until whoever made the rounds was forced to be away at least two, and sometimes three, nights. They built two overnight shelters, one a lean-to against an abrupt cliff, the other a roof of poles over a snug hollow in the rocks. In one of these lodges Louis or Neil, sometimes alone, sometimes accompanied by Walter, would spend the night; with a blazing fire at the entrance to keep away wolves and wildcats.

For several weeks a thievish wolverine annoyed the trappers. The clever, bloodthirsty beast followed the trails, broke into deadfalls, and skilfully extracted the catch from traps and snares. What it could not devour it carried away and hid, after mangling the creature until the pelt was ruined. Louis swore vengeance on the thief, and tried in every way to trap it. At last, by going out at night to follow the wolverine's fresh track against the wind, he came upon the greedy beast in the act of breaking into a deadfall from the rear. A quick and lucky shot, and Louis triumphantly carried home the robber. Walter had never seen a wolverine, and Neil knew it from its tracks and skin only. With its long body, short, strong legs, and big feet armed with sharp, curved claws, it looked a most formidable creature for its size.

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February was a stormy month, until near the close, when there came another period of clear, calm cold. In this fine weather Louis laid a new trap line extending seven miles or more north to *Tête de Boeuf*, Buffalo Head, one of the highest points in the range. After accompanying his friend over the new trail, Walter climbed Buffalo Head for the first time one bright, windless noonday. He found the view from the top impressive, but the name puzzled him.

"Why do you call this hill *Tête de Boeuf*?" he asked his companion. "I can't see that it is shaped like a bull's head, looked at from below or from up here."

"No," Louis replied. "I think the name does not come from the shape of the hill, but from a curious custom of the Indians. Do you see those red things over there?"

He pointed to an irregular line of objects in an exposed, wind-blown spot at the very rim of an escarpment.

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"Those queer looking stones? They look as if someone had laid them there in a row, and then daubed them with red paint. Did the Indians put them there? What for?"

"You think they are stones? Go and look at them," returned Louis with a smile.

Walter walked to the edge of the bluff, looked down at the objects, and exclaimed in

astonishment, "They're skulls; skulls of some big animal."

"Buffalo," said Louis. "To the Assiniboin and the Sioux this mountain is sacred. They bring buffalo skulls, daub them with red earth, and place them as you see, noses pointing to the east. The skulls are offerings to some heathen god. There is another spot up here where the Indians burn tobacco as a sacrifice." He stooped to examine one of the skulls. "This one has not been here long. See how fresh the paint is. It is trader's vermilion mixed with grease."

"That skull was put there since the last storm," Walter agreed. "There are little drifts of snow against the others, but hardly any around that one."

Louis had turned his attention to a shallow, snow-filled hollow in the rock. "Here are tracks. Truly someone has been here since the last snowfall."

Although the weather had been unusually calm for several days, every breath of breeze swept the exposed spot. The prints in the snow were partly obliterated. If the boys had not found the freshly painted skull, they would scarcely have guessed that the tracks were those of men. With some difficulty they traced the footprints to the edge of a steep, bare, rock slope. There they lost the trail. They were out after game and did not care to waste time tracing a couple of wandering Indians, so they gave up the search.

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Nevertheless the recent offering of a buffalo skull on *Tête de Boeuf* aroused the lads' curiosity, and set them wondering if there might be Indians camped somewhere in the neighborhood. In all their wanderings heretofore the three had seen no recent sign of human beings.

"We must keep a better watch of our things," Louis decided, as he sat by the fire that evening preparing the pelt of a red fox. "The Assiniboin are great thieves. Stealing horses is a feat they are proud of. We have no horses, but we do not want to lose our dogs."

"Or our sled and blankets and all our furs," Neil added. "One of us must stay home after this to look after things."

"Yes." Louis was silent for a moment considering. "I think," he said at last, "that you and I, Walter, will try to follow that trail tomorrow. It may lead to some camp. Neil will stay here to guard the cabin."

"Why not let Walter stay?" demanded the Scotch boy, who preferred a more active part.

"Because he cannot talk to the savages or understand them, if any come this way. He knows no Assiniboin."

"I don't know much myself," Neil protested.

"But you know a little, and you have dealt with Indians. He has not. He does not even understand their sign language."

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Neil could find no answer to that argument. He was forced to consent to the arrangement, though he was far from pleased.

XXIII UNWELCOME VISITORS

The period of bright, calm weather seemed to be over. The next morning was dark and cloudy, with a raw wind. In accordance with Louis' plan, he and Walter climbed Buffalo Head again. At the foot of the bare rock slope, they succeeded in picking up the trail from the painted skull. Two men, Louis concluded, had come and gone that way. He traced the trail easily enough for a short distance, but in the woods it became confused with that of several wolves. Probably the beasts had followed the men at a safe distance. Where the snow lay deep the men had taken to snowshoes.

By the time the lads had reached a puzzling spot, where the tracks seemed to branch into two trails, the threat of the morning had been fulfilled. Snow was falling. Selecting the more distinct trail, Louis led on, but the thick-falling flakes were rapidly obliterating the tracks. He grew more and more doubtful of them, until at last he was sure that he had lost the trail entirely. After circling about, attempting in vain to pick it up, he gave up the chase.

"It is of no use to go on," he said to his companion. "If this snow had waited a few hours,—but no, it comes at just the wrong time." With a resigned shrug of his shoulders, he turned back.

For a time the snow came thick and fast, but before the boys were half-way home, it had almost ceased. When they reached the cabin, the wind had changed and the sun was shining. The storm had lasted just long enough to defeat their purpose. Their hard tramp had been for nothing. The stay-at-home, however, had news; news he was impatient to tell.

"I have had a visitor," he burst out the moment Louis opened the door.

"A visitor!"

"A visitor?" echoed Walter, entering close behind his comrade.

"Yes, and I have found out about the new skull on Buffalo Head."

"That is more than we have done," Louis admitted, shaking the snow from his capote. "There have been Indians here?"

"No, a white man."

Louis and Walter were too amazed even to exclaim. They stared unbelievably at Neil.

"A white man," the Scotch boy repeated. "He came a little while after you left. I didn't know he was anywhere around till he knocked on the door. I was surprised, I can tell you, when I heard that knock. An Indian would have walked right in, so, even before I opened the door, I knew there must be a white man there. And

there was,—a broad-shouldered fellow with a shaggy beard. He said '*Bo jou*' and I said '*Bo jou*, come in.' Then we stood and looked at each other. Just as I opened my mouth to ask him where he came from, he began asking me questions."

"What kind of questions?" Louis interrupted.

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"Who I was, and what I was doing here, if I was trapping or trading with the Indians. He could see the pelts all around the room. He was so sharp about it, I thought he might be a Hudson Bay man out on the track of free traders. I told him we hadn't seen an Indian since we came and didn't expect to see one. Then he wanted to know what we were going to do with our furs. Of course I said we were going to take them to the Company at Pembina."

"Did that satisfy him?"

"It seemed to. He isn't a Company man, it appears."

"A free trader?" questioned Louis.

"He didn't say. He is on his way from *Portage la Prairie* to Pembina."

"*Portage la Prairie* is on the Assiniboine. Why did he come this way?"

"He said it was shorter and he wanted to make speed."

Louis shook his head doubtfully. "Shorter? No, I think not. He must be off his course. How many are in his party?"

"No one but himself. He didn't even have a sled, only a pack and his snowshoes."

"But that is strange. You are sure he had no comrades?"

"I asked him if he had come all the way alone," Neil explained, "and he said that at first he had traveled with two others. Yesterday or last night, he left them. He had quarreled with them I think. When he went away, he warned me to look out for them and not to trust them. I asked if they were coming this way. He didn't know where they were going, he said, but they were somewhere around here in the hills."

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"What about the painted skull?" inquired Walter.

"I told him about our finding it and the tracks. He said the other fellows put the skull there. One of them is an Assiniboin."

Walter was puzzled. "If that is true,—if those men really did that, they must have reached the hills two or three days ago. We found the skull yesterday."

"That's so." Neil rubbed his red head thoughtfully. "That rather spoils his story of making speed straight through from *Portage la Prairie*, doesn't it?"

"He lied," concluded Louis emphatically. "Somewhere he lied, either about himself or about the placing of the skull on the *Tête de Boeuf*. What was he like, that fellow, and who is he? What is his name? Where does he belong?"

"He didn't tell me his name, but he is a DeMeuron from St. Boniface. He asked so many questions that I didn't think till afterwards that he hadn't mentioned his name. He asked mine and yours."

"He knew you were not here alone then?"

"Oh yes, I told him I expected you two back any moment. He kept looking at our furs, and I thought he had better know we were three to one."

"Three to three perhaps," said Louis thoughtfully, "if the others are still near here. They may not have parted at all."

"I'm sure they have quarreled. He was telling the truth about that. You should have seen his face when he spoke of those other fellows, and he warned me against them, you know."

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"That is true," Louis conceded, "but his stories do not agree and we had best not trust them too far."

One of the trap lines had not been visited for two days, so Neil went out to examine the nearer traps while daylight lasted. Doubt of the white traveler's story made Louis decide to remain at the cabin. The boys had a fairly good catch of furs, and Louis knew that wandering trappers and free traders were not always above robbing weaker parties. If the stranger returned or his former companions happened along, Louis wanted to be at home.

The sun was sinking behind the hills as Walter, accompanied by Askimé, went down to the creek. He found the water hole frozen and was chopping it out when the dog began to growl uneasily. The boy paid little attention, thinking Askimé had scented some wild animal. Suddenly Askimé threw back his head and howled. His fellows replied from near the cabin. Then, as all three were silent for a moment, there came other answers from farther away; up the creek somewhere. In doubt whether the answering voices were those of dogs or wolves, Walter filled his kettle and hastened back to the cabin.

Outside the house, Louis was trying to quiet his beasts. "We shall have visitors soon," he announced. "You heard?"

"Yes, but I wasn't sure whether they were dogs or wolves."

"Dogs," Louis asserted confidently. "Those men have heard ours. They will come this way."

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Louis and Walter tied their dogs at the rear of the cabin, and lingered outside, watching for the strangers. It was not long before a howl from the opposite direction, together with the voice of a man shouting, as he belabored some unfortunate beast, announced the arrival of the visitors.

Through an opening in the woods, into the cleared space before the cabin, came a tall fellow in buckskin leggings and blue capote, the hood pulled low over his face. He was followed by two lean, shaggy dogs drawing a toboggan. It flashed into Walter's mind that these were the very men and sled he had seen upside down against the sky during the mirage.

"Bo jou," called Louis in a friendly tone, as a second man appeared and the sled came to a halt.

"Bo jou," returned the tall fellow in a deep voice.

At the sound of that voice Walter started with surprise. The newcomer pushed back his hood, and the boy found himself gazing into the face of the half-breed voyageur Murray. The sun was down behind the mountain, but even in the waning light, there was no mistaking that face; that dark, aquiline, beardless, hard, cruel face, that he had seen day after day during the long journey from Fort York to Fort Douglas.

If Murray recognized the two lads, and he must recognize them Walter knew, he made no sign. He merely stood impassive, looking at them, until Louis recovered his wits sufficiently to act the host. Under the circumstances he could do no less, even though the guest was an unwelcome one. After all there had been no open breach between Murray and the boys, and what had happened at Pembina was not their business. It would be better to show no knowledge of that affair.

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At Louis' invitation, the newcomers entered the cabin and were given the stools by the fire. They had unhitched their dogs from the sled and tied them to a tree to keep them from Louis' beasts, but Murray was hardly seated when the noise of battle sounded from without. Louis ran out and Murray followed to find that one of his dogs had broken or gnawed off his rawhide rope and was engaged in a fight with Askimé who had broken his rope also. The beasts were separated, Murray's dog, after being well beaten by his far from merciful master, was tied more securely, and Askimé was taken into the cabin.

Walter was already getting the evening meal, which, as a matter of course, the visitors would share. The second man, it was evident, was not the one who had been with Murray at Pembina. This fellow was an Indian, a young man, slender, well built, but insignificant beside the Black Murray. He understood scarcely a word of French or English, and spoke only when addressed in his native Assiniboin. It seemed to Walter, as he covertly watched the two, that the young Indian was completely under Murray's domination, and stood in fear or awe of him.

Before the meal was ready, Neil returned. He had heard unfamiliar dog voices, as he approached the cabin, and had seen the loaded sled before the door, so he was not surprised to find strangers sitting by the fire. He it was who first mentioned the visitor that had come earlier in the day.

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"I suppose," he said, "you two are the ones that fellow was traveling with."

Murray grunted an assent. After a moment he asked, "How long ago he here?" He grunted again at Neil's reply.

The warm meal, eaten for the most part in silence, seemed to thaw Murray's sullenness somewhat. Suddenly he began to talk; his usual mixture of bad English, worse French, Cree, and Dakota. Like the DeMeuron, he asked questions about the boys' trapping, and inquired if they

had seen any Indians and had done any trading. Questioned in return, his replies were brief and evasive. He and Kolbach had been to the west. They had come back to the hills expecting to meet a band of Assiniboins. "We waited," he said, "but the Assiniboins not come."

Walter and Louis were not surprised to learn that Murray's former companion was Fritz Kolbach. They had guessed that already.

"It was here at the mountain you expected to meet the Assiniboins?" Louis inquired.

Murray shot a keen glance at him, and nodded.

"Then you camped near here for several days?" persisted Louis.

"To the north, other side *Tête de Boeuf*."

"You left the fresh buffalo skull on the mountain?" put in Neil.

Murray silently pointed to his Assiniboin companion, who apparently understood nothing of the conversation. Then the half-breed asked abruptly, "Who told you that? Kolbach?"

"We found the newly painted skull and your tracks," said Neil. "I spoke to him this morning about them and he said you put the skull there."

Le Murrai Noir's face had darkened at every mention of the DeMeuron. He demanded savagely, "What else he tell you?" And, before Neil could answer, added a string of violent abuse of his former companion.

"Kolbach told me nothing," the boy hastened to reply, "nothing except that he had been traveling with you, but had left you and was going on alone. He seemed to be in a hurry."

Murray's eyes were fastened on Neil's honest, freckled face. His only reply was an abrupt grunt, he turned to Louis. "You stay here long? I sell you bag pemmican, good pemmican, for furs."

Louis ignored the question. "We thank you for your offer," he said, "but we have no need of pemmican. We have plenty of food." This was not strictly true, but he wanted no dealings with Murray.

Murray cast a look about the cabin, dimly lighted by the fire on the hearth. "We go now," he said abruptly.

"You're not going on to-night?" Neil asked in surprise.

"You are welcome to spread your blankets here by the fire," Louis added, he would not break the rules of hospitality even though he felt the guest to be an enemy.

Murray did not even thank him. "The moon is bright. We go on."

The Indian had risen and moved towards the door. Murray pulled on his capote and looked up at the bark and pole roof. An evil smile showed his strong, yellow-white teeth. "It burn?" he inquired.

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"You set it on fire," accused Louis.

Murray grinned mockingly. "Not me,—Kolbach."

"But why did he want to burn the roof off?" cried Walter.

"Why leave a cabin for other traders?" Murray spoke contemptuously. Undoubtedly he felt contempt for Walter's innocence. "Only the roof burn well," he added. His left hand on the door latch, he turned and held out the right to Walter.

The Swiss boy, surprised at this courtesy from the man he had believed an enemy, could not refuse his own hand. Murray's sinewy fingers clasped it firmly for an instant. A scratch in the palm,—a deep scratch made by a rough splinter of wood when Walter was renewing the fire before supper,—tingled sharply with the pressure.

"*Bo jou!*" said Murray, and opened the door and went out.

The Assiniboin repeated the words and followed. In a moment both were arousing and harnessing their dogs. The men's shouts, the whines and howls of the tired beasts, lashed and beaten to force them to speed, could be heard long after men and sled had disappeared into the woods and the night.

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XXIV A SORE HAND

"Now we know it was Murray and Kolbach who camped here the night before we came," said Louis, after the guests were gone. "Then they tried to burn this old cabin so no one else could use it. That is a trick of rival traders to make each other as much trouble as they can."

"The Northwest Company used to destroy Hudson Bay houses whenever they got a chance," put in Neil.

"Yes, and the Hudson Bay men did the same to the Northwesters."

"That was a queer way to try to burn a house though," Neil remarked, "to begin at the top. Kolbach must have had to clean off the snow before he could set the fire."

"Perhaps it was Kolbach who cleaned away the snow, but I think the plan to burn the cabin was as much *le Murrain's* as Kolbach's," Louis asserted. "I believe they tried to start fire in other places as well as the roof. At the back there is a place where a fire has burned close to the wall. The logs are charred and black. They started several fires, I think, but they did not stay to watch them. As *le Murrain* said, only the roof burned well. What do you think, Walter?"

Walter had scarcely been listening. He was examining his right hand, which still smarted. Raising his head at the question, he replied

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carelessly, "About the fire? They set it, of course. Lucky for us it didn't burn better." He looked again at his stinging palm. "I wonder if Murray ever washes his hands. The dirt came off on mine. It makes this scratch sting."

"Let me see." Louis seized his friend's hand, turned the palm to the firelight and bent over it. "That is no dirt," he exclaimed. "It is sticky, a gum of some sort. You say it was not there before Murray shook hands with you? And now it hurts?"

"My hands were clean. I washed them before we began to get supper. That scratch certainly does hurt; much more than it did at first."

"Put some water on the fire, Neil, just a little, to heat quickly. We must do something for this hand." Louis spoke anxiously. "*Le Murrai* has tried to poison you, Walter. Perhaps I can suck it out like snake venom."

Without hesitation he put his lips to the scratch and sucked. He spat in the fire, and wiped his mouth with the end of his neck handkerchief. "The gum is too sticky, and we have nothing to draw the poison out, no salt pork for a poultice."

"Make the scratch bleed," suggested Neil. "Open it with your knife."

"This black stuff must be cleaned off first," objected Walter.

Cold water made no impression on the sticky substance that smeared Walter's palm. Louis tried to scrape away the gum, then he sucked the scratch again. But he had to wait for hot water to really dissolve the gummy stuff and cleanse the hand. When every trace of black had been washed off, Louis drew the sharp point of his knife along the scratch, making a clean cut, deep enough to bleed freely.

In those days little was known about antiseptics. All three boys, however, were familiar enough with the treatment of snake bites to understand that poison must be drawn out as speedily as possible, either by sucking the wound or letting it bleed freely. They knew also that a clean wound was apt to heal more readily than a dirty one. Even the Indians recognized that fact, though their ideas of cleanliness were not much like ours. Louis would have torn a strip from his handkerchief to bandage the injury, but Walter felt that a colored and not too clean cloth was not the best dressing. He decided to leave his hand unbandaged, letting it bleed as much as it would and the blood clot naturally.

At first Walter could scarcely believe that Murray had deliberately tried to poison his hand, but Louis had no doubts. "I have heard of such things among the Indians," he said, "and *Je Murrai Noir* is more Indian than white. He would not be above revenging himself that way or any other. If he is really friendly to us, why did he act as if he had never seen us before? He knew us certainly, though our names were not spoken. As he went towards the door, he put his fingers in his fire bag. I saw him do it, but thought nothing of it. He had seen you get that scratch. You know it is not like Murray to shake anyone by the hand."

"That surprised me, I admit," conceded Walter.

"Truly he had a reason. He hated you always after that affair of poor M'sieu Matthieu."

"Do you suppose he has learned that we reported the loss of the pemmican and told about his bundle of trade goods?" Walter asked thoughtfully.

"That may be. He did not go up the Assiniboin, he was at Pembina too soon. At Fort Douglas or at the Forks they may have asked him about that pemmican. Even if they did not say we told them, he might lay it to us. He never was fond of either of us. The Black Murray is an evil man. He likes to do evil I think. He takes pleasure in it."

In spite of the prompt treatment, Walter's hand pained him all night and kept him restless. He was not the only one of the three that was wakeful. Louis and Neil, too, were uneasy. They were uncertain of Murray's intentions. He and his companion had gone away, with sled and dogs, but how far had they gone? Had they really set out for Pembina, or had they made camp as soon as they were out of sight and hearing? The Black Murray's keen eyes had not failed to take note of every pelt in the cabin. He had even offered to trade pemmican for the furs. Louis had declined, but did that settle the matter? Would Murray try in some other way to get possession of the catch? That he was not scrupulous in his methods was proved by his assault and robbery of the Ojibwa at the Red River.

The boys were sure that Murray would not have hesitated to take everything, if they had been away from the cabin when he arrived. They did not doubt that he would have been ready to use violence against any one of them. But he had found Louis and Walter quite prepared for him. Numbers had been equal and the boys' guns within reach. Before Murray could discover an opening for strategy, Neil had arrived. With three alert lads watching him, the free trader had no chance. They were not at all sure, however, that he might not return and attempt a surprise. So Neil and Walter slept little, and Louis scarcely at all. Many times during the night, the Canadian boy slipped out to look and listen. Though he had turned the dogs loose, he did not dare to trust entirely to them.

The night passed without an alarm, but the boys were far from sure that they had seen the last of the Black Murray. Before they dared go about their ordinary work, they had to be certain that he was not anywhere in the vicinity. Louis decided to follow his trail, while the others remained at the cabin, alert and prepared for a second visit.

Walter's hand worried both himself and his comrades. It was inflamed, swollen, and very sore. No one knew what to do for it, except to open up the cut and make it bleed again, a painful operation which Walter bore without flinching.

Louis was away early. He returned late in the day with the encouraging news that Murray had left the hills. His track, distinct and easy to follow, ran straight across the prairie in the direction of the Red River. "I followed several

miles over the plain," said Louis, "and could see the trail going on in the distance. Yet I feared he might have turned farther on somewhere, so I went north a long way, looking for a return trail. Then I came back, crossed his track, and went on to the south. I found nothing. Certainly *Je Murray* has gone, unless he made a very wide circle to return. I think he would not give himself the trouble to do that. He had no reason to think we would doubt his story. Yes, I am as sure he is gone as I can be without following him clear to the Red River."

Reassured, the boys took up their daily tasks of visiting the traps and deadfalls, fishing through the ice, and hunting. One of them, however, always remained at home, his gun loaded and within reach.

For several days Walter's hand was very sore and painful. He was more than a little anxious about it. He feared serious blood poisoning that might mean the loss of hand, arm, and even life. But the inflammation did not spread. The prompt sucking of the scratch, the cleansing and free bleeding, and the healthy condition of Walter's blood saved him. Within a week the soreness was almost gone and the cut healing properly.

In the meantime another misfortune had befallen the boys. The dogs were taken sick. Askimé was the first one to show the disease. One morning Louis found the husky with a badly swollen neck. He took the dog into the cabin and tended him anxiously, but the swelling increased until Askimé could no longer eat. He was scarcely able to swallow a little water. Walter proposed piercing the lumps, and performed the operation with an awl used in sewing skins. The swellings discharged freely, and Askimé, able to swallow, began to improve.

The other dogs had already shown signs of the same trouble. Gray Wolf had only a slight attack, but the brown animal was very sick. Lancing the lumps on his neck did no lasting good, and in spite of the boys' efforts to save him, the poor beast died. Luckily Askimé and Gray Wolf recovered completely. How the dogs got the disease was a mystery. Murray had had no opportunity to poison them. Possibly the wolf-like animal that had broken loose and attacked Askimé had given the infection to him, or the husky and his fellows might have caught it from some wild beast they had killed and eaten.

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XXV THE TRAVELERS WITHOUT SNOWSHOES

After the wolverine was killed trapping had improved for a time. Then the catches began to dwindle, growing smaller and smaller. Louis and Neil agreed that they must either change their hunting grounds or go back to Pembina. They had promised to return early in March. Now March had come, with a thaw that suggested an early spring. The ducks and geese would soon be

flying north, spring fishing would begin, and food be plentiful again in the settlement. And perhaps both boys were a bit homesick.

"We go back with less food than we came away with," said Louis, "but we have not been forced to eat wolf yet. Not once have we been near starving, and we have a good catch of pelts. We will make the rounds of our traps once more, spend the night in the hut near *Tête de Boeuf*, and start from there."

The morning was fine and the sun already high, when the boys left the overnight shelter in the rolling hills below Buffalo Head. Neil went ahead to break trail. The two dogs, fresh and eager, pulled willingly. The sled was well loaded with a good store of skins: rabbit, squirrel, raccoon, red fox, and mink, a few otter and beaver, two wildcats, three wolves, a couple of marten, the elk hide, and a fine and valuable silver fox pelt.

The weather was springlike, too springlike for good traveling. The soft, sticky snow clung in sodden masses to the snowshoes, making them heavy and unwieldy. It formed wet balls on the dogs' feet. Moccasins, warm and comfortable in colder weather, became soaked. The sun glare, reflected from the white expanse, was almost unbearable. Before noon, Walter's eyes, squinted and screwed nearly shut to keep out the excess of light, were smarting painfully. Neil's were even worse. He was so snow blind that he dropped behind, following his comrades by hearing instead of by sight. Louis, less troubled by the glare, had to do all the trail breaking.

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They had hoped to reach the Red River by night, but the usual four miles an hour were impossible in the sodden, soft snow. Having made a later start than they intended, they permitted themselves no stop at noon. At sundown they made a perilous crossing of a prairie stream on water-covered, spongy ice, that threatened at every step to go down under them, and reached a clump of willows.

"We stop here and have a cup of tea and dry our moccasins," Louis announced.

The others, tired, hungry, with chilled feet, aching legs, and smarting, swollen eyes, were only too glad of a halt. A fire was soon burning and the kettle steaming over it. The boys, seated on bales of furs, took off their moccasins and held their feet to the blaze. The tired dogs lay in the snow near by, tongues hanging out and eager eyes watching the supper preparations.

The meal was a scanty one. For the boys there was tea and a very small chunk of pemmican, saved for the return trip. One little fish each remained for the dogs. Yet everyone felt better for the food, so much better that Louis proposed going on.

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"It will be easier by night," he asserted. "The snow will freeze over the top."

"I'm for keeping on," Neil agreed, "if I can see to find the way." His reddened eyelids were swollen almost shut. "How about you, Walter?"

When Walter had sunk down on the furs before the fire, he had not dreamed of traveling farther

that day. If the question had been put to him then he would have answered no. But now that his feet were warm and he was fortified with food and hot tea, going on did not seem so impossible. He felt strangely anxious to reach Pembina. His thoughts, ever since morning, had been turning to the Periers. It was more than two months since he had heard from them. How had things been going with them? Surely there were letters awaiting him at the settlement. "Let's go on by all means," he replied to Neil's question, "as far as we can. It won't be so bad when the snow hardens and there isn't any sun glare."

Louis nodded. "We will rest till darkness comes. The wind has changed. It will soon be much colder, I think."

There was no doubt that the weather was turning colder. Thawing had ceased with the setting of the sun, and the wind came from the northwest. By the time the journey was resumed, a crust had formed on the snow. The going was much easier, but the dogs were tired and footsore. Gray Wolf showed strong disinclination to pull. Askimé, however, did his best, and dragged his reluctant comrade along. The average half-breed driver would have lashed and beaten the weary beasts, but Louis used the whip sparingly. He pulled with them or encouraged them by running ahead.

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In spite of weariness the travelers made good progress. After midnight they paused in a willow clump for another cup of hot tea, and then went on again. The night had turned bitterly cold, and there was no sheltered spot nearer than the banks of the Red River. The river was now only a few miles away, so they forced themselves and the reluctant dogs forward. There was no lack of light, for the moon was at the full in a clear sky. The surface of the snow was frozen so hard that no obscuring drift was carried before the wind. The waves of the prairie were motionless. The three boys and two dogs might have been at the north pole so alone were they. Except for their own voices and the slight noises of sled and snowshoes, as they sped forward over the crust, there was not a sound of living creature in a world of star-strewn sky and endless snow.

A brisk pace was necessary for warmth, and, in spite of their weariness, they kept it up. Reaching the woods bordering the river, they made their way among scattering, bare-limbed trees, creaking and clashing in the wind. In search of a sheltered camping ground, they descended a stretch of open slope to an almost level terrace about a third of the way down to the stream. And there they came upon the trail of human beings.

Stooping to examine the tracks, Louis gave a low whistle of amazement. "*Ma foi*, but this is strange! Those men had no snowshoes. Why should anyone travel without them at this time of year?"

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"Do you see any sled marks?" queried Neil. His own eyes were hardly in condition to distinguish faint traces by moonlight.

"I find none. Even on the crust a *tabagane* would leave some marks. Those men without snowshoes broke through the crust."

"Perhaps it is nothing but an animal trail," Walter suggested.

"No, no. Men without snowshoes came this way." Louis followed the tracks a little distance, then returned to his companions and the dogs, who had stopped for a rest. "There were three people," he said positively, "two men; or a man and a boy,—and a woman."

"How can you tell it was a woman?" demanded Neil sceptically.

"Where she broke through into soft snow there are the marks of her skirt."

"Maybe it was a man wrapped in a blanket. They were probably Indians," the Scotch boy suggested.

Louis shook his head. "Why should Indians travel without snowshoes?"

"Well, it's no affair of ours how they traveled or why. What we want is a camping place. The wind strikes us here."

"Yes," Louis agreed, "we will go on and look for a better place."

Along the terrace the dogs needed no guidance. Nose lowered, Askimé followed the human tracks. Where the terrace dipped down a little, the husky paused, raised his head, and howled. Louis ran forward and almost stumbled over something lying in the snow in the shadow of the slope. He uttered a sharp exclamation.

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"What's the matter?" called Neil.

"Have you found a good place?" asked Walter.

"I have found a man," came the surprising reply.

"A man? Frozen?"

Neil hurried to join Louis, who was on his knees trying to unroll the blanket that wrapped the motionless form lying in the snow. Neil stooped to help.

"His heart beats. He still breathes," Louis exclaimed. "But he is cold, cold as ice. Make a fire, you and Walter. I will rub him and try to keep the life in."

Neil snatched the ax from the sled. Walter kicked off his snowshoes and set to work digging and scraping away the snow. As soon as he had kindled some fine shavings and added larger wood to make a good blaze, he helped Louis to carry the unconscious man nearer the fire. As they laid him down where the firelight shone on his face, Walter gave a cry of surprise and horror.

"Monsieur Perier! It is Monsieur Perier, Louis!"

He recalled Louis' certainty that the tracks were those of a man, a boy, and a woman. "Where are the others?" he cried. "Where are Elise and Max?"

Without waiting for an answer, he sprang up and began to search. In a hollow in the snow in the lee of a leafless bush, completely hidden in deep shadow, he found another huddled heap

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wrapped in blankets; Elise and Max clasped in each other's arms. Between them and the place where their father had lain were the ashes of a dead fire.

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XXVI ELISE'S STORY

Both children were alive. When Walter and Neil tried to separate them, they aroused Max. The little fellow was stupid with cold and heavy sleep, but seemed otherwise to be all right. Walter carried Elise nearer, but not too near, to the fire. Kneeling beside her, he rubbed her ice-cold feet, legs, and arms to restore circulation. The rubbing brought her back to consciousness, dazed and wondering, to find her big brother—as she called Walter—bending over her. As soon as the daze of her first awakening passed, she asked for her father. Assuring her that Louis was looking after him, Walter made her stay near the fire and drink some of the strong, scalding tea.

Restoring Mr. Perier to consciousness was more difficult. Louis' unceasing efforts aroused him at last, but his mind seemed confused and bewildered. He struggled with Louis as if he thought the boy was trying to do him some injury. He stared blankly at Walter and did not appear to recognize him.

Throwing off the blanket Walter had wrapped around her, Elise went to her father and put her arms about his neck. "Father, Father, it is all right," she cried. "Walter found us, and we are all safe."

The wild look left Mr. Perier's eyes and he ceased struggling. When Walter brought him a cup of strong tea, he drank it obediently. The hot drink seemed to clear his brain. After more rubbing, he was able to sit up, nearer the fire. Elise and Max wrapped him in most of the blankets. Attracted by the heat, the tired dogs snuggled close to the children and added their animal warmth.

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Louis was anxious to find a less exposed spot in which to spend the night. "Stay here and keep the fire going," he ordered his comrades. "I will find a better camping place."

In a few minutes he was back with word that he had found a much better camping ground, a dry gully protected from the bitter wind. "You and I, Neil," he said, "will go over there and prepare a place, while Walter keeps the fire burning here. Then we will come back and move our camp."

Elise and Max were now wide awake and ready to talk, but Mr. Perier seemed inert and drowsy. After Walter had cut more wood and fed the fire, he crouched at Elise's side and began to question her.

"How did you come to be here all alone?" he asked. "Why did you leave Fort Douglas?"

"We were on the way to Pembina," she replied.

"A man with a sled was taking us. It was warm when we started. Max and I rode on the sled, but we didn't like riding because the man abused the dogs and we were sorry for them. Father tried to make him stop being so cruel, but he just laughed. When Father tried to reason with him, the man grew so angry and ugly that Father didn't dare say anything more. We stopped once and had pemmican and tea, then we came on again. It was hard for Father to keep up, he had no snowshoes. He dropped behind. At sunset we stopped again, and the man made a fire. Father caught up with us, and we had some more tea.

"After that it turned cold. Max and I were very cold riding on the sled. We wanted to walk a while to warm up, but the man wouldn't let us. He said we were too slow. We got so cold we were afraid we should freeze, and Father told our guide we must stop and get warm. Father had promised him his watch——"

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"His watch?" interrupted Walter.

"Yes. We have very little money left, and the man didn't want money anyway. He said he would take us to Pembina for the watch."

Walter grunted wrathfully, and Elise went on. "When Father said we must stop and make a fire, we weren't far from the woods. Our guide said we could go down to the river bank and camp, but that would delay us. It would take longer to reach Pembina, and he would have to have more pay. He wanted the chain as well as the watch. Father agreed and we came into the woods and stopped. Max and I ran around and tried to get warm. Our eyes hurt and Father was almost blind. The man made Father give him the watch and chain at once. He put them in the pouch where he carried his tobacco and flint and steel. Then he whipped the dogs and jumped on the sled, and they ran away and left us."

"The miserable brute!" cried Walter.

"He ran away and left us," Elise repeated, "without any food or snowshoes. Everything we owned, except the blankets Max and I had been wrapped in when we were riding, was on the sled. It was a cruel way to treat us."

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"Cruel? Why even the meanest Indian——" Walter's wrath choked him.

"He is an Indian. They call him a *bois brulé*, but he looks just like an Indian. No one but a savage could be so cruel."

"He's worse than a savage. He must be a fiend. Why did Kolbach let you come with such a fellow?"

"Monsieur Kolbach didn't know we were coming," Elise explained. "The Indian said he was a friend of Monsieur Kolbach's brother."

"Fritz? That's not much of a recommendation."

"Do you know Monsieur Fritz? Has he been at Pembina? I have never seen him."

"I think I have seen him, and I have heard about him. He and his brother aren't very friendly, are they?" Walter questioned. "I have been told that they weren't."

Elise shook her head. "I know nothing about that. Monsieur Kolbach has never said. He is not a man who talks much anyway. Monsieur Fritz has been away from Fort Douglas most of the winter. He has been trading with the Indians."

A sudden thought struck Walter, an unpleasant thought that made him shudder. "What was that fellow's name, the one who deserted you?" he demanded.

"He has an English name," Elise replied. "I'm not sure I understood it right. Mauray or something like that."

"Murray? Elise, he is the very man I wrote you about, the one who was steersman of our boat when we came from Fort York. It was the Black Murray himself, the fiend! If ever I——"

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The voice of little Max interrupted. "I'm cold," he complained.

Walter had forgotten the fire. He sprang up to replenish it. He found Mr. Perier dozing, roused him, and warned him against dropping off to sleep. Then he heaped on fuel until the blaze was so hot the others were forced to move back from it. As for Walter himself, he was so boiling with anger against the inhuman Murray that he gave no heed to cold. He wielded the ax savagely, and sent the chips flying far and wide.

In a surprisingly short time Louis returned to guide the rest of the party to the camping place. Mr. Perier was unable to walk, so he was placed on the sled, warmly wrapped. The dogs protested piteously at being aroused and harnessed. Even Askimé refused to pull until Louis took hold also. Elise and Max bravely asserted that they were able to walk, and Walter knew it would be better for them to do so if they could. He gave his snowshoes to Elise,—she had learned during the winter to use snowshoes,—and helped Max when the little fellow broke through the crust.

The gully was only a short distance away. They soon reached the camping place, to find Neil tending a blazing fire. Between the fire and a steep, bare, clay slope that reflected the heat, beds were made with bales of pelts, blankets, and robes. The toboggan, turned on its side, furnished additional shelter. There the Periers could sleep safely and comfortably. The boys had no intention of sleeping at all. Their task was to keep the fire going until daylight, which was not far away.

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There was a little tea left, but no food. At dawn Neil went down to the river, chopped a hole in the ice, and with a hook baited with a bit of rawhide, caught two small fish. The little fish made a scanty breakfast for Elise and Max. Mr. Perier and the boys refused to touch them. Their meal consisted of tea alone, and they used the last of that.

Both of Mr. Perier's feet had been badly frozen and were swollen and very painful. He was placed on the sled again, and Elise and Max took turns riding with him. To make room for the passengers, part of the furs were taken off and made into packs, which the boys carried on their backs. Even then, the load on the sled was a heavy one for two tired, hungry dogs. One, and

sometimes two, of the boys had to help pull.

By way of the gully they left the river bank and went up to the prairie. There they found and followed a well defined trail, the usual route between Pembina and Fort Douglas. More than one dog train had traveled that way since the last fall of snow. The morning was cold and the crust firm, but the party had to make the best possible speed before the sun softened the surface. With one or the other of the children walking, it was not possible to go very fast. Cold though the wind was, even the beaten track grew soft under the direct rays of the sun, as the day advanced.

With soaked moccasins, and red, swollen eyes, the tired, half-starved travelers reached Pembina some time after noon. Mr. Perier was the only one with dry feet. He was not suffering so much from snow blindness either as the others, for he had been able to keep his eyes covered. But his feet and right hand and arm were paining him severely.

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The arrival caused much excitement in the little settlement, but the boys did not linger to explain how it happened that they returned from their hunting trip bringing three strangers. They went at once to Louis' home. His mother received the Periers with almost as warm a welcome as she gave her own son. The little cabin would be crowded indeed, but that did not disturb her in the least. There was always room for travelers in distress, and Elise and Max, cold, weary, hungry, and motherless, appealed to her motherly heart.

Mrs. Brabant and her younger children were thin, much thinner than when Walter had seen them last. Food had been scarce in Pembina for weeks, but they did not hesitate to share what little they had with the newcomers. Kinder, more generous people never lived, thought the Swiss boy, as he remembered all they had done for him and saw how eager they were to share their last bite with his friends. He could never do enough to repay their kindness. That they neither expected nor wanted repayment, he knew well. Their hospitality was a matter of course with them.

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XXVII

WHY THE PERIERS CAME TO PEMBINA

Before starting for the hills, Walter had written Elise that he expected to be back by the first of March. So when Mr. Perier decided to leave Fort Douglas, he felt very sure that he would find his apprentice at Pembina. "I was anxious to get away," he said when he told his story. "The weather was mild and favorable for the journey, and—well, I had other reasons. At St. Boniface I learned of a man with a dog team who was coming this way."

Walter interrupted to ask if the man was really

Murray.

"Yes, that is his name," Mr. Perier replied. "He said he knew you and your friend Louis Brabant. Murray had not intended to leave for another day or two. He was waiting to see Sergeant Kolbach's brother, who had gone to Norway House."

At first the half-breed had refused to take the Periers to Pembina. While he was arguing his case, Mr. Perier had taken out his watch and glanced at it; a nervous habit of his when worried or distressed. Murray pointed to the watch. He would go for that he said. As nothing else would satisfy him, Mr. Perier agreed. Murray furnished toboggan and dogs, and they started early the next morning.

Before they had been out an hour, the Swiss began to regret his bargain. Murray's brutality and his insolent, overbearing manner filled the quiet, gentle-natured apothecary with apprehension. The trip proved far from pleasant, but, knowing that the wild *bois brulés* were apt to appear more savage than they really were, he did not think his children and himself in any real danger. What really happened Elise had already told. Before the journey was over, Murray demanded his pay. Mr. Perier had been forced to hand over his watch and chain. As soon as the coveted articles were in the half-breed's possession, he had whipped up his dogs, jumped on the sled, and left the Periers to freeze or starve.

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Mr. Perier knew that if they followed the river it would lead them to Pembina. They tried to keep going but they had no snowshoes and were continually breaking through the crust. All three were very cold and tired. When they came to a spot a little sheltered from the wind, they camped, intending to go on in the morning. With his pocket knife, the father hacked off a few dead branches. He kindled a fire, and Elise and Max lay down beside it, wrapped in one of the blankets. They insisted that their father should use the other.

"I didn't intend to go to sleep," he confessed. "I was utterly exhausted and had to rest a little. I lay down, meaning to get up in a few minutes and cut more wood. What happened was all my fault. I should have kept awake and moving."

"Even now I am at a loss to understand," he concluded, "how Murray dared to desert us. To have taken us on, as he promised, would have delayed him but little. He must have known that, whether we ever reached here alive or not, he was responsible for us. He would be charged with the crime of deserting us and stealing our belongings. Surely the Company cannot overlook such a crime. He must suffer for it."

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Louis shrugged. "It is not at all certain that he will suffer for it, though Walter and I will do our best to see that he does. This is not *le Murrai Noir's* first crime, and always, so far, he seems to have escaped punishment. He thinks he will always escape. He stole the Company's property, he and Fritz Kolbach attacked and robbed one of the Company's hunters, yet he has not been punished, it seems, for either of those crimes. He was bold to go to St. Boniface and stay there, after that last affair."

"Perhaps he lay low and did not let the Company at Fort Douglas know he was there," suggested Walter.

"Or he lied himself free of the charge," Louis added, "with witnesses bribed to say he spoke the truth. But this last crime is more serious." The boy rose from the hearth, where he had been sitting cross legged. There were not stools enough to go around. "I go now," he announced, "to learn whether *le Murrain* really came to Pembina, and if he is still here."

"I'll go with you," cried Walter springing up, tired though he was. "The sooner we lay charges against Murray the better. Already he has had time to take warning from our coming, and be gone."

A little questioning of the people of Pembina brought the information that Murray had arrived at the settlement before daybreak, had rested a few hours, and had gone on, with a fresh team for which he had exchanged his exhausted dogs. His only answer to the question whither he was bound had been "Up river."

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At Fort Daer and Pembina House the boys learned that Murray had avoided the posts. The clerks in charge did not even know that the half-breed had been in the neighborhood until the lads brought the news. The man at the Company post listened gravely to the story, but was inclined to blame Mr. Perier for leaving Fort Douglas.

"Why didn't the Swiss stay where he was?" he asked impatiently. "He was better off there than he will be here. What did he want to come to Pembina now for? He will only have to go back again with the rest of the colonists in a few weeks. It will soon be time to break ground and sow crops."

To this Walter had no good answer, for he himself did not understand just why Mr. Perier had decided so suddenly to make the change. Not until night, after Madame Brabant and the girls were in bed in the main room and Walter lay beside his master on a skin cot in the lean-to, did the boy learn the real reason for the journey to Pembina.

"Sergeant Kolbach turned us out," said Mr. Perier.

"What?" exclaimed Walter. "I thought he had been so kind to you."

"He was until recently, but he and I had a disagreement. He asked me for Elise's hand in marriage."

"Why she is a mere child!" Walter was both surprised and distressed.

"So I told him. I said she was far too young to marry. He replied that she was old enough to cook his meals and keep his house, and that was what he wanted a wife for."

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Walter grunted angrily.

"It is true," Mr. Perier went on, "that some of our girls not much older have married since coming to the Colony. You know the Company encouraged young women to come over because

wives were needed in the settlement, especially by the DeMeurons. But Elise came to be with me, and I have other plans for her. She shall not marry Kolbach or any other, now or ten years from now, unless he is the right kind of a man and she wants him."

"I hope she'll never want a DeMeuron." The thought of his little sister married to one of that wild crew horrified Walter.

"I hope not indeed," agreed the father. "I would prefer one of our own people for her; when she is several years older of course." He paused a moment then went on. "Elise never liked Kolbach. Even though he was kind to us and she felt she ought to be grateful, she disliked him and was a little afraid of him. I could see it. If I had dreamed that he had any such idea in his head, I would not have stayed in his house a day."

"Does she know he wants to marry her?" Walter inquired.

"I think not. I told him I would not consent to his speaking to her. He declared he would do as he thought best about that, but he has had no chance. We left his house that very day."

"Did he really turn you out?"

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"It amounted to that. He was angry at my refusal to consider his suit. He said he was willing to wait a year, if, at Easter, Elise was formally betrothed to him. When I would consent to no betrothal, he said that we could not stay in his house longer unless she was promised to him. I have been working at the buffalo cloth mill, and have been paying him what I could for our lodging, and Elise has done all the housework. Yet he spoke as if we were beggars. I answered that we had no wish to remain in his house. We went to a neighbor,—Marianne Scheidecker she was before she married. I told her, as I told Elise, that Kolbach and I had quarreled. The next day I found Murray and hired him to bring us here."

"Do you suppose Kolbach could have put him up to deserting you?" Walter questioned suspiciously.

"Oh no. I doubt if Kolbach knew we were going. The Sergeant would not do such a thing, however angry he might be. He is a rough, domineering man, but not bad at heart. No, no, he wouldn't be capable of anything like that. In his way he is really fond of Elise. I think he would be as kind to her as he knows how to be, but he is not good enough for her, and she is far too young."

"She certainly is," Walter agreed emphatically.

It would be years yet before little Elise need think of such things, the boy decided. Then perhaps he would have something to say about the matter. The idea had never occurred to him before, but why should he not marry Elise himself some day? What other girl was there in the new land or the old to equal her? Of course it would be years from now, but in the meantime he must keep guard over her and see that no DeMeuron, or Scotchman, or French *bois brulé* tried to take her away. None of them should

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bother Elise if he could help it, and he thought he could. It was with a new and not unpleasing sense of responsibility that, the boy fell asleep that night.

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XXVIII THE LAND TO THE SOUTH

Pembina seethed with indignation when the Periers' story was told. The Swiss, who were all undergoing their share of suffering, sympathized warmly with their country folk. Though still prejudiced against the new colonists, the Scotch and Irish settlers had nothing but condemnation for the rascally half-breed Murray. Many of the *bois brulés* of Pembina had bitterly opposed the Selkirk settlement, and some had joined with the Northwesters in driving out the colonists. Since the union of the two companies, however, most of the enmity had evaporated. Walter had received only the kindest treatment from the French mixed bloods. Now there was not one to defend Murray in his heartless desertion of helpless travelers. So strong was the feeling against the treacherous voyageur that if he had been in Pembina when the Periers arrived, he would scarcely have escaped with his life. Though he had been gone several hours, a party of armed men went out to search for him. Uncertain whether he had told the truth when he had said he was going up river, they scoured the country for miles to the east and west as well as to the south. They did not overtake him. He had too long a start.

Murray was not well known in Pembina. He had never lived there nor at St. Boniface. No one in either settlement knew much about him. The spring after the killing of Governor Semple, the tall voyageur had come down the Assiniboine from the west with a brigade transporting furs to York Factory, and had remained in Hudson Bay service. It was said at that time that he was the son of a free trader of mixed Scotch and Cree blood. The elder Murray had wandered far,—so it was said,—and had taken a wife from among the western Sioux. If this story was true, Murray could not be more than one quarter white and was at least half Sioux. The Indian blood in the Pembina half-breeds was chiefly Ojibwa and Cree. The Sioux were the traditional enemies of the Ojibwas and the Crees. To the people of Pembina Murray's Sioux blood did not endear him. There was not a man to find excuse for behavior of which few full-blooded Sioux would have been guilty.

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It was some time before the Perier family recovered from their terrible experience. The frost bites Elise and Max had suffered were so severe that the outer skin of their cheeks, noses, hands, and feet peeled off in patches, leaving sore, tender spots. Their father was in a far worse condition. His feet and ankles, his right hand and arm, were badly swollen and inflamed and very painful. It was weeks before he was able to walk or to use his right hand. Had the boys failed to give him prompt treatment when

they first found him he would have frozen to death. Realizing what might have happened if they had camped on the prairie that night, instead of pushing on to the river, Walter felt that he and his companions had indeed been guided to the rescue.

The little settlement had passed through hard days while the three boys were in the hills. Food had been very scanty. The buffalo had been far away, and following them in the deep snow next to impossible. Other game had been exceedingly scarce. Even the nets set under the ice of the two rivers had yielded little. The *bois brulés* and the older settlers had fared better than the Swiss. Though the rations had been slender, neither the Brabants nor the MacKays had been entirely without food. The Swiss had suffered severely. Johan Scheidecker told Walter that at one time his family had not had a morsel to eat for three days. At Fort Douglas conditions had been even worse than at Pembina. By February most of the settlers were on an allowance of a pint of wheat or barley a day, which they ground in hand mills or mortars. Soup made from the grain and an occasional fish were all they had for weeks at a time. Though their fare had been meager enough, the Periers, in Sergeant Kolbach's care, had fared better than many of their country folk. They had never been quite without food.

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With the coming of spring matters improved at Pembina. When the ice in the rivers began to break up, wild fowl arrived in great flocks. Almost every night they could be heard passing over. By day they alighted to feed along the rivers and in the marshes. Every man able to walk, every boy large enough to carry a gun, shoot an arrow, or set a snare, and many of the women and girls, hunted from daylight till dark for ducks, geese, swans, pelicans, cranes, pigeons, any and every bird, large or small, that could be eaten. The buffalo also were drawing nearer the settlement. Following the herds over the wet, sodden prairie was difficult, even on horseback, but a skilful hunter brought down a cow or calf now and then. The lucky men shared generously with their neighbors.

Louis and Walter had no time for long hunting trips. Both had obtained temporary employment at the Company post. Indian and half-breed hunters were bringing in the winter's catch, and the two boys were engaged to help with the cleaning, sorting, and packing of the pelts.

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The post was a busy and a merry place those spring days. The men worked rapidly and well, but found plenty of time for joking, laughing, singing, and challenging one another to feats of strength and agility. After the cold and hardships of the winter, the spring fur-packing was a season of jollity for the voyageurs. Walter and Louis enjoyed the bustle and merriment, while they worked with a will.

The skins were thoroughly shaken and beaten to free them from dust and dried mud. Then they were sorted, folded to convenient size, and pressed into packs by means of a wooden lever press that stood in the post courtyard. Each bundle,—about ninety pounds weight,—of assorted furs was wrapped in a strong hide. In every package was a slip of paper with a list of

the contents. To the outside was attached a wooden stave, with the number and weight of the pack, and the name of the post. The numbers and lettering were burned into the wood. Because he wrote a good hand, Walter was able to help the overworked clerk with these invoices and labels. He did a share of the harder physical work as well.

The Swiss boy was heartily glad of employment. His wages, in Hudson Bay Company paper money, were exchanged for food and ammunition, and clothes for Elise, Max and himself. The Periers needed his help sorely. They had reached Pembina destitute. When they had left Switzerland, they had been well supplied with clothing. They had also brought with them the apothecary's herbs and powders and such household goods as they were permitted to take aboard ship. In the crowded open boat in which they had come from Fort York, there had not been room for all their belongings, so some had been left behind. Nearly everything else had been lost in the wreck on Lake Winnipeg. The little that remained had been on the toboggan that Murray had run away with. Every cent of Mr. Perier's money, as well as the Hudson Bay paper he had received for his work at the buffalo wool factory, had gone for food and other expenses during the winter. Even his silver watch and chain he had turned over to Murray. Father and children had nothing left but the worn clothes they were wearing, two blankets, and the few packets of medicinal plant seeds the apothecary carried in his pockets. He must begin all over again, and on credit at that.

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Mrs. Brabant's sympathy for the unfortunate family was genuine and warm. They crowded her house to overflowing, but she would not hear of their going elsewhere. Indeed there was no other place for them to go but Fort Daer, and the fort was too well filled for comfort. It was hardly worth while to attempt building a new cabin, if they were to return to the Selkirk settlement in a few weeks.

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Were they going to return to the settlement? That was the question that troubled Mr. Perier and Walter. It led to many debates, as the two families sat around the fire after the evening meal. There was that hundred acres of land to be considered. A vast estate it seemed to the Swiss apothecary. The promise of that great tract of land had dazzled him when he first talked with Captain Mai in Geneva. Since his coming to the new country, however, the hundred acres of unbroken prairie had grown less alluring. He had learned that not one of the older colonists had been able to cultivate more than a few acres. He had no farming tools and he could obtain nothing but hoe and spade at the Colony store. There was not a plough to be bought for credit or cash. Breaking tough prairie sod with hoe and spade would be slow and painful toil for Walter and himself.

Because of the depredations of the locusts, seed grain was very scarce. The little Mr. Perier might buy would be high in price. From his first crop he would have to pay for seed as well as rent for the land. If he did not succeed in raising a crop, if the grasshoppers came again and destroyed it, he would be far in debt to the

Colony, with no immediate hope of getting out. Already he had learned to his cost that prices were high at the Colony store, and that bills were sometimes rendered for things that had not been bought. In the end he might easily lose his land and have nothing to show for his labor. The prospect was not bright. Hopeful though he was by nature, he doubted his ability to make a success of farming under such discouraging conditions.

Walter was strongly against returning to Fort Douglas. It would be better to remain where they were, he argued, and trust to making a living, as the *bois brulés* did, by hunting, fishing, and planting a small garden. Perhaps the Company would let Mr. Perier have his hundred acres in the neighborhood of Pembina. Both Louis and Jean Lajimonière,—who was consulted,—shook their heads at the latter suggestion. Pembina was included in Lord Selkirk's grant, but the real Colony was established at and near Fort Douglas. It was there that the land was allotted. They thought it unlikely that Mr. Perier could obtain his anywhere else. In any case there would be the same difficulty about tools, seed, supplies, and rent. And so the argument went on.

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In the meantime spring had come in earnest. The ice was gone from the rivers. Birds were nesting in the woods, in the marshes, and on the prairie, according to their habit. As the rivers subsided from flood stage, fishing was resumed and yielded good results. The snow had melted from the prairie, though it still lingered in shaded places in the woods and along the river banks. The burned stretches showed new green. The sun was drying up the excess of moisture that had turned the prairie into ponds and spongy expanses and had converted the rambling paths and cart tracks of Pembina into sticky mud.

In May the old colonists and most of the new began to prepare for the return to Fort Douglas. Still Mr. Perier and Walter were undecided. At last they came to a decision suddenly and almost by accident. Through Lajimonière, Mr. Perier met a man named St. Antoine who had traveled more widely than most of the Pembina mixed bloods. Two years before, he had been far to the south and east with Laidlaw, the Colony superintendent of farming, when the latter had gone to Prairie du Chien on the Mississippi River for seed grain. St. Antoine had many tales to tell of the country along the Mississippi and the St. Peter rivers.

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"That is a fine land," he told Mr. Perier, "a land with hills and forests,—not flat and bare like this, though there is open country there too, good land for farming. At Prairie du Chien now, there the soil is rich and the crops grow well and ripen. It is not so cold as here. The spring comes earlier and the frost later."

"Are there grasshoppers there?" Mr. Perier inquired.

"The kind that eat up everything? No, no. Those grasshoppers have never been seen in that country, the people say. And where the two rivers come together, where the Americans are building a fort, it is beautiful there, with high hills and bluffs like mountains, and woods and

waterfalls."

Mr. Perier's brown eyes were wistful. St. Antoine's description sounded good to a Swiss homesick for his mountains. "How does one go to that country?" he asked. "Can land be bought or rented?"

"Oh," replied St. Antoine confidently, "you do not have to buy or rent it, that land. There is no Hudson Bay Company to say where you shall live and where you shall not, and to charge you so many bushels of wheat a year. You find a place that you like and you build a house and plant your crops and it is yours. That is the way folk do on the east side of the Rivière Mississippi. On the west side the American government does not want people to settle. That is Indian country. You may live there if you are a trader. But there is plenty of land on the east side, fine land too. Some time I am going back there to stay,—when I get old and want to settle down."

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St. Antoine's tales took hold of Mr. Perier's imagination. The more he thought of that country to the south and east, the more he wanted to go there, and the less he wanted to return to Fort Douglas. He told Walter and Louis, and they too talked to St. Antoine, who fired their imaginations as he had fired the older man's. It did not take Walter long to decide what he wanted to do. The question was how were they to get to the Mississippi. It would be a long journey, hundreds of miles, by cart and horseback through the country of the Sioux. But it could be done of course. It had been done a number of times. The previous summer's threats of trouble with the Sioux had come to nothing. Yet the trip might be a dangerous one for a small party. At this point Louis had a suggestion to offer.

"The summer buffalo hunt will start in June," he said. "It will go far to the south, perhaps near to the Lake Traverse. We can travel with the hunters at first. When we are near Lake Traverse,—or if the hunters go too far to the west,—we can leave them and make haste to the lake. There is a trading post there, so St. Antoine says, and another at the Lake Big Stone. Traders go back and forth along the Rivière St. Pierre to the Mississippi. There will surely be some party we can travel with."

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"You will go too, Louis?" Walter asked eagerly.

"But *certainment*. Do you think I would let you and M'sieu Perier and Ma'amselle Elise and the little Max go alone? No, no, I want to see that country too. And I think Neil MacKay will go also."

"His people would never let him."

"I am not so sure of that. M'sieu MacKay is not well pleased with the Selkirk Colony. He says if the grasshoppers come again, he will go somewhere else. I think he would not object to Neil's going to see that country to the south."

So, gradually, the plan took shape. It was Mrs. Brabant who made the strongest objections at first. But when Mr. Perier and Walter finally decided to go, and Louis insisted on going with them, she suddenly made up her mind, much to Raoul's delight, that she and the children would

go along. "And if we like that country, Louis," she said, "we will stay. It may be there will be a better chance for you there. If we do not like it, we can come back when some party comes this way."

Neil proved eager to go. After some argument, he got his father's consent, with the provision that he was to return to the Red River colony at the first opportunity, before winter if possible. He must learn all he could about that Mississippi country, his father said. If the crops should fail again, it might be that the MacKay family would have to leave the Red River for good. The Northwesters could not drive the stubborn Scot to give up his land, but against the locusts he could not contend forever.

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XXIX THE COMING OF THE SIOUX

Early in May the Perier family said good-bye to their countryfolk who were returning to Fort Douglas. Some of the Swiss tried to dissuade Mr. Perier from going farther into the interior. Others talked of following later if things did not turn out well in the Colony.

A short time after the Swiss left, something happened that threatened to upset all Mr. Perier's plans. A party of men returning from a buffalo hunt brought disquieting news. They had met an Ojibwa scout who had told them that a large body of Sioux were on the march towards the settlement. Remembering the unfortunate affair at Fort Douglas the summer before, the people of Pembina feared the worst. Scouts were sent out to watch for the Sioux, guns were overhauled, and bullets moulded.

In the midst of the preparations for defence, two boats arrived from down river, bringing reinforcements. Rumors of the approach of the Sioux had reached the Governor, and he had sent a detachment of DeMeurons and voyageurs to meet the Indians and prevent them from going on to Fort Douglas. The Sioux were to be stopped by diplomatic methods if possible. Force was to be used only in case of necessity. With the party were Sergeant Kolbach and the Rev. Mr. West, the man who had befriended the Periers when their boat was wrecked on Lake Winnipeg. The clergyman greeted Mr. Perier cordially, but Kolbach favored his former guest with the stiffest and slightest of nods. Walter looked in vain for the red-faced DeMeuron with the sandy beard. Inquiry brought the information that Fritz Kolbach was not among the soldiers. Fritz was not in favor with the Company just then, having been accused of free trading with the Assiniboins, one DeMeuron told Walter.

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The relief force arrived on Friday, and Saturday passed without alarm. Sunday morning Mr. West held service at Fort Daer, and the Periers and Walter attended. Just at the close of the service scouts came hurrying in with word that the

Sioux were approaching. Armed men began to gather at the fort, the plan being to make so strong a showing that the Indians would not dare attack. The women and children were to stay north of the Pembina, where carts and boats were in readiness to carry them to Fort Douglas if there should be trouble.

Walter took Elise and Max across the river to join Mrs. Brabant. Then he returned to Fort Daer where he found Louis just arrived. The MacKays had gone to Kildonan with other colonists who had wintered at Pembina. In June Neil was to return to go south with his friends.

"They are in sight," shouted a man who was watching from the roof of one of the buildings.

The fort gates stood open, for the Company officers intended to maintain a friendly attitude as long as possible. With others, Louis and Walter ran out to watch the coming of the Indians. There they were, a band of mounted men approaching across the prairie from the south. Walter's heart beat fast, but he was surprised to find that he was excited and eager rather than frightened.

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"There are no *travois*, only mounted men, no women," St. Antoine remarked. "That looks bad. Yet they come openly, in the daytime. They raise no war cry. But we cannot tell. The Dakota are treacherous." He used the name by which the Indians of the prairies called themselves—Dakota. It was their enemies, the Ojibwa, who named them Sioux.

The Indians came on at an easy pace until they were a few hundred yards from the fort. There they halted, as if waiting to see how they were to be received. A small group of white men, among them Mr. West, went out on foot to meet the strangers. Suddenly, out from the fort gate darted a slender, bronze figure, a young Indian stripped naked and without weapons. Straight towards the Sioux he ran full speed.

"He has gone crazy," gasped Walter. "They will kill him." He knew the fellow, an Ojibwa hunter who had recently brought his furs to the post.

"He does it to prove his courage, to show that he is not afraid of the Sioux," explained Louis. "But what use is it to a man to be called brave, after he is dead?"

As the young Indian drew near the enemies of his people, Walter held his breath, expecting every moment that a shower of musket balls or a cloud of arrows would put an end to the rash Ojibwa. But nothing happened. Whether from admiration for his reckless bravery or because they scorned to kill an enemy so easily, the Sioux let him come on uninjured. When he was almost up to them he paused, stood still for a moment, then turned and walked back towards the white men.

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How would the party from Fort Daer be received? Was it to be peace or war? In silence, every nerve tense, the watchers waited to learn. The white men drew closer and closer, without pause or hesitation. The Indians were dismounting. The two parties were mingling. They were coming towards the fort, together. Only a few of the Sioux remained behind to

watch the horses. Walter drew a long breath.

The Sioux were conducted straight to the open gates. They were to be treated as guests. This was Walter's first glimpse of Sioux. He looked on with keen interest as they were ushered into the fort. They were manly looking fellows, these Dakotas. Most of them were rather tall, taller than the majority of the *bois brulés*. They were straight and slender, lithe and wiry rather than muscular in appearance. Their faces were intelligent for the most part, strong featured, and with a look of pride and fierceness very different from the stupid expression of the Crees he had seen at Fort York. All wore fringed leggings and moccasins. The bodies of some were bare to the waist, while others were clothed in shirts of deerskin or calico, or wrapped in blankets or buffalo robes. Their black hair, adorned with feathers, hung in braids over their shoulders. Every face and bare body was hideous with paint, in streaks, patches, spots, circles, and zigzags, the favorite colors being red, yellow, and black. They were all tricked out in their best finery, beadwork, quill embroidery, necklaces of animals' teeth or birds' claws, and trinkets bought from the traders.

The Sioux proved restless and uncomfortable visitors. They pried into every corner of the fort. They appeared to be suspicious and acted as if they were looking for trouble. The Company officers fed them and treated them to tea, tobacco, and some liquor. That was a dangerous thing to do, Walter thought, to give them liquor, for all were armed with guns, bows, knives, or tomahawks. But the refusal to give them drink might have been taken as an insult. The Chief insisted on crossing the river to the Company fort, and the trader in charge thought it best to let him go. But he managed things so that only a few of Chief Waneta's followers accompanied him. As soon as possible they were conducted back to Fort Daer.

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All the rest of that day the Sioux lingered at Fort Daer. When night came they showed no intention of leaving. They had brought nothing to trade, but they expected all sorts of gifts. Most of the *bois brulés* had gone back to their families, but Mr. Perier and Walter were allowed to remain at the fort with Mr. West. It was a night of anxiety and alarms. Drink had made the savage guests touchy and quarrelsome. Several times shots were fired in threat or sport, but luckily no one was hurt. The arrival of three Assiniboins, who said they had come to smoke the peace pipe with their ancient enemies, did not help matters any.

About eleven o'clock shouts and war whoops from outside the walls roused everyone. Thinking that the attack had begun, Mr. Perier and Walter rushed out of the house where they had withdrawn to keep out of the way of quarrelsome Indians. They found that the Sioux, instead of attacking, were leaving the fort in haste. There had been a fight between a Dakota and an Assiniboin. The Dakota had shot the Assiniboin and scalped him, the fallen man's two companions had fled, and some of the Sioux had started in pursuit.

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Chief Waneta had been overbearing and truculent enough himself, but he apparently did

not want a general fight. Waneta was no fool. He probably realized that the white men and *bois brulés* of Pembina were too strong for him in numbers and too well prepared for trouble. With unexpected promptness he gathered his followers together, and started for home. Before midnight the whole band had disappeared in the darkness, riding south.

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XXX WITH THE BUFFALO HUNTERS

If the visit of the Sioux had resulted in hostilities, Mr. Perier would have been forced to give up the trip to the Mississippi. As it was, the fact that the only hostile act committed had been against the Assiniboins, and that Waneta and his braves had departed at peace with the white men, went far to convince the Swiss that his little party would have no trouble with the Indians unless they sought it. Louis did not wholly agree with that idea, but he was young, eager for travel and adventure, and willing to take what seemed a rather remote risk. His mother was more doubtful, but if the others were going, she did not intend to stay behind. At first Elise had dreaded a new journey into strange country, but when Mrs. Brabant decided to go, she no longer felt afraid. She did not want to return to Fort Douglas, and she had grown very fond of Mrs. Brabant.

Already the *bois brulés* of Pembina were growing restless. The coming of spring had stirred the wild blood in them. They were eager to be up and away. Those who had not taken service with the Company to go as voyageurs to Fort York, neglected their primitive gardening to prepare for the great buffalo hunt. They mended harness, repaired old carts by binding the broken parts with rawhide, patched hide and canvas tents, cleaned guns, moulded bullets, made stout new moccasins, packed their wooden chests, and overhauled gear of all kinds. The ground around every cabin was strewn with odds and ends.

On the first day of June Neil arrived full of enthusiasm, and the little party was complete. A spot on the open prairie to the southwest of the junction of the two rivers had been chosen as a gathering place for the hunters. Early in the morning of the appointed day, the people began to leave the settlement. Most of the hunters were taking their entire families along. The clumsy, squeaking, two-wheeled carts, drawn by wiry ponies, were crowded with black-haired, dark-skinned women and children or piled high with household gear and equipment. Louis' one horse and cart were not enough for the Brabant-Perier party, so he and Walter had built another vehicle. Neil furnished two ponies, and Louis had traded his toboggan and Gray Wolf for a fourth. Askimé was to go with him. He would not part with the husky dog.

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At the women's suggestion, the Brabant, Perier,

and Lajimonière families selected a spot a little distance from the main camp. There they unhitched their ponies, and stretched their tent covers from cart to cart.

"There will be much drinking in the camp to-night," Louis explained to Mr. Perier, "to celebrate the beginning of the hunt, and much noise and gaming, and probably fighting. Since we do not wish to take part in all that, we will camp by ourselves. This is a better place for the women and children."

The wisdom of this plan soon became evident. Long before midnight the big camp had grown uproarious. When an unusually loud outburst of noise was followed by the sound of shots and frantic yelling, Mr. Perier raised himself on his elbow to listen. He was sleeping on the ground underneath one of the carts.

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"I'm afraid we have made a mistake," he said anxiously to Walter lying next him. "We cannot travel with that wild crew. It will not be safe for the children."

Louis, on the other side, overheard the words, and hastened to reassure the Swiss. "You need not fear, M'sieu Perier. They will be all right after the liquor is gone. I think they will finish it to-night. They cannot get more till they return. Our people are seldom quarrelsome except when they have liquor. Once the hunt makes a start, the leaders will keep good order. The rules are very strict. They are rough and wild, my people, but they are not unkind. Ma'amselle Elise and my little sisters will be quite safe."

The hilarity continued through most of the night, but before sunrise quiet had descended on the circle of carts and tents. Flasks and kegs were empty, and most of the roisterers were sleeping. They remained in camp all that day. By the time the caravan was in motion the following morning, all were sober and more than ordinarily quiet. Some had good reason to be morose, having gambled away their guns, horses, and carts while under the influence of liquor. Several had received knife or gunshot wounds in the quarrels that resulted.

"It is always so that the hunt begins," said the Canadian Lajimonière, with a shake of his head. "Liquor and gambling, they are the twin curses of the *bois brulé*. Those two things are the cause of most of his troubles."

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It was surprising how quickly camp was broken and the long train got under way at the cries of "*Marche donc!*" The guide rode ahead. His household cart, following close behind, bore a flag made of a red handkerchief attached to a pole. The lowering of that flag was the signal to stop and make camp.

In single file the long line of creaking, jouncing carts stretched far across the prairie. Where a man had to drive two or more vehicles, he tied one horse to the tail of the cart ahead. Loose ponies for buffalo hunting or to replace those in the shafts, ran alongside. Most of the men and some of the women rode horseback or went afoot, while the children were now in, now out of the carts, according to their inclination. The bright colors of the *bois brulés'* dress, and the red and yellow ochre with which many of the

carts were painted, gave a gay appearance to the cavalcade, but the screeching and groaning of the ungreased axles was anything but a merry sound. The discordant rasping and squawking tortured Elise's ears and set her teeth on edge.

Because they had camped separately, the Brabant-Perier party was at the very end of the train. Mr. Perier was mounted on one of the four horses, while Walter, Neil, and the two Brabant boys took turns riding another. Most of the time Louis walked beside the front cart or sat on the shafts, one of the other boys accompanying the second. Mrs. Brabant, her two daughters, Elise, and Max rode in the carts, getting down now and then to walk for a while. The rate of travel was slow, less than twelve miles being made the first day. Thereafter the day's march averaged nearly twenty.

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It was with some apprehension that Mr. Perier watched Louis and Neil wheel the two carts into the place assigned them in the circle that night. Walter, who had lived longer among the *bois brûlés*, was less troubled. Louis had assured him that everything would be all right, and Walter did not doubt his friend's judgment. Everything, but the mosquitoes, was all right, that night and every night that the Brabants and Periers camped with the hunt. Rough and noisy the hunters and their families were, but good natured and kindly enough. They shouted, laughed, and sang, fiddled and danced, told stories, played cards and other games by the light of their fires, but there was little quarreling and no fighting. Within two hours after sunset, all had settled down for the night, and the camp lay quiet and sleeping.

The sun rose early those June mornings, but before it appeared above the horizon, the camp was astir. In an astonishingly short time the train was in motion again. The route was to the west of the Red River in what is now North Dakota. There were swampy stretches to cross, still wet enough to make traveling difficult, then drier ground and better going. On every side lay flat, open country, broken here and there by small groves or thin lines of trees along the streams. The prairie was green with new grass, and dotted everywhere with the pink and white and yellow and blue of wild flowers growing singly or in masses. Elise and the Brabant and Lajimonière girls delighted in picking the sweet, pale pink wild roses and decorating themselves and the carts. Mrs. Brabant warned them to look out for snakes and Louis armed each with a stout stick. At the warning rattle, Marie Brabant and Reine Lajimonière would search for the snake and kill it. But little Jeanne and Elise, who had not grown used to prairie rattlesnakes, ran back to the carts in fright.

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Snakes were not plentiful, however. Far more troublesome were the mosquitoes that rose in clouds after the sun went down. On still nights the buzzing, stinging insects were a continual torment. Smudges were kindled everywhere within the circle of carts, but Elise and Max could find little choice between the stinging pests and the choking smoke.

Mr. Perier and Walter marveled at the control the leaders of the hunt exercised over the wild crew. The hunters had chosen a chief and

several captains, who formed a governing council, and each captain had a number of men under him to act as guards and police. When the guide lowered his flag, every cart took the place assigned it in the circle, shafts outward. The captain and men on duty were responsible for the order and good behavior, as well as the safety, of the camp.

The rules adopted by the council were much the same on all the hunts. Scouts were sent out each day to look for buffalo, but must not frighten them. No one was allowed to separate from, or lag behind the main party without permission, or to hunt buffalo independently. The most serious offences were thievery and fighting with guns or knives. Punishments ranged from cutting up a man's bridle or saddle, if he had one, to driving the guilty person from camp. Knowing that the penalty would be swift and severe, even the boldest seldom ventured to break the laws.

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For several days no buffalo but a few scattered individuals were seen. When the beasts caught scent or sound of the caravan, they were off at an awkward gallop. They seemed to move slowly, but really made good speed. It was Elise's first sight of live buffalo, and she thought them very ugly creatures, with their great shaggy heads and clumsy movements.

Late one afternoon the line of carts wound down the bank of the Turtle River to a ford. Long before the rear of the caravan reached the stream, exciting news had been carried back from mouth to mouth.

"There are buffalo ahead," one of the Lajimonière boys called to Neil, who was driving the first of the Brabant-Perier carts. "A great band has been across the ford, and not long ago, they say."

A great band it must have been. The hunting party had left a plain and well-trodden trail down the bank, and roiled, muddy water at the crossing. But no cart-train running wild could have so ravaged the country. Far on either side of the ford, the willows and bushes were torn and trampled. From many of the trees the bark was rubbed off or hanging in shreds. The grass was worn away. The mud along the margin was trodden hard by thousands of hoofs. The devastation was fresh.

Would the hunters chase the buffalo that night? Walter hoped so, though the sun was setting when the last cart crossed the ford. The chief of the hunt said no, however. Any attempt to pursue buffalo in the darkness would probably result merely in frightening them away. Moreover the horses, even those that had been running loose, were weary from a twenty-mile march. Real buffalo country had been reached. If the hunters missed this particular band, there would be others.

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So camp was made as usual, but the horses were picketed within the circle, instead of being hobbled and turned loose to feed. Time would be saved by having the mounts handy in the morning. There was another reason for keeping close watch of the ponies that night. Where there were buffalo there were likely to be Indians. South of the Turtle River was debatable ground between Sioux and Ojibwa, and the

Sioux were notorious horse thieves.

It was plain that the buffalo were not many miles away. All that night their lowing and bellowing could be heard almost continuously.

"The country must be full of them," Walter whispered to Neil, as they lay side by side.

"Aye, it's a big band. There'll be grand sport in the morning," was the sleepy reply.

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XXXI THE CHARGING BUFFALO

Scouts went out at dawn, and were back again before the camp had finished breakfasting. Their report made the hunters hasten preparations. Already the question as to which ones of the Brabant-Perier party should take part in the hunt had been settled. Only two horses were available. Louis' new one had gone lame, and one of Neil's was not a good buffalo pony, being gun shy and easily frightened. Neither Mr. Perier nor Walter had ever hunted buffalo, while Louis and Neil were skilled in the sport. So it was right that the latter two should go. Walter was disappointed of course. He would have liked to take part in the hunt. But he comforted himself with the thought that there would be other opportunities.

The caravan was just south of the Turtle River, a tributary of the Red, and a number of miles west of the latter stream, in slightly rolling, though open country. A low, irregular ridge shut off the view to the south and hid the buffalo. After the hunters got away, the women, children, and few men who had remained behind, started on, with the carts. They wanted to be in readiness to collect the meat before the hot sun spoiled it, and they were eager to watch the sport. This time the carts did not move single file, but jounced over the prairie in any order their drivers saw fit.

Walter and Raoul were as anxious as anyone for a view of the hunt. They hitched up Neil's pony and got away as quickly as possible, leaving Mr. Perier and Mrs. Brabant to follow slowly with the other cart and lame horse. Elise, Marie, and Max went with the two boys, while Jeanne remained with her mother.

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The boys' cart was among the first to top the rise. The sight revealed almost took Walter's breath away. The prairie beyond the ridge was covered with buffalo in a dense, dark mass. They were feeding peacefully, moving slowly along towards the southeast.

"Where are the hunters?" asked Walter.

Raoul pointed to the southwest. "Behind those little hills," he said confidently. "The wind is east. They have gone around to approach from that way, so the beasts will not get their scent. There they come!"

Figures of horsemen were appearing over the top of one of the low hills. On they came, a long, irregular line, riding easily down hill at a lope. As they reached level ground they broke into a gallop. The buffalo nearest the hunters were taking alarm. They were crowding forward, the bulls on the outskirts of the herd pawing the ground and tossing their great heads. The horsemen broke into a run. They charged recklessly across the prairie, regardless of gopher holes. Those *bois brulés* could certainly ride, thought Walter in admiration. He wondered whether Louis and Neil were among the foremost. At that distance he could not tell.

Suddenly the buffalo everywhere took fright. At a clumsy, galloping gait they were away. They crowded, wheeled, milled, stampeded, hoofs flying, shaggy heads tossing. In a few moments the foremost of the hunters were among them, shouting, yelling, firing, horses plunging and shying. The whole mass was in wild commotion, sweeping on towards the low ridge where the carts waited and the excited spectators looked on. With the thundering of hoofs, the bellowing of the beasts, the shouts and yells of the hunters, the continuous popping of guns, the clouds of smoke and dust lit up by the flashes of firing, the prairie had become pandemonium.

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Never had Walter dreamed of such a sight. His blood was tingling. He breathed fast and excitedly. Elise stood beside him, her hands clasped tightly together, frightened yet fascinated. Marie and Raoul danced up and down, and little Max sat on the edge of the cart and shrieked at the top of his voice in his excitement.

The great band was breaking up into smaller droves and groups. In every direction they wheeled and fled. The hunters, riding recklessly, swaying in their saddles, loading and firing at full speed, pursued them.

One group of six or eight frightened beasts was close by, just at the foot of the low ridge. A horseman dashed towards them. Walter had just time to recognize that blue-bonneted red head, and then, as Neil fired, the little band broke and scattered. One big bull was pounding up the slope, straight towards the cart.

Walter was standing on one side, Raoul on the other of the nervous, excited pony, which was pawing, snorting, twisting about in the shafts, alarmed and uneasy at the sight below. It had not occurred to either boy that he would have a chance to do any shooting. Both of the guns were in the cart.

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When the buffalo charged up the slope, Walter sprang back. As he seized his gun, the panic-stricken pony jumped to one side, sending Raoul sprawling, wheeled, overturned the cart, and was off. Walter saw Max hurtle through the air, and land right in the path of the oncoming buffalo. As the child struck the ground, Elise darted towards him.

With shaking fingers Walter slipped a charge of powder and ball into the muzzle of his gun and primed it. His whole body was trembling. He must not miss. A story Lajimonière had told of a fight with an infuriated buffalo flashed through his mind. "I aimed behind the ear," the Canadian

had said. Where was the ear in that shaggy mass of hair?

The bull, at the crest of the ridge, paused for an instant to paw the ground, shake its huge, ugly head, and bellow defiance at the little group in its pathway. Forcing himself to be steady, deliberate, Walter pulled the trigger. It pulled hard. The flint struck the steel. Sparks flew in every direction. There was a flash, a roar, a bellow. The buffalo plunged forward, and went down.

When Walter recovered from the shock of firing—his primitive, flintlock musket kicked like a mule—the great, dark, hairy bulk lay almost at his feet. Had he hit behind the ear? He would take no chances. The muscles of the big body were twitching. Hurriedly reloading, he fired again, the gun muzzle almost against the buffalo's head. An instant later there came another report. Raoul had picked himself up, seized his gun, that had been thrown out of the cart, and fired at the fallen beast. He missed it in his excitement, by a wider margin than he missed Walter.

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Walter took no heed of the wild shot. His only thought was of Elise and Max. He turned to find Elise stooped over her little brother, her arms around him. When she realized that the danger was over, she sank down in a heap in the grass. Max wriggled from her arms and sat up.

"Elise," cried Walter, "what were you trying to do?"

"Drag Max out of the way," she answered simply. "Didn't you see? That terrible beast was coming straight towards him!"

"And straight towards you, too. Didn't you think of that?"

"She is the bravest girl I ever saw," exclaimed Marie Brabant. Marie, who had been on the other side of Raoul, had fled to safety, and had not returned until the danger was over.

"No, no," Elise protested. "I was terribly frightened when I saw that huge, ugly beast coming up the hill. But when Max fell out of the cart, I thought he was going to be killed. I have looked after him ever since Mother died you know, Walter," she added, as if in excuse for her own bravery.

"You are the bravest girl I ever knew," Marie repeated emphatically, "even if you are afraid of snakes."

But Elise had turned to her little brother. "You aren't hurt, are you, Max?" she asked anxiously.

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"Just my shoulder where I fell on it," the lad replied bravely. "I think——"

He was interrupted by Neil's shout. Unnoticed by the others, the Scotch boy had ridden up the hill. He dismounted beside the dead buffalo.

"It was all my fault," he said contritely. "I ought not to have driven the beasts this way. I saw you, but I was after a cow and didn't notice that bull turning towards you. I never thought of his charging up hill. I didn't know you were in any danger, till I heard the shot and looked up here.

You've made a good kill, Walter. He's a big fellow. And you certainly kept your head. I'm not sure I wouldn't have lost mine, if I had been in your place." This was a generous admission from anyone as proud of his courage and prowess as Neil MacKay was. At that moment, however, Neil was not in the least proud of himself. His carelessness had brought peril to his friends.

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XXXII TO THE SHEYENNE RIVER

When Neil went in pursuit of the frightened pony, he found it feeding on the prairie grass on the other side of the ridge. Hindered by the cart, it had not run far. He had righted the badly wrecked vehicle, and was examining the breaks, when the rest of his party, with the other cart and the lame pony, came up. Mr. Perier was appalled when he heard of his children's peril, and Mrs. Brabant was warm in her praise of the courage and coolness of Elise and Walter.

The hunt had swept away towards the Red River, leaving the trampled prairie dotted with the dark bodies of the fallen buffalo. Here and there a wounded beast struggled to its feet and made off painfully. The sight of the injured and slain was not a pleasant one for the tender-hearted Elise, and she turned her back upon it.

"I wish," she confided to Mrs. Brabant, "people didn't have to kill things for food. I hate buffalo. They are ugly beasts. But I don't like to see them killed, except the one that would have killed Max. Of course Walter had to shoot that one."

The Canadian woman put an arm around her and comforted her. "It is necessary, my dear, for people to have meat to live, especially in this wild country where we raise so little from the ground. I have always told my boys not to be wasteful in their hunting, not to kill for the sake of killing. If no one killed more than could be eaten or kept for food, there would always be plenty of animals in the world."

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As the carts descended the slope to the hunting ground, the hunters began to straggle back from the chase. By the place where the animal lay, the spot where the bullet had entered, and sometimes by the bullet itself, they identified the game they had slain. Many of the hunters had marked their bullets so they would know them.

Neil had killed two buffalo and Louis four. Their party was well supplied with meat. The bull Walter had shot was too old and tough for food. At that season of the year the skin was not fit for a robe. The summer coat of hair was short, and in many places ragged and rubbed off. But Louis said that the tough hide was just the thing for new harness. With Walter's permission the Canadian boy set to work. With sure and skilful strokes of his sharp knife, he marked out the harness on the body of the buffalo, and stripped off the pieces. When dry,—with a thong or two in place of buckles,—the harness would be ready

for use.

One by one the carts returned to camp loaded with meat and hides. Though of no use for robes, the short haired summer skins were in the very best condition for tanning. Buffalo leather was used by the *bois brulés* for tents, cart covers, and other purposes.

The choicest cuts were soon broiling over the coals. At the same time the rest of the meat was being prepared for pemmican making. It was cut into large lumps, then into thin slices, which were hung on lines in the hot sun or placed on scaffolds over slow fires. For the meat drying and pemmican making, the hunters prepared to remain in camp three days. It was a very busy time, yet a rest from traveling.

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The Brabant family and Neil knew just how to go about the work, but the Periers and Walter, though willing and ready to help, had to be taught. After the buffalo strips were well dried, they were placed on hides and pounded with wooden flails or stones until the meat was a thick, flaky pulp. In the meantime the fat and suet were melting to liquid in huge kettles. Hide bags were half filled with the flaked meat, the melted fat poured in, the whole stirred with a long stick until thoroughly mixed, and the bags sewed up tight while still hot. So prepared, the pemmican would keep for months, even years, if not subjected to dampness or too high a temperature.

The skins selected for tanning were stretched and staked down, and the flesh scraped off with an iron scraper or a piece of sharp-edged bone. When the hides had been well cleaned and partially cured by the sun, they were folded and packed away in the carts to receive a final dressing later.

On the second day in camp a small body of Indians passed about a mile away in pursuit of a herd of buffalo. A half dozen of the hunters, who were out scouting, encountered some of the band. They reported that the Indians were Sioux, Yankton Dakota from farther west. They appeared friendly enough. The hunting party felt no concern about them, except as possible horse thieves. The men were especially careful that night to see that every pony was safe within the circle of carts. The camp guards were even more alert than usual.

There was feasting and jollity, as well as busy work, in the hunting camp. The *bois brulés* always had time to fiddle and dance, to play games and race their ponies over the prairie. Their capacity for fresh meat was enormous. Walter marveled at the quantity of buffalo tongues, humps, and ribs consumed. From dawn to dark, it seemed to him, there was never a moment when cooking and eating were not going on somewhere in the camp. Even the lean dogs grew fat on what was thrown away and what they managed to steal. The wild creatures profited, too. The scene of the hunt beyond the low ridge was frequented, night and day, by birds of prey and wolves.

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With high expectations of further sport, the hunters resumed their march to the south. They were not disappointed, for they were in true buffalo country. The first time Walter joined in

the chase, he was so excited and confused by the wild ride across the prairie and the charge into the band of stampeding beasts, that he could do nothing but cling to his horse and try to avoid being thrown or trampled. It was not until the herd had scattered and the worst of the wild confusion was over, that he managed to get a shot at one of the animals, and missed it. Mortified by his failure, he tried a different plan next time. He kept to the outskirts of the herd, singled out a young bull, pursued it, and brought it down.

Though some of the hunters, like Louis, killed only what they could use and saved as much of the meat as possible, the majority of the *bois brulés* were wasteful and improvident. They ran buffalo for the mere excitement of the chase, killed for sport, and frequently took nothing but the tongue, leaving the rest for the wolves and crows. Like white hunters of a later period, they believed the herds of buffalo inexhaustible. Yet it did not take many years of unwise slaughter almost to exterminate the animals that, during the first half of the nineteenth century, roamed the prairies in hundreds of thousands.

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Sometimes the hunters had accidents. Men thrown from their horses suffered severe sprains and broken bones. Occasionally too heavy a charge of powder burst a gun. Raoul's old musket was ruined in this manner. He carried his left hand bandaged for weeks, and was lucky to lose no more than the tip of his forefinger. There were many maimed hands among the hunters. Fortunately none of the injuries was fatal, though one man was so badly hurt when he was thrown and trampled that he would never hunt again. The *bois brulés* were skilled in the rough and ready treatment of wounds, sprains, and broken bones, but not over particular about cleanliness. Their open air life, however, helped most of the hurts to heal rapidly.

Day after day the caravan made its slow and creaking way to the south. Now and then bands of Sioux, out on the summer hunt, were seen. Sometimes Indians visited the camp, with no apparent unfriendly intentions. The savage blood in the Pembina half-breeds was mostly Cree and Ojibwa. But the hunting party was too large and well armed to fear hostility from small, wandering bands of Sioux.

Nevertheless the Pembina men had no intention of penetrating too far into Sioux country. They did not wish to provoke the tribes to unite against them. When camp was made one night on the bank of the Sheyenne River, the chief of the hunt announced that they would go south no farther. July had come. They had been out nearly four weeks. The carts were well loaded with fresh and dried meat, fat, pemmican, and hides. On the morrow they would turn, circling to the west a little, and, hunting as they went, make their way back to Pembina. They should reach the settlement early in August.

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This decision meant that if the Brabants and Periers were to go on to the St. Peter and Mississippi rivers, they must part company with the hunters. That night Mr. Perier and the boys consulted with Lajimonière, St. Antoine, and others who knew something of the country to

the south and east. Lake Traverse, they were told, was only three or four days' march away. At the lake were traders who would doubtless help them on their journey.

Some of the hunters shook their heads at the idea of such a small party traveling alone sixty or seventy miles across Dakota country. There would be grave danger in the attempt, they said, and advised against it. But Mr. Perier, Walter, and Louis had not come so far merely to turn back to Pembina. They were bound for the Mississippi and intended to reach it somehow. They might have hesitated to travel alone farther to the southwest, but everyone said that the route to the southeast was less dangerous. The Indians who visited Lake Traverse were in the habit of dealing with traders.

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In truth the hunters had neither seen nor heard sign of trouble anywhere. The Indians they had encountered had seemed inoffensive enough. The boys had rather lost their awe of the dread Sioux. They were beginning to believe that the tales of the fierceness and cruelty of those savages were greatly exaggerated. As Neil expressed it, "Most of that sort of talk is just an excuse for Saulteur and half-breed cowardice. They have made bogies of the Sioux. I can't see that they are different from any other Indians. I don't believe they dare molest white men."

The always hopeful Mr. Perier was quite sure there would be no difficulty in reaching Traverse. "We are not enemy Indians raiding the Sioux country," he argued. "We are peaceable white settlers going about our own affairs. Probably we shall meet no Indians at all. If we do, we will treat them in a polite and friendly manner. They are reasonable human beings just like ourselves. They have no reason to harm us and I don't believe they will try to."

"We will take care to avoid them anyway," added Louis, not quite so sure of Sioux reasonableness, but eager to go on.

Louis had hoped to persuade some of the hunters to go to Lake Traverse with the little party. In fact St. Antoine and another man had half promised. But both suddenly changed their minds. The boys could find no one else willing to leave the hunt for the trip to the trading post. There was nothing to do but go on alone. Before they rolled themselves in their blankets, they had decided to part with the hunters on the following day.

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XXXIII

A LONELY CAMP

The Sheyenne River, where the night's camp was pitched, should not be confused with the Cheyenne, which is a tributary of the Missouri. Both were named after the same tribe of Indians, who once lived along their banks. To distinguish the two, different spellings of the name have been adopted. The Sheyenne is a

much smaller stream than the Cheyenne, and one of the principal rivers that go to form the Red. After a general course to the east, the Sheyenne turns north, and runs almost parallel with the Red, to fall into it at last. The spot where the hunters were camped was only about ten miles from the Red, but another stream, the Wild Rice, lay between.

St. Antoine advised against going directly east. "If you go east," he said, "you will reach the Rivière Rouge many miles below the Lac Traverse. It is more difficult to cross there. I cannot tell you whether there is a ford or not. But if you keep to the southeast, reaching the river where it is narrow and shallow, you can cross easily. There it is not called Rivière Rouge, but Bois des Sioux. A few miles above where the Bois des Sioux joins the Ottetail, which comes from the east to form the real Rivière Rouge, there is a good crossing place. When you are across, turn south and follow the river to the Lac Traverse."

The caravan was slow in getting away that morning. The good-natured *bois brulés* lingered to help the Brabant-Perier party across the Sheyenne. At some time hunters or traders had built a rude log bridge over the deep, muddy stream. Part of the old bridge had been carried away by flood waters, but skilled axmen soon repaired it, so that the two carts could be taken across.

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By the time good-byes were said, last words of advice and warning spoken, the river crossed, and the steep bank climbed, the sun had passed its highest point. St. Antoine, Lajimonière, and several others rode with the little party through the thick woods that fringed the stream bank. The woods passed, St. Antoine carefully pointed out the route. The day was clear, and the travelers could see far across the flat, open country.

"You see that *île des bois*?" questioned St. Antoine, pointing to a tiny dark dot far away on the prairie. "That is the only *île des bois* for many miles around. Make straight for it. You can camp there to-night. There is a spring, and wood to boil your kettle. To-morrow go on in the same direction, and you will come to the river the Sioux call *Pse*, the white men *Folle Avoine*, from the wild rice that grows in its marshes. If you keep a straight course you will reach that river near a fording place. From there the Bois des Sioux is less than a day's journey. But do not try to take your carts across either river until you are sure that the water is not too deep or the current too strong. The Bois des Sioux is a small stream and has many shallow places. Go then, and the good God go with you."

The hunters turned back, waved a last farewell, and disappeared among the trees. Louis set his face towards the dark dot far across the prairie. "*Marche donc!*" he cried, and slapped his pony's flank, he was riding ahead as guide, while Neil and Walter walked beside the carts.

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The stretch of flat prairie between the Sheyenne and the Wild Rice looked easy to cross. The party expected to make good time, but the very flatness of the land proved a hindrance. The poorly drained plain was marshy. The grass grew tall and coarse, the soil it sprang from was

spongy and frequently soft and wet. Stretches of standing water or very soft ground, grown thick with marsh grass and cattails, had to be skirted. In spite of the travelers' care in picking their way, the cart wheels often sank far into the mud and water, and the faithful ponies had to pull hard to haul them through. In such places Mrs. Brabant and the children got out and walked or rode the two saddle ponies. Most of the time Louis or Neil rode ahead to select the route.

The difficult going lengthened the ten or twelve miles to that dark spot of woods. Sunset found the party still a mile or more from the *île des bois*. It would be better to go on, they decided, than to camp on the wet, open ground, with no wood for a fire, and only stagnant marsh water to drink.

Louis and Mr. Perier, with Max in front of him on the saddle, were riding in advance. Then came the carts with Mrs. Brabant and the girls, Neil beside the first cart, Raoul accompanying the second. Walter plodded along in the rear. Turning to look back at the sunset sky, where the reds and golds were already fading away, he noticed several dark forms loping along the trail through the tall grass. They were prairie wolves.

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Walter had often seen wolves following the cart train, cleverly keeping just out of musket range, but ready to close in on the remains of any game that might be killed. He did not fear the cowardly scavengers. Yet now they gave him a strange feeling he had never had when with the long caravan. The sight of those wild creatures, shadowy in the twilight, following so boldly in the wake of the tiny party, brought to him a sudden sense of loneliness and peril such as he had not known before. He shivered, though the evening was warm. Then he raised his gun, intending to frighten the beasts, even if he could not hit them.

Before he had time to fire, an exclamation from Mrs. Brabant caused him to lower his gun and turn towards the cart. Both carts had stopped. A hundred feet ahead Louis and Mr. Perier had reined in. Louis jumped from his horse and stooped to examine the ground.

"What is it? Why are we stopping?" Walter asked Raoul.

"Louis signaled for a halt. I don't know why."

Moved by curiosity, Walter followed Neil and Raoul to the spot where the horsemen had reined in. It did not need the Scotch boy's exclamation or Louis' sober face to make Walter understand the seriousness of what they had found. They had come upon a trail, a clear, distinct trail. It was not the wide, trampled track of a buffalo herd, but the clearly defined, narrow trail of horses single file.

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"Indians?" asked Walter, though he knew well enough that the question was unnecessary.

Neil answered with a grunt of assent. Louis, leading his horse, had gone on a little farther. In a moment he turned and summoned the others. He had come upon a parallel trail, somewhat wider and more irregular than the first and marked with lines resembling wheel tracks, but not so wide as those made by the broad-rimmed

cart wheels.

"*Travois*," he said briefly. "Heavily loaded."

Walter had heard the word *travois* before in the sense in which Louis used it. It was the name the French Canadians had given to a primitive Indian conveyance, two poles lashed to the sides of a horse or dog, the front ends resting on the animal's shoulders, the rear ends trailing on the ground. Cross pieces were tied on, and a hide or blanket stretched between the poles. Travois were loaded with household goods, or carried women too old and children too young to walk or ride horseback. The crude vehicles were used everywhere by the prairie Indians.

A little farther on was another similar trail, and beyond it a fourth, a narrow horse track like the first.

"A whole band," Louis concluded, "women and children and all. When I saw that first trail I feared it was a war party of mounted men only."

"They are traveling as if in enemy country," Neil commented, "in four lines, instead of single file."

"With the travois and women in the middle, and the braves on the outside," added Louis. "Yes, they must be uneasy about something."

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"How long ago do you think they passed?" asked Mr. Perier.

"Not many hours. Since last night. It must have been before noon though. We could have seen them a long way across the prairie."

"They are far away by now."

"Yes. It is good that we did not make an earlier start."

"And that our trail crosses theirs instead of going the same way," said Neil. "We'd better go on as fast as we can to that clump of trees. Our camp will be hidden there." Somehow he did not feel quite so sure now that Dakotas would not dare to attack white men, especially when the white men had horses to be stolen.

Louis climbed on his pony again, and the other boys turned back to bring up the carts. They made the best speed they could through the tall grass and over the marshy ground, but darkness had settled down before they reached the *île des bois*.

Finding a camping place among the trees, Louis and Walter unhitched and unsaddled the horses. Instead of hobbling them and turning them loose to feed, they tied the four ponies to trees close to the camp fire, where they could browse on tufts of grass, leaves, and twigs. Louis was taking no risk of losing them. In the meantime Neil was cutting wood, Raoul had kindled a fire, Mr. Perier had brought water from a rather brackish pool, and Mrs. Brabant and the girls were preparing supper.

To Walter the seclusion and shelter of the grove came as a relief from the open prairie. The cheerful flames of the camp fire lighting up the surrounding tree trunks and the cottonwood leaves overhead, the appetizing smell of pemmican heating in an iron pan, raised his

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spirits. He forgot the following wolves and the Indian trail. The rest of the party also seemed to have forgotten the unpleasant things of the day's journey. Elise hummed to herself as she helped Mrs. Brabant with the simple meal. Max ran about to find sticks for the fire. Raoul teased Marie, as he often did, and she retorted in her usual lively manner. Little Jeanne, with the dog Askimé beside her, had fallen sound asleep on a blanket bed between the carts. She had to be waked when supper was ready.

The meal was as cheerful as if the little group had still been part of the big hunting party. Yet the loneliness of their situation had its effect upon them. Unconsciously they lowered their voices. At the slightest sound from beyond the circle of firelight, the stirring of a horse, the breaking of a twig, the rustling of a bush, the cry of a night bird, everyone glanced quickly around. When a screech owl in a near-by tree wailed, they were all startled, then, shamefaced, laughed at themselves.

After supper Mr. Perier drew Louis aside. "Do you think we ought to stand guard to-night?" he asked in a low voice.

"I think it most wise," Louis replied promptly. "We do not wish our horses stolen, if any Indians have seen the smoke of our fire."

Including Raoul, who was quite old enough to do guard duty and would have been insulted if anyone had suggested that he was not, there were five men in the party. To make up an even number, Mrs. Brabant insisted on taking her turn. It was arranged that Walter and Raoul should keep first watch, Mr. Perier and Neil second, and Louis and his mother the hours just before dawn. Both the latter knew, though they said nothing about it, that before dawn was the time danger was most likely to come, if it came at all. Mrs. Brabant confessed to Louis that she would not be sleeping then anyway, and might just as well be standing guard.

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Though they had seen no sign of Indians except the track across the prairie, and seemed to be in no real danger, everyone but the two younger children slept lightly and uneasily. The beasts seemed to catch their masters' uneasiness. Askimé, as if personally responsible for the safety of the camp, padded back and forth and round about through the grove, growling low in his throat sometimes, but never making a loud sound. The night was windy, and the mosquitoes were not troublesome, but the ponies were restless. They crowded as close to the carts as their lariats would permit. Now and then one or another would jump and snort as if in terror. Yet the guards could find nothing wrong, no cause of disturbance except the howling of a wolf on the prairie or the hooting of a hunting owl.

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XXIV DANGER

The camp was stirring early, and the sheltering grove was soon left behind. On every side the prairie, empty and peaceful, stretched away into misty distance. The fears and alarms of the night had been imaginary.

As on the day before, the route lay over flat, poorly drained, often marshy country, where the grass grew tall and rank. By going directly east, the travelers might have reached the Wild Rice River in a few hours, but far from the place where St. Antoine had advised them to cross. Even if they succeeded in crossing, they knew they would lose rather than gain time by going that way. If they went straight east they would come to the Red River a number of miles below the Ottertail, where the Red was much larger and more difficult to ford. St. Antoine had explained all that, showing them how, by going southeast, instead of east and then south, they would find better fording places as well as save actual distance. So they continued to the southeast.

By the position of the sun and the little grove behind him, Louis strove to keep a straight course, a difficult feat for anyone less experienced in prairie travel. Louis himself found it far from easy, especially when he had to make detours around impassable ground. Many times that day he wished for St. Antoine or some other older and more prairie-wise man.

As the sun rose higher, the day grew very hot. Even the ponies felt the effect of the heat, as they plodded steadily on. At noon the party halted for an hour on the open prairie, to let the horses rest and feed. There was not a stick of fuel anywhere, so the pemmican was eaten cold, and washed down with a sip of the warm, brackish water they had brought from the *île des bois*.

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In mid afternoon, hot and tired, the little caravan reached the bank of a stream Louis knew must be the Wild Rice. A narrow, crooked, muddy stream it proved to be, like a deep ditch between high and scantily wooded banks. At the top of the bank the carts halted, while Louis and Neil scrambled down, leading their horses, to look for a ford. After a half hour's search for a place that appeared safe, the two boys came upon a trail. The slope was a little less steep in this spot, and, winding down to the water's edge, was the well-worn track of men and animals. There was no mistaking it.

"Here is a ford," Louis announced confidently. "It is here that the Indians cross."

"It looks like it," Neil agreed. "We might as well go back for the carts. This is the easiest place we've seen to bring them down."

Louis shook his head. "Wait a bit," he commanded. "I must see if the crossing is safe. The trail is old. There are no signs that anyone has crossed recently, and the river is yet far from its lowest point. You stay here, and I will try to trace the ford and make sure it is not too deep."

"All right," consented Neil. "I'll keep an eye on you. If you get into trouble, I'll go to your help."

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The water was so thick and muddy, Louis could

scarcely see whether it was deep or shallow. His pony was sure footed, and picked its way carefully. So he left the finding of the ford to the animal's instinct and intelligence. Slowly they made their way across. The water rose to the horse's sides, but did not carry it off its feet, as the current was sluggish. There was one deep place, however, where the pony was forced to swim a few yards.

Neil, mounted and ready to go to the rescue, watched anxiously. His help was not needed. The pony found foothold, and was soon scrambling up the farther bank to dry land. Dismounting, Louis patted the animal and rubbed its nose. Unlike the *bois brûlés*, he treated his beasts kindly. He had brought this horse up from colthood, and it had no fear of him. After resting a few minutes, boy and pony made their way back again.

"Can we get the carts across?" asked Neil, as Louis, wet to the waist, reached shore.

"Yes, if we pull them over with ropes. We can take my mother and the children on the horses. There is only the one deep place, and the current is not strong. César knew the way. He took me out where the trail goes up from the water. This is an old fording place."

"St. Antoine said nothing about a trail."

"No, I think this is not the place where he crossed. We may be miles from that spot."

"If we can get across here, that is all we care about," returned Neil.

The old trail was steep but not impossible for vehicles. With the boys acting as brakes by hanging on to the rear, the carts made their screeching, groaning way down. The horses were unhitched, and rawhide ropes attached to one of the carts. Then Louis and Walter rode over the ford, wound the ropes around a willow tree for greater security, and began to pull. The others steadied the cart into the water. Neil, mounting hastily, rode behind it to prevent disaster.

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Part way across, the wheels stuck in the muddy bottom and would not turn. Neil jumped off his horse, and Raoul waded out to help him. They pushed and heaved vigorously, while Louis and Walter pulled, and got the cart moving again. In the deep place the box body floated, and the boys succeeded in pulling it to shore before it took in much water. Knowing that the dry box would leak more or less, they had lined it with hides. The load came through uninjured.

The same process was repeated with the second cart, which was not so lucky and took in more water. Then Mrs. Brabant and the girls, their skirts gathered up under them on the horses' backs, were brought across, wetting no more than their feet and ankles. Max, sitting cross legged in front of his father, did not even get his feet wet. The older boys and Mr. Perier were well soaked. The day was so warm they did not mind a wetting.

The search for the ford and the crossing had taken a long time. The sun was low when the weary little party started up the old trail to seek

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a camping place. It happened that Walter, leading one of the horses along the steep track, was ahead. As he reached the top, picking his way, he turned to look back at the pony. After the horse was up, he continued to stand looking down, watching the carts making their slow way up, the ponies pulling steadily, the boys pushing. He ought to be down there helping, he thought.

The neighing of a horse startled him. He swung around, gave one gasp, and fairly tumbled down the bank, dragging the surprised pony after him.

"Indians!" he gasped.

"Where?" Louis let go his hold on the first cart, and scrambled up to join Walter.

"Coming across the prairie. A whole band of them."

"How far away? Did they see you?"

"They must have seen me. There are no trees. I stood right in the open."

Louis dropped flat and wormed his way up the slope. He raised his head cautiously, lowered it quickly, and slid back.

"They certainly saw you. They are too close to have missed you. We can't avoid them. They come straight to the ford. We have no time to get out of the way. There is not enough cover to hide in. And they must have seen you and the horse. We must put on a bold front and not act afraid. That is the only thing we can do."

The rest of the party, alarmed by the two boys' actions, had stopped in their tracks. Not many seconds were spent in telling them what was happening. All realized that Louis was right when he said there was nothing to do but put on a bold front. In a few moments the tiny caravan was moving again. Raoul held Askimé by the collar to keep him from running ahead.

Louis and Walter went first, side by side, leading their horses. When he came in view of the prairie, Walter's heart beat fast. He struggled to control his trembling knees, and to appear cool and unconcerned.

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A very short distance away, coming straight towards the two lads, was a little group of mounted men, with bare, black heads and feathers in their hair. Some wore loose buckskin shirts. The bronze bodies of others were bare. Beyond them more mounted men, men, women, and children on foot, pack animals, and travois covered the prairie in a wide, irregular, disorderly procession.

"A whole band out on the hunt," said Louis. "Well, that is less to be feared than a war party of braves only."

The advance group let out a yell, a wild, menacing sound it seemed to the Swiss boy, hammered their horses' sides with their heels, and came on at a gallop. Louis swung himself into the saddle, and advanced to meet them, one arm raised in the friendship sign. Walter mounted and followed, imitating the gesture.

The leading Indian responded with upraised arm, and the group came on. Surrounding the

lads, they reined in their ponies. Walter's heart was thumping against his ribs, but the trembling had passed. He sat straight and steady in the saddle, and kept a calm exterior.

"*Bo jou*," said Louis pleasantly.

"How," stolidly returned the leader of the advance party. He was a well-built, broad-shouldered fellow in the prime of life. A piece of buffalo robe was his only saddle. He guided his horse with a cord of twisted hair around the jaw, and rode with free and easy grace.

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As Louis knew only four or five words of Dakota, communication had to be carried on principally in sign language. Recognizing the word for trader when the Indian spoke again, Louis replied with a shake of his head, then pointed to the carts just appearing over the top of the bank. He interpreted the Indian's next gesture as a question about the size of the party, and held up ten fingers in answer. Wishing to convey the idea that the ten were only part of a much larger party, he pointed across the river, and spread out his fingers, closing and opening them several times.

The Indian nodded, stared fixedly at the carts, and inquired, "*Minnewakan?*"

That was one of the few words Louis knew. "*No minnewakan, no liquor*," he replied. His questioner looked disappointed, so Louis hastened to add, "We can give you a little tobacco. *Tabac*," he repeated with emphasis.

Evidently the Indian had heard the word *tabac* in intercourse with the traders. He repeated it with a nod and held out his hand.

Louis pointed towards the carts, and said quickly to Walter, "Go get some tobacco. It will be all right. We're safe enough for the present."

The Indians made no move to hinder Walter's return to the carts. He was back in a few moments with the tobacco, which Louis divided among the group of braves, taking care to give the largest portion to the leader.

The first of the main body of Indians had come on almost to the river bank, a little way beyond where the carts were standing, and had halted there. The boys' new acquaintance pointed to the spot, then brought the tips of his forefingers together to indicate the pointed shape of a tipi. Walter guessed the man's meaning to be that the band would camp there for the night. His heart sank. He had been hoping that the Indians would go on across the river.

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If Louis was troubled, he did not show it. He pointed the other way,—up river,—and made the same sign. Then he said "*Bo jou*" again and turned his horse in that direction.

The Indian gave a little grunt which might have meant either assent or protest. Neither he nor his companions showed any wish to hinder the boys' freedom of movement. They remained motionless for a few moments, then turned towards the camping place of their own band.

"What are we going to do?" asked Walter, when he and Louis had put a few yards between

themselves and the Indians.

"We will have to make camp," Louis replied slowly. "We will not be any safer if we go on. If they wish to steal our horses or interfere with us in any way, they will only follow. They can overtake us easily. Those fellows' horses are fresher than ours. I saw that at once. We will camp farther up the river, as far as we can without seeming to run away. I tried to make them believe that we are an advance party. If we camp here it will look as if we waited for the others to join us. It is a bad situation, but I do not see what else we can do."

"If they want to take our horses, though, and everything else we have, we are helpless. We are too few to fight a whole band. I suppose you are right about going on now. If they wished to harm us, some of them would follow. But when they think we are all settled for the night, can't we steal away in the darkness?"

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"I have thought of that," Louis returned quietly. "That is one reason I want to camp as far away as we can, without making them suspicious. If they seem perfectly friendly, it may be best to remain in camp till morning. We can decide that later. The important thing now is to keep our heads and act as if we had no fear."

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XXXV IN THE CHIEF'S TIPI

The others of the party realized that Louis knew more than they about Indians, so his view of what was best to do prevailed. He chose a spot back from the river bank on the brink of a narrow, steep sided ravine. A *coulee* such a rift in the prairie was commonly called. There, in the open, nearly a half mile up river from the Indian encampment, camp was pitched.

The dangers of the situation were carefully concealed from the younger children. Elise and Marie were old enough to realize the peril, but they understood as well as their elders that they must not appear afraid. Both girls were frightened, but they tried pluckily not to give way to their fears. Mrs. Brabant set them a good example, going about the camp work in a cheerful, matter-of-fact way. Not even Louis guessed how she was suffering with anxiety and dread. While her lips smiled bravely, she was repeating over and over in her mind passionate prayers for her children's safety. Though he understood less of the danger, and was by nature always hopeful that things would turn out all right, Mr. Perier too was far from easy in his mind. He regretted sincerely that he had brought Elise and Max on this dangerous journey. Still, as always, he hoped for the best. Of the four older boys, Raoul, the youngest and most reckless, was the least frightened and the most thrilled by the adventure. The feelings of the others were of mingled fear, excitement, and manly pride in the responsibility laid upon them. The red-headed Highland lad, cleaning his gun

carefully, was almost hoping for a fight. Louis and Walter, though determined to protect their camp at any cost to themselves if that should be necessary, were racking their brains for ways to avoid conflict of any kind. They must avoid it or their little party would be wiped out.

At first the Indians left the white men to themselves. Before the evening meal was over, however, visitors arrived, announced by a warning growl from Askimé. Into the firelight stalked the sturdy, strong-faced brave who had led the advance party. He was followed by two younger men. Both were slender, wiry fellows, and one was distinctly handsome in a Roman-nosed, high-cheeked, hawk-eyed style. The other was disfigured by a broken and crooked nose.

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The young men stood impassive, while the elder made a sign of greeting and said "How" in his deep voice.

Louis, who had risen, returned the "How" and motioned the visitors to seats by the fire, the others moving closer together to make room. Foreseeing that there might be guests, Mrs. Brabant had made more tea and heated more pemmican than usual. She helped the guests liberally, and they ate in silence. When each was satisfied, he carefully placed his cup and plate upside down on the ground.

"*Minnewakan?*" the elder warrior inquired, as if he had not asked the question before.

Louis shook his head and passed out some tobacco. There was silence, while each Indian gravely smelled of his portion, and stowed it away in his beaded buckskin fire bag.

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Then the man with the crooked nose pointed to Askimé, who lay at Louis' feet, keeping a watchful eye on the strangers. "*Nitshunka?*" he asked, looking at Louis.

The boy had never heard the word before. He did not know whether the fellow was inquiring if the dog was his, or offering to buy it. In answer he laid one hand on Askimé's head, and touched his own breast with the other. The young Indian promptly took off the necklace of beasts' and birds' claws he wore, and held it out. But Louis shook his head emphatically, saying "*Non, non.*"

The broken-nosed man nodded gravely, and replaced the necklace, but he continued to gaze at the dog. It was plain that he was anxious to get Askimé by some means or other.

The elder brave soon brought the call to a close. Rising to his feet, he pointed first in the direction of the Indian camp, and then to Louis and Walter in turn. He said something in his own language, drew his forefinger across his forehead, and pointed again towards the camp. The drawing of the forefinger across the forehead was the common sign for a hat-wearer or white man.

Louis' curiosity was aroused. He drew his finger across his own head, then pointed to his breast.

The Indian shook his head. It was some other white man he meant. Again he made the sign, with his left hand, while he pointed towards the camp with his right. At the same time he spoke

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the word for trader.

Louis nodded to show that he understood.

The Indian gave a little grunt, and once more pointed to the boys in turn, then to the camp. He repeated the hat-wearer sign and the word trader.

Louis turned to Walter. "There is a white man with that band, a trader. I am sure that is what this fellow means. And he wishes us to go to the camp and see the man. Perhaps the white man has sent for us."

"Shall we go?" asked Walter. "Do you think it is safe?"

"I do not know if it is safe," was the thoughtful reply, "but *I* must go I think. If I do not he will think I am afraid. And I want to discover if there really is a white trader there, and talk with him. He may be our one chance of safety. Sometimes the traders have great influence. Yes, I must go."

Louis indicated his willingness to accompany the Indians, but the elder man was still unsatisfied. He kept pointing at Walter.

"I am going too, Louis," the latter decided. He glanced around the little circle. "Do you suppose the others will be all right while we are away?"

"There is risk to all of us, all the time, whatever we do," Louis returned gravely. "It is not good for our party to be separated. Yet I do not think they try to separate us. Why should they, when we are so few, and they are so many? No, I think that white trader has sent for us, and we had best go." He turned to Neil and Raoul. "Keep close watch," he warned, "and you, Raoul, make a big pile of dry grass and wood. If anything happens to alarm you, light it, and we shall see the flames, and come at once."

"If we can," Walter added to himself. He did not voice his doubt. He knew they must take the risk; he saw that quite clearly.

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There was a frightened look in Elise's eyes. She laid her hand on Walter's arm. "Don't go," she whispered.

"I must, little sister. I can't let Louis go alone. We will be back soon."

Mrs. Brabant's face had turned pale, but she made no protest. As for Mr. Perier, the news that there was a white man with the Indians had gone far to reassure him of their friendliness and good intentions.

The three braves had come unarmed, so courtesy required that Louis and Walter should not take their guns, reluctant though they were to leave them behind. The Indians were on foot, and all went back in the same manner. The long twilight was deepening, as the five took their silent way towards the firelit group of tipis that had sprung up from the prairie like some strange mushroom growth. The air was hot, still, and oppressive. Dark clouds lay low on the western and southern horizon.

The Indian camp was a noisy place. As the party approached, their ears were assailed by a

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variety of sounds; the neighing and squealing of ponies, the howling and yelping of dogs, the shouting of children, the voices of the women, the tones of the old squaws cracked and shrill, calling, laughing, and scolding, the toneless thumping of a drum and the clacking of rattles accompanying the harsh monotone of some medicine man's chant, and a hundred other noises. Hobbled horses fed on the prairie grass around the circle of lodges. A whole pack of snarling, wolfish dogs rushed out as if to devour the newcomers, but did not dare to approach very close for fear of a beating. The buffalo skin tipis were lit up with cooking fires without and within. The mingled odors of wood smoke, boiling and roasting meat, tobacco and *kinnikinnick*,—osier dogwood or red willow bark shredded and added to tobacco to form the Indian smoking mixture,—filled the air.

The little party were close to the tipis, when a man came out to meet them. He spoke to the older brave, and an argument followed. Unable to understand the conversation, the boys stood waiting, and wondering what was going on. Evidently the two Indians were disagreeing, but the only words Louis recognized were *minnewakan* and the term for trader.

It was the lads' conductor who yielded at last. He gave a grunt of sullen assent, gestured to the boys to follow the other, turned on his heel, and stalked off. The stranger led the way among the lodges.

Walter had never visited an Indian camp, and curiosity was getting the better of his fears. The squaws and children were quite as curious about the white men. The women left their various occupations, and ceased their gossiping and scolding, the children stopped their play and quarreling, to stare at the strangers. Their inquisitiveness was open and frank, but did not seem unfriendly. The men, lounging about at their ease, eating, smoking, polishing their weapons, or doing nothing whatever, disdained to show interest in the newcomers. Their casual glances were indifferent rather than hostile. Walter noted that these people were in the habit of dealing with traders. Many of the loose, shapeless garments the women wore were of bright colored cotton, instead of deerskin. Some of the men had shirts or leggings of scarlet cloth. The boy's courage rose. So far there was nothing to fear.

The lodges were arranged in two irregular circles, one within the other. In the center of the inner open space, stood a solitary tipi of unusual size. From it, apparently, came the sounds of drum, rattles, and chant. Walter wondered if it was there that he and Louis were being led. Surely a white man would not— But the guide had turned to the right, and was pulling aside the skin curtain that covered the entrance to one of the lodges in the circle. He motioned to the boys to enter.

Walter followed Louis in, and looked about him. The fire on the ground in the center of the tipi was smouldering smokily, and the forms of the men beyond were but dimly visible. Louis went forward unhesitatingly. At the right of the fire, he paused, and Walter stepped to his side.

Someone threw a piece of buffalo fat on the fire.

The flames leaped up, casting a strong light on the bronze bodies of six or seven seated men. All were nearly naked, except the slender young man in the center. He wore scarlet leggings and a blue coat with scarlet facings; an old uniform coat that must once have belonged to some white officer. The young Indian's chest was bare and adorned with paint. A necklace of elk teeth, with a silver coin as a pendant, was his principal ornament. There were eagle feathers in his scarlet head band, and his coarse, black hair, which hung in two braids over his shoulders, glistened with grease. The swarthy face of the young chief, as the firelight revealed it, struck Walter with instant distrust and dislike. The wide mouth was loose lipped. The dark eyes—large for an Indian—that he fastened on the boys were bloodshot and fierce.

Louis stood straight and motionless, steadily returning the young chief's gaze. Drawing himself up to his full height, Walter tried to imitate his comrade's bold bearing. After a few minutes of this silent duel of glances, during which the fire died down again, the chief deigned to speak.

His first words were apparently an inquiry as to whether the white men were traders. Louis shook his head. Then came a request,—it sounded more like a demand,—for *minnewakan*.

Again Louis shook his head. Stepping forward, he offered the chief the gifts he had brought him, a twist of tobacco, a paper of coarse pins, and a piece of scarlet cloth. Though the boys had expected to be led directly to the white trader, Louis had thought it best to go provided with a few courtesy presents for the head man of the band. The chief accepted the things in silence.

On the chance that the fellow or someone of his companions might know a little French, Louis proceeded to explain that he and his party were peaceful travelers from the Selkirk Colony on their way to the trading post at Lake Traverse. Whether anyone understood what he said the boy could not tell.

When Louis had finished, the chief made a speech, a long speech, delivered in an impressive, even pompous manner, with frequent pauses for effect. At each pause, his companions in chorus uttered an approving "Uho, uho!" That was the way the exclamation sounded to Walter. He could understand nothing of the chief's oration, of course, but he got the idea that the young man liked to listen to his own voice.

Among the voices that cried out "Uho," there was one deep pitched one that affected the Swiss boy in a peculiar manner. It sent a sudden chill of fear over him. And there was something familiar about it. He glanced around the group to see to which man that voice belonged. The fire had nearly burned out, and the lodge was so dark he could distinguish the figures but dimly. At the third exclamation of approval, he made up his mind that the voice that affected him so strangely came from the man on the chief's right. During the few moments when the firelight had been bright enough to reveal the Indians, Walter had noticed nothing about that man except his size. He was a big fellow, broad shouldered and tall, overtopping the chief by

several inches, though the latter was not short. The big man's features the boy had not seen, for they were in the shadow of the scarlet blanket the fellow held up, apparently to shield his face from the heat.

The speaker brought his oration to a sonorous close. There was a chorus of loud "uhos." As if for dramatic effect, another chunk of fat was thrown upon the fire. The flames shot up again, and cast their light upon the chief and his courtiers.

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Walter gasped. He felt Louis' fingers close upon his arm and grip it tight in warning. The blanket no longer concealed the face of the big brave on the chief's right. The amazed boys were staring straight at the glittering, bright eyes and thin-lipped, cruel mouth of the Black Murray. It seemed incredible, impossible, but it was so.

The big warrior, a Sioux Indian in every detail; braided hair and feathers, big-muscled, bronze body naked except for the breech cloth and the handsome scarlet blanket about his shoulders, chest and arms adorned with streaks and circles of red and black paint, was the former Hudson Bay voyageur, Murray. If it had been possible to mistake that regular featured, sinister face, with its glittering eyes and scornful smile, the silver chain around his neck, with Mr. Perier's watch hanging upon his chest, must have removed all doubts. He was the Black Murray beyond question.

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XXXVI

THE WHITE TRADER

While Louis and Walter stared, amazed and apprehensive, the Black Murray rose to his feet and turned to the chief. He said a few words in Dakota; his all too familiar voice sending another chill up Walter's spine, gathered his blanket about him, gave the boys one scornful glance, and strode around the fire and out of the tipi.

Louis drew a long breath to steady himself, and spoke to the chief again. Still uncertain whether the Indians understood any French, the boy thanked the young chief for receiving his comrade and himself. They had enjoyed the visit to the village, he said, but must return to their own camp now, as the hour was growing late. They hoped to see more of the chief and his people in the morning. At the close of this speech, Louis bowed slightly, and began to step backward around the fire.

Walter imitated his friend, carefully keeping his face turned towards the chief. That young man waved his hand in a gesture of dismissal. Not one of the Indians made a move to hinder the two from leaving.

It was an enormous relief to be out of that tipi, yet both boys knew they were far from being out of danger. From the illuminated lodge in the center of the camp, the thumping of the drum

and the clacking of rattles went on tirelessly. Fires had been kindled in a circle around the big tipi, and about them men and women were gathering.

"There is to be some kind of a dance," Louis whispered. "Look!" he exclaimed suddenly. He gripped Walter's arm and drew him back into the shadow of an unlighted lodge.

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Crossing the open space, in the full light of the blazing fires, was the tall, stately form of Murray. A great, hairy buffalo robe fell loosely from his broad shoulders. His head was adorned with the strangest of headdresses, the shaggy head of a buffalo bull, horns and nose painted red. That stuffed buffalo head must have been exceedingly heavy, but under its weight Murray held his own head and neck proudly erect. Looking neither to right nor left, he strode between the fires, men and women making way for him. He stooped only to enter the big tipi.

The two boys, in the protecting shadow of the dark lodge, had stood apparently unnoticed through this show. After Murray disappeared Louis led Walter around to the side of the unlighted dwelling farthest from the fire.

"We must be away," he whispered. "This is no place for us."

Silently, cautiously, they made their way among the tipis. The whole band seemed to have gathered in the central space, yet the boys were not to escape notice. They were passing through the outer circle of dwellings, when a man suddenly appeared in front of them. It was the broad-shouldered warrior who had brought them to the camp. He spoke urgently, pointing again and again towards the inner circle of lodges, and making the hat-wearer sign.

Louis shook his head. "*Non, non,*" he replied emphatically. "We have seen enough of your white trader. A fine white man he is. Go on, Walter," he ordered, and Walter obeyed.

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If the Dakota did not understand the words, he could not mistake the boys' actions. He tried to seize Louis by the arm. Louis dodged, jumping to one side nimbly, eluded the Indian, and ran after Walter, who also broke into a run. To their surprise, the man did not attempt to follow them. Perhaps the middle-aged, rather heavily built brave despaired of catching the light-footed lads. At any rate he let them go. There was no one else near by to stop them.

As soon as the boys were sure they were not being followed, they slowed to a walk.

"We are well out of that," said Louis, drawing a long breath of relief.

"Yes. I can't understand why Murray let us go so easily."

"I fear we have not seen the last of *le Murrain Noir* yet," was the sober reply. "If he had abused us, cursed us, threatened us, I should have less fear. I do not like his silence, the way he allowed us to go without raising a hand against us."

"The Indians seem friendly. Perhaps they won't let him touch us."

"That may be. They may be afraid that any trouble with white men will bring vengeance upon them. Yet I do not like the looks of that young chief. And he did not offer us food. That is a bad sign, Walter. If he had invited us to eat, to smoke the calumet, but he did not." Louis shook his head doubtfully.

"I can't imagine," Walter pondered, "why Murray went out and left us, and then sent that man after us again."

Louis was equally puzzled. "It is all very strange. *Le Murrai* sent him for us. Surely that was what he meant. Then, when we reached the camp, another man came and took us away from him. And when we were leaving, the first fellow came again and wished us to go back."

"Perhaps Murray wanted to see us alone, and the chief interfered," Walter suggested.

"So he sent for us again? But we saw *le Murrai* going to join in the dance. The dance will take a long time, all night perhaps, and he is the chief figure in it I think."

"He certainly looked as if he was. Louis, is there really any white blood in Murray at all?"

"That is another strange thing," returned the troubled Louis. "It is strange that those Indians should speak of him as a hat-wearer, a white man. Rather he seems one of themselves."

Discussing and pondering the bewildering events of the past few hours, the boys made their way across the prairie towards their own camp. The moon had risen and lighted their way. The camp fire, a flickering point of light, guided them and assured them that all was well with their companions. Had there been no spark of fire at all, or had a great column of flame sprung up, the two would have been running at full speed. Their puzzlings led to no solution of their strange treatment at the hands of Murray and the chief.

"I am certain of but one thing," Louis asserted finally. He spoke emphatically and in a louder tone than he had been using. "There is mischief brewing in that camp to-night, and *le Murrai Noir* is the center of it."

"Aye, you are right there."

The words, in a strange voice, came from behind them. With one impulse the boys sprang apart, and turned. Louis' hand was on the hilt of his hunting knife.

Close to them, leading a horse, was a tall form, a very tall form. Taller he seemed than Murray himself, though perhaps that was because he was so gaunt and thin. In the moonlight the boys could see that his buckskin clothes hung loosely upon his long frame. He wore a cap, and had a bushy beard.

"You were too busy with your talk," the strange man went on rebukingly. "The whole band might have stolen up on you." He spoke easy, fluent Canadian French, but with a peculiar accent that reminded Walter of Neil's manner of speech.

"Who are you?" demanded Louis, his hand still on his knife.

"I'm the hat-wearer that sent for you."

"You are the white trader? Then it wasn't *le Murra*?"

"It was not. But you're right in thinking he's the center of the mischief over there. I sent Shahaka to your camp. He was to bring you straight to my lodge, but someone, Murray or Tatanka Wechacheta, interfered. Then I told Shahaka to wait for you at the edge of the village, but you wouldn't go back with him. I wanted to warn you of what was going on. I thought it wiser not to go to your camp myself. My influence with that young fool of a chief is not so strong as it was before the big medicine man Murray came along."

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"He claims to be a medicine man?" asked Louis.

"Aye, a mighty one, with all sorts of *wakan*. He is teaching a picked few rascals of them a new medicine dance. They will dance and powwow till near the dawn, then Murray will feast them and fill them full of rum."

"But why?"

"Why? He's a free trader, that Murray, a clever one and not particular about his methods, his boasts that he got his start by stealing pemmican from the Hudson Bay Company and then selling it back to them, through a friend, for trade goods. If he can make those foolish savages look up to him and fear him as a great *witan wishasha*, he can do anything he likes with them in the way of trade. He has sold them a lot of medicines already, charms against evil spirits and injury in battle, charms to give them power over their enemies and the beasts they hunt." The tall man changed the subject abruptly. "You have horses and carts and goods with you?" he demanded.

"No trade goods, except a few little things for presents. But we have two carts loaded with our personal things, and four good horses, and an Eskimo dog."

"You will have none of them by sunrise," was the grim response, "if you stay here. Murray is not the man to let all that slip through his fingers."

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"Then why did he let us leave the camp?"

"And why not? He can put his hand on you whenever he likes. In a few hours he will have plenty of drunken savages to do his will."

Walter shivered. He was thinking, not of himself, but of Elise and Mrs. Brabant and the children.

As they drew near the camp, Neil, gun in hand, sprang up from the ground, where he had been lying, watching their approach. He had been worried because, instead of two only, he could make out three men and a horse.

Entering the circle around the fire, Louis introduced the stranger. "This is the man who sent for us, the trader."

The tall man pulled off his fur cap and ducked his head to Mrs. Brabant. "I'm Duncan McNab, at your service, Madame," he said. He caught sight of Neil's freckled face and blue bonnet. "Ye're a Scot," he said accusingly in English.

"I am that, and sa are you," Neil retorted promptly.

"Aye. Ye'll be fra Kildonan na doot, but there's na time ta be talkin' aboot that." He turned to Louis and spoke in French again. "You are camped on the edge of a coulee. Did you pick this spot on purpose?"

The boy nodded.

"Then you know what to do. The coulee leads towards the Bois des Sioux. Leave your fire burning. The savages will think you're still here."

"Our carts make so much noise," interposed Walter. "If any of their scouts or camp guards should hear that squeaking——"

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"Leave the carts behind," McNab interrupted. "I doubt if you could take them up the coulee."

"We can go faster without them anyway," Louis agreed, "and get more out of our horses."

"Travel light, a little pemmican, your weapons and ammunition, nothing else. It is hard to lose all your things, Madame," the trader said bluntly to Mrs. Brabant, "but better than to run the risk of your children falling into the hands of Tatanka Wechacheta and the Black Murray."

"Murray?" cried Mr. Perier.

"You know him?"

"We all know him. We have good cause to," said Walter.

"That makes it all the worse, if he has anything against you. No, don't tell me the story now. We have no time to exchange tales."

"If we must leave the carts behind," Neil suggested, "why not hide them in the coulee? Then the Indians may think we have taken them along. Later we can come back from Lake Traverse and get them."

"It might work oot that wa'," returned McNab, falling into Scots' English again, "but I'm thinkin' they'll find the cairts easy eneuch."

"We'll tak them *doon* the coulee a bit," Neil insisted, in the same tongue. "If Murray finds the tracks he'll maybe think we've gane doon ta the Wild Rice and back across."

The trader shook his head. "He'll be findin' your trail all richt, but ye can maybe delay him for a bit. Weel, do what you're goin' ta do quick, an' be awa' wi' ye. I maun be gettin' back or they'll miss me."

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"You're na comin' wi' us?" cried Neil.

"Na, na, I'm not rinnin' awa' yet." He switched to French and took his leave of the others. "Cross the Bois des Sioux and make speed for Lake Traverse," he advised. "Tell Renville I'll be back there in a few days. It was Renville sent me to find out what that rascal Murray was up to. Good speed and God go with you."

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XXXVII FLIGHT

Louis and Walter decided that Neil's plan was worth trying. They muffled the axles of the two carts with strips torn from a ragged blanket, and carefully cased the vehicles over the edge of the coulee. The moon, shining into the rift, lighted them down the steep slope. Along the bed of the shallow brook that ran through the coulee to join the Wild Rice River, they pushed and pulled the carts, and left them well hidden among willows and cottonwoods where the ravine widened.

"There," said Neil when the job was done, "if those Indians follow straight up the coulee after us, they won't find the carts at all. If they come down here and find them, they may think we have gone back across the river."

"Probably," Louis returned, "they will divide into two parties, one to go up, the other down the coulee. But if they get all our things they may be content to let us go."

Hiding the carts had taken less than a half hour. In the meantime Mrs. Brabant and the children had gone down into the coulee, Jeanne and Max stumbling along, scarcely awake enough to realize what was happening. While the horses were being led down, Walter remained behind as rear guard. As he threw a last armful of fuel on the fire, a burst of hideous noise came across the prairie from the Indian camp. Howls and yells, to the thumping of many drums, proved that Murray's medicine dance was in full swing. A picture flashed through the boy's mind; a picture of that central space within the circle of tipis as it must look now, with scores of naked, painted, befeathered savages, stamping, leaping, yelling around the blazing fires. There was no time to lose.

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Mrs. Brabant was impatient and anxious to be away. She had made no protest at leaving the carts behind. All her household belongings were in them, but what were blankets and copper kettles, and the precious wooden chest of clothing and little things, compared with the safety of her children? She and little Jeanne had been placed on one of the ponies. There were only four horses for ten people. Mr. Perier took Max with him on another, and the remaining two were given to Elise and Marie. Marie could ride almost as well as her brothers, and Elise had learned since leaving Pembina.

It was very dark at the bottom of the coulee among the willows that fringed the stream. Speed was not possible, and the foot travelers could easily keep up with the ponies. Yet there was no doubt in anyone's mind that this was the only route to take. On the open prairie, in the moonlight, they would be plainly visible from every direction. Here they were completely hidden. They hoped to be miles away before the Indians discovered that they had gone.

Progress seemed heart-breakingly slow, however, as the little party picked their way up the bed of the brook in the darkness. Louis, on

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foot, went ahead as guide. Walter, Neil and Raoul brought up the rear. The stream was not much over a foot deep at its deepest, with a sticky mud bottom. Luckily the ponies were sure-footed and almost cat-eyed. One or another slipped or stumbled now and then, but recovered quickly without unseating the rider. The night remained oppressively warm. Not a breath of breeze stirred the willows down below the level of the prairie. Pale flashes lit up the narrow strip of sky overhead, and distant thunder rumbled.

The coulee grew narrower and shallower. The brook dwindled to a rivulet, the fringing willows were smaller and met above the stream. It was difficult to push a way through. At last Louis called a halt.

"Wait a little," he said. "I will go on and find a way."

Strung out along the narrow streamlet, which scarcely covered the hoofs of the horses, the rest waited for his return. The mosquitoes were bad, and the tormented horses twisted, turned, pawed the mud, and slapped their tails about. Walter made his way among the willows to Elise's side to be at hand if her mount should become unmanageable. But they exchanged only a word or two. The oppression of the night and the danger lay too heavy upon them both.

After what seemed a long time, Louis returned. "The coulee ends a little way ahead," he reported. "The stream comes from a wet marsh that we must go around. I have found a place where we can climb the right bank."

Without further words, he took hold of the bridle of his mother's horse and led it through the willows and up a dry gully. The gully was one of the channels by which the marsh waters, during spring floods and rainy periods, found their way into the coulee. The prairie at the head of the gully was dry in July, the marsh being shrunken to dry weather proportions.

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There was a certain relief in being up on the open plain again. For one thing there was more light. The western sky was banked with clouds. Over there lightning flashed and thunder rumbled, but the moon remained uncovered. Looking back to the northwest across the flat prairie, Walter could see, against the dark clouds, the glow of the fires in the Indian camp. A flash of lightning showed the pointed tips of the tipis black against the white light.

It seemed a long time since the fugitives had gone down into the coulee. The boy was disappointed and alarmed to find that they had not come farther. Had the Indians discovered their absence yet? He scanned the prairie for moving figures. To his great relief he could see not one. Not even a buffalo or a wolf appeared to be abroad on that wide, moonlit expanse. Only an occasional puff of breeze stirred the tall grass.

The party were gathered together at the head of the gully. Louis was speaking, and Walter turned to listen.

"We can go faster now, but one must go ahead to keep the course and—"

"You must do that, Louis," Neil interrupted. "You are guide. It is your place. The two girls will have to ride one horse."

Louis hesitated. "It is not right for me to ride away and leave you three to follow on foot."

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"It is the only way," put in Walter. "The ponies can't carry us all. The others can't go on without a guide. You will have to do it, Louis. We won't be far behind."

"Neil can guide as well as I can," Louis began.

"I can't and I won't," retorted the Scotch boy stubbornly. "You have your mother and sisters to take care of, and you are going on ahead."

"One of you boys can take my horse," Mr. Perier proposed. "I am the least experienced and the least useful of all." He started to dismount.

"No, no," cried Louis. "You will be too slow with your crippled foot. You will hold the others back. You must ride."

"There are the children to think of," Walter added earnestly. "You must go with them. Neil and Raoul and I can go much faster on foot than you could."

"Stop talking and get away," exclaimed Raoul impatiently. "Marie, come off that horse."

For once in her life Marie obeyed her next older brother. She took his hand and slipped quickly to the ground. Raoul helped her up in front of Elise. Louis, without further argument, mounted and took the lead. He knew as well as anyone that they had already wasted too much time in argument.

As Raoul drew back from helping Marie up, his mother bent down from her horse to throw her left arm about his neck. "God guard you, my son," she said softly.

"And you," muttered Raoul huskily.

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At first the lads on foot kept almost at the heels of the ponies. The prairie grass grew high and rank, and there was no beaten path. The animals could not go fast, and all three boys were good runners. But running through tall grass is not like running on an open road or even on a well-trodden cart track. They soon tired, and had to slow their pace and fall behind. The ponies were double burdened and far from fresh, but they were tough, wiry beasts, capable of extraordinary endurance. When they struck firmer ground beyond the marsh, they made better speed. The rear guard fell still farther behind. They tried to keep in the track made by the horses, but it was not always easy to do so, especially when flying clouds covered the moon and left them in darkness.

No rain fell, however. The storm that had been threatening for so long was working around to the north. The rumblings of thunder grew fainter, the lightning flashes less bright. Before dawn they had ceased altogether. A fresh, cool breeze sprang up, billowing the grass and putting new life into the tired boys, as they plodded on, carrying their heavy muskets. They no longer tried to run, but they kept up a steady walking pace.

Dawn showed a line of trees ahead that did not appear to be much over a half mile away. Those trees, the boys felt sure, must mark the course of the Bois des Sioux. It was from one of the groves on its bank that the stream took its name. The foot travelers had lost the horse track some time before, but Neil and Raoul had managed, with the aid of the stars, to keep a general course towards the east. The rest of the party were nowhere in sight. Probably they had crossed the river long ago.

Though the trees seemed such a short distance away, the sun was rising above them before the lads reached the river. Wet, marshy ground had forced a detour. The stream, where they came out upon it, proved larger and wider than they had expected.

"If we cross here we will have to swim," said Neil, as he looked down at the muddy water. "I think we are too far down. See there." He pointed to the opposite shore up stream. "Either the river makes a sharp bend there, or another one comes in."

"It is the Ottetail," suggested Raoul. "That must be where the two come together to make the Red."

"It looks like it," Walter agreed. "Anyway this doesn't seem to be a good place to cross. We know nothing about the current. We had better go on up and look for a ford."

The boys did not have to go far along the west bank of the united rivers to convince themselves that the stream coming in from the east was indeed the Ottetail. They could see plainly enough that it was larger than the branch from the south. Single file, with Walter in the lead, they were making their way along the bank opposite the mouth of the Ottetail, when from the willows directly in front of them an Indian appeared.

"*Bo jou,*" he said, and added a few words in his own language.

Walter, startled, had half raised his musket, but Raoul, who was close behind him, seized his arm.

"That's a Saulteur, not a Sioux," the younger boy whispered, then answered the man in his own tongue.

Neil pushed forward to join in the conversation. He also knew a little of the Saulteur or Ojibwa language, though he did not speak it so readily as Raoul, who had played with Indian and half-breed lads since babyhood. Walter, unable to understand more than an occasional word or two—picked up at Pembina and among the hunters—stood back and looked on.

The sudden appearance of this lone Saulteur near the southern limits of the debatable ground surprised him greatly. What puzzled him most, however, was the man's familiar face. Surely he had seen that scarred cheek, where the skin drew tight over the bone, before, but where? On the way from York Factory, at Fort Douglas, at Pembina, at the Company post when the hunters were bringing in their winter's catch? Then he remembered. It was at the post he had seen the

Ojibwa; not in the spring, but in the autumn. This was the hunter who had been beaten and robbed, as he was loading his canoe to return to his hunting grounds at Red Lake. What was he doing here?

The Indian was speaking rapidly, in a low voice. Walter caught two words he knew, "*Murray Noir*." Neil swung around, excitement in his eyes.

"Walter," he exclaimed, "this fellow says Murray is his enemy. He is after Murray to get revenge. Is he——"

"Yes." Walter did not wait for Neil to finish the question. "He is the man Murray and Fritz Kolbach attacked. I know that scar on his cheek. At the post they said a grizzly bear once clawed him in the face. How did he learn that Murray was in this part of the country? Ask him."

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Raoul put the question and translated the answer. "He was at Pembina just after the hunt left. Fritz Kolbach and two other DeMeurons were there at the same time. Scar Face attacked Kolbach, but the other fellows separated them. Then Kolbach declared it was Murray who hit Scar Face over the head, and offered to put him on Murray's trail. He told Scar Face that Murray was near Lake Traverse trading with the Dakotas and pretending to be a medicine man. Some men going from Traverse to Pembina with carts had seen him. So Scar Face is trailing him."

"Alone?" queried Walter.

"No, he has some young braves with him who want to get a reputation by raiding enemy country. They came down the Ottetail River."

"Where are they?"

"Near here somewhere. I don't know how he learned that Murray was with Tatanka Wechacheta's band, but he knew it before I told him."

"Did you tell him that we are running away from them?"

"Yes. Wait a minute."

The Indian was speaking. He pointed up the river and his manner was earnest and emphatic. When Scar Face paused, Raoul turned to the others again.

"He says he has heard that there is a good ford a little way up the river. That is probably where our people crossed. He thinks that Murray and the Sioux will follow the horse tracks to the ford. If Scar Face and his braves lie in wait there, they can get a shot at Murray when he tries to cross. They will take us to the ford in their canoes."

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Before Raoul had finished this explanation, the Indian was showing signs of impatience. He turned now and led the way in among the willows. There, where the river current had taken a crescent-shaped bite out of the mud bank, two birch canoes were pulled up. Five young braves, arrayed in feathers and war paint, came out from hiding places among the bushes, where they had been waiting for their leader,

who had been for a look across the prairie west of the river.

They were a wild and fearsome looking little band. Had the boys not known that they were, for the time being at least, on the Saulteur side of the quarrel, they might have hesitated to trust themselves with the war party. But they had given Scar Face and his comrades information of value, and had nothing to fear from them.

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XXXVIII

THE FIGHT AT THE BOIS DES SIOUX

The Indians wasted few words and little time. Walter and Raoul were assigned to one canoe, Neil to the other. Riding as passengers, they took the opportunity to munch the chunks of pemmican they had brought with them, but had not paused to eat.

The Bois des Sioux, above the Ottetail, proved to be an insignificant stream. It had no valley, but meandered crookedly through a mere trench in the flat prairie. Willows and other bushes fringed its muddy waters. Its banks were sometimes open, sometimes wooded with groves or thin lines of cottonwood, poplar, wild cherry, and other trees. It would be possible to ford the stream almost anywhere, Walter thought, if one did not stick fast in the mud. He watched the shores anxiously for signs that horses had recently been across.

The Indians had been paddling for not more than a half hour, when Scar Face, who was in the bow of the canoe that carried Walter and Raoul, gave a little grunt, and pointed with his paddle blade to the low west bank. Undoubtedly animals had gone up or down there. The willows were broken, the mud trampled. The Indians swerved the canoe close in. The broken bushes were still fresh.

"*Mistatim*," said Scar Face, his keen eyes on the tracks.

"That's the Cree word for horse," Raoul explained to Walter, "but we can't be sure. They may have been buffalo."

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"If they were, there were only a few of them," Walter returned. "A big band would have done more damage."

"Yes. I believe myself our own people crossed here."

The canoe was brought to the bank, and Scar Face stepped lightly out. Walter and Raoul followed. The Saulteur examined the trampled ground carefully. He gave a low grunt of satisfaction. He had found the print of a moccasined foot, where a rider had dismounted. But he was not satisfied yet. He followed the trail through the willows, examining it intently. Presently he straightened up and spoke to Raoul

who was close behind.

"They came to the river," he said.

"You mean," the boy questioned, "that they came from there,"—he nodded towards the west,—"and went"—he pointed east across the stream.

Scar Face grunted assent.

"It must have been our people," Raoul said to Walter. "They are safe across the river."

"That is where we had better be, as soon as we can get there," was Walter's reply.

But the Saulteur was not quite ready to cross. He went on through the belt of small trees beyond the willows. Walter and Raoul hesitated an instant, then followed. They too wanted a view of the open ground.

Their first glance across the prairie was reassuring. Except for a few birds on the wing, the only living creature in sight was one lone animal; a buffalo from its size and humped shape.

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"No Sioux yet," exclaimed Raoul. "I don't believe they are coming after us at all. Nothing to be seen, except that one old buffalo."

Scar Face knew the French word *boeuf*, commonly used by the Canadians for buffalo. "Not buffalo," he said, pointing to the creature moving through the tall grass. "Man on horse."

"What?" cried Raoul.

"Man on horse, buffalo skin over him," the Indian insisted. "See," he added, pointing to the northwest. "More come."

Walter had understood the dialogue and gestures well enough to guess that Scar Face found something wrong with the distant buffalo and that he saw or thought he saw something else beyond. Following the Indian's pointing finger, the boy strained his eyes. He believed he could make out something,—moving objects.

"More buffalo," said Raoul.

Scar Face shook his head doubtfully. The three stood gazing across the prairie. The lone buffalo was drawing nearer. There was something queer about it, Walter concluded. Its head was too small. Its shape was wrong.

"He is right," exclaimed Raoul. "That is a man on horseback, stooped over, a buffalo hide thrown over him."

Walter recalled Murray's queer costume of the night before. What about those far-away figures? Were *they* buffalo?

The day was bright and clear. There was not a trace of haze in the air, now that the sun was climbing higher. And the land was so flat one could see for miles. There was no longer any doubt in Walter's mind that there was something else coming from the northwest, far away still, far beyond the lone buffalo or horseman, but drawing nearer. Whether that something was a band of buffalo or of mounted men he could not

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tell, though he strained his eyes to make out.

Scar Face had made up his mind that this was no place for him to stay longer. Abruptly he turned back among the trees. Neil and Raoul asked no questions. With Walter they heeded the silent warning and followed the Indian back to the river.

With scarcely a word spoken, the Ojibwas paddled across the stream to the spot where the party that had taken the ford had left the water. Scar Face motioned to the boys to get out. He spoke earnestly to Raoul and Neil, and the latter translated to Walter.

"He wants us to go on, out of the way. He and his braves are going back to that little island." Neil pointed to a low, willow-covered islet that parted the current just above where they had crossed and nearer to the west bank. "If it is Murray coming they will have a good chance at him from there."

Taking for granted that there could be no objection to this manœuvre, Neil started along the trail, his comrades after him. The Indians stepped back into their canoes. Walter felt surprised that the hot-headed Neil should be so willing to run away from a fight. In a moment, however, he found that Neil had no intention of running away. Instead of seeking the open, the Scotch boy turned aside among the bushes. After searching a little, he found a spot that suited him.

"This will do," he said, crouching down behind a spreading osier dogwood.

Joining Neil and looking between the red stems of the bush, Walter had an almost clear view of the river. He could see the lower end of the tiny islet and the spot on the opposite shore where the trail came to the water.

"You're going to stay and see what happens?" he asked.

"Of course. We may have to take a hand in the fight. Murray and his Dakotas must not cross the river, Walter. We must see to that."

Walter nodded. Even if the Periers and Brabants had passed the Bois des Sioux before daybreak, they could not have reached Lake Traverse yet. They had a long way to go with tired horses. It was not impossible for the Indians, riding hard on fresh ponies, to overtake them. Murray and his savages must not cross.

The Ojibwas were concealed among the willows of the low island. The lads could get no glimpse of them. The canoes were visible in part from where the boys were, but must be completely hidden from the opposite shore. Crouched among the bushes, the three waited, silent and almost motionless. Walter had about made up his mind that the horseman with the buffalo robe,—if it actually was a horseman,—was not coming to the ford, when Neil laid a hand on his arm and pointed across the river.

The willows were stirring,—not with wind. An animal of some kind was coming through. It was a horse. Walter could see its head, as it pushed through the growth. Then the rider came into

view; a tall man with a buffalo hide wrapped about him. He was no longer trying to conceal himself under the robe. He had let it slip down as he straightened up in the saddle.

Neil uttered a low exclamation, and Walter started up from his hiding place. The whole width of the Bois des Sioux at this place was not fifty yards. The man on the opposite shore was in full sunlight at the edge of the water. He was tall, like Murray, but he was fully clothed and he wore a beard.

Raoul pulled Walter down again. "Don't yell," he warned in a whisper. "There may be others behind him. Scar Face can see it is not Murray. I told him how a white man warned us. He'll let him cross. He knows he will lose his chance if he fires before he sees Murray himself."

There was reason in what the younger boy said. Walter and Neil kept silence, but they held their breaths for fear the Ojibwas might make a mistake.

McNab's horse took to the stream, picking its way carefully. The water was shallow, the current sluggish, and the rider was not obliged to dismount or the horse to swim. Not a leaf moved on the willow-covered islet. Not a sound, except the peaceful twittering of a bird, came from it, as Duncan McNab, unconscious of any peril from that direction, rode past the tip, and on across the stream. Intent upon finding the ford, he did not even glance back, so caught no glimpse of the birch canoes.

Before McNab reached shore, Neil had left his post and slipped through the bushes to meet him. In a few moments he was back again, the trader, without his buffalo robe and horse, following. He squatted down beside Walter and looked at the island and the bark canoes. Neil had told him of Scar Face and his companions.

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"Are the Sioux after *you*?" Walter whispered.

"That I don't know," was the response in French. "I suspect Murray would set them on me if he could. When he and some of the young fools started for your camp this morning, I thought it was time for me to be away. So I took short leave of Chief Tatanka Wechacheta. I struck your trail at the head of the coulee."

"But they are coming, aren't they? We thought that——"

"Aye, they're coming, on your trail. It was no band of buffalo you saw. I had a buffalo hide over me and the hind quarters of my horse, but I don't know whether I fooled them or no." His keen eyes were fastened on the break in the bushes, watching.

Walter asked no more questions. Silence was best. But while he waited he stole more than one glance at the trader, whose strange appearance had aroused his curiosity the night before. A queer figure indeed was this tall, lank, big-boned man of almost skeleton thinness; seeming to consist entirely of bone and gristle. His name was Scotch and so was his tongue, but Walter suspected that he was far from being wholly white. The coarse, straight black hair that hung below his fur cap, the dark bronze of his long

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face, the high-bridged nose, and prominent cheek bones, betrayed the Indian. Yet his beard was uneven in color, rusty in places, and the eyes he turned on the Swiss boy were steel gray, startlingly light in his dark face. A singular man surely, with a grim, shrewd face, no longer young, as its many lines and wrinkles betrayed. In spite of the suspense of waiting, Walter found himself wondering about Duncan McNab and his history.

The wait was not a long one. McNab suddenly raised his head, like a hound listening. Then the ears of the others caught the sounds too,—the crackling of twigs, the clatter of accouterments, as mounted men came through the strip of poplars and willows on the low opposite bank of the stream. Duncan looked to the priming of his musket and dropped a ball into the muzzle. Walter felt for his own weapon. Even in the midst of his excitement, the thought of shooting unwarned men from ambush sickened him. But if Murray and his Sioux were really on the trail, they must not cross. Fear for Elise and for Louis' mother and sisters steeled the boy's nerves.

The willows were moving. A horse's head appeared, then the rider, a slender, bronze figure, brave in red paint and feathered head-dress. It was not Murray. He halted at the edge of the water and turned his head to look back. Another horse was coming, a white one.

"Himsel," muttered McNab under his breath.

The rider came in view, tall, stately, his painted body naked to the waist, his black head bare. There was nothing about him except his size to distinguish him from any other Indian. The two talked together for a moment. The slender warrior seemed, from his gestures, to object or protest.

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The waving and rustling of the willows, the sounds that came across the water, proved that other men were following. But the track was narrow, and they were obliged to check their horses until the leaders should take to the water.

"How many?" Neil whispered to McNab.

"Eight or ten," was the equally low reply.

The discussion ended in Murray's going first. When the white horse stepped into the water, a cold shudder passed over Walter. He had every cause to hate and fear the Black Murray. He hoped Scar Face would not miss. Yet, quite unreasonably, he wished the rascally mixed blood might have a chance to fight for his life. He looked a fine figure of a man on his big, white horse.

He came deliberately enough, letting his horse pick its way, as McNab had done. From the willows on the islet there was no move, no sound. He was opposite the tip now. He was past it. He was coming on. Had Scar Face weakened? Had he lost his courage?

The silence was broken by a sudden menacing sound, not loud but strangely blood-chilling; the Ojibwa war whoop. On the near side of the islet a figure leaped into view. At the same instant, it seemed, Murray swung about on his horse's

back, musket raised. He was a breath too late. Scar Face had fired.

The distance was too short, the target too good for the Ojibwa hunter to miss. Even as his own gun went off, Murray swayed forward. The white horse leaped and plunged. More shots came from the island. Horse and rider went down, and the muddy water flowed over them.

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On the farther bank, the slender Dakota's horse was hit. As it fell, the man leaped clear, and darted back among the willows. There followed an exchange of shots between shore and islet, without a man visible in either place. Only the puffs of smoke betrayed the hiding places.

Gray eyes gleaming, Duncan McNab turned to Neil. "Get you awa'," he ordered. "Ta Traverse as fast as your legs can carry ye."

"And you?" the boy asked.

"I'll o'ertak ye. I'll be seein' the end o' this, ta mak sure there's na followin'. On your wa', all o' ye."

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XXXIX SAFE

Not one of the three boys thought of disobeying Duncan McNab's stern command. On hands and knees, for fear some Indian might catch a glimpse of them and send a shot in their direction, they crawled through the bushes. Not until they were out of sight as well as out of range, did they stand upright.

They tried to follow McNab's instructions and make good speed towards Lake Traverse, but all three suddenly found themselves very tired. The night before, after a hard day's journey, they had had not a wink of sleep. It had been a night of continuous physical exertion and intense strain. Then came the meeting with Scar Face, and the anxious waiting for Murray and the Dakotas, capped by the excitement of the brief fight. The time had seemed long, yet in reality events had followed one another so swiftly that the sun even now was scarcely more than half-way up the sky.

"If I didn't know we were going in the right direction, I should think we were headed north, not south," said Walter, as he plodded wearily along. "It seems as if the sun must be on the way down, instead of up."

Neil nodded. "I'm dead sleepy," he admitted, "but we must try to keep on going till McNab overtakes us."

"The firing has stopped," put in Raoul. "The fight must be over."

"Or else the noise doesn't reach us here."

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If the fight was over, who had won? The answer to that question might mean life or death to the

fugitives. Murray had fallen, but if the Dakotas had destroyed the Ojibwas, they might, even without his leadership, cross the river and continue the pursuit. The boys felt they must go on as long as they possibly could. They trudged doggedly on, casting many a glance behind them.

At last Neil, turning to look back, gave a cry of joy. A single horseman was on their trail, coming at good speed. He raised one long arm in the friendship sign. The three stopped short and dropped down to rest and let him overtake them. They were almost asleep when he reached them.

McNab reined in his horse and looked down at the weary figures with a grim smile. "Weel," he said slowly, in his peculiar Scots' English with its guttural suggestion of Dakota, "ye disappairt sa quick I thocht the prairie had swallowed ye."

"Did the Saulteux win?" Neil roused himself to ask.

"Aye, an' without losin' a man. Scar Face himsel got a shot in the thigh, but it's only a flesh wound. The ither side didna ken the number o' the enemy, an' they were mair nor a little upset by Murray's fa'. When they found they coudna drive the Ojubwas fra the wee isle, they turnt tail theirsel an' were awa'. If ye can mak it, we'd best be gettin' ta that bit *île des bois* ower yon, where ye can be sleepin' in the shade."

The clump of small trees was only a short distance away. There, shaded from the heat of midday, the boys slept, utterly relaxed, until the sun was far on its downward course. Duncan McNab kept watch. He had had no more sleep than they the night before, but he was more used to going without and needed less than growing boys required.

Neil's first words, when he woke to find the sun low in the west, were, "How far have we got to go to Lake Traverse?"

"Ta the post thirty mile or mair," was the reply.

Neil groaned and stretched. "And we've got to walk it," he muttered.

"Weel, ye may be glad ye've got twa soond legs left ta walk it wi'," McNab returned with his grim smile. There were no more complaints.

McNab, old campaigner that he was, carried cooking utensils, pemmican, and a packet of tea in his saddle bags. A hot meal put new courage into the lads. Before the sun was down they were on their way again. The night was clear and light, and they kept up a steady pace till midnight. Then they stopped for a brief rest and more tea.

Luckily for the boys they did not have to walk the whole distance to the trading post. Dawn had not yet come, when McNab made out a party of horsemen coming towards them. The foremost rider waved his arms and shouted. The boys knew that voice. Louis had come back to seek them.

Unashamed to display his feelings, Louis sprang from his pony to hug his brother and his friends. "Thank the good God," he cried. "I felt like a

coward and a traitor to leave you behind."

"It was the only thing to do," Walter and Neil exclaimed together. "Are the others safe?"

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"All safe, but we did not reach the fort till after sunset. After we crossed the Bois des Sioux we had to rest our horses a little, and the children slept. We dared not stop long. The ponies did their best, but they could not carry double all the time. My mother and M'sieu Perier and I walked much of the way, and sometimes Marie and Elise walked also."

"And you started right back to find us?" cried Walter.

"I rested a while first, but I could not sleep. M'sieu Renville gave me a fresh horse, and these men offered to come with me. I thought you would follow our trail. If I kept to it, I would find you; if *le Murrai* had not overtaken you."

The *bois brulés* from the trading post gladly gave up their horses to the weary boys, and went afoot. So Lake Traverse and the shelter of the Columbia Fur Company's fort was reached at last. There, in one of the log buildings within the stockade on the shore of the lake, the rest of the little party were waiting anxiously. The boys, almost dropping from their saddles with sleep and weariness, were embraced and shaken by the hand, and cried over, and questioned, until the trader, Joseph Renville, intervened. He led them away to bunks where they could sleep undisturbed for as many hours as they cared to.

When the boys had had their sleep out, the two sections of the party exchanged stories. Afterwards Duncan McNab had something to add. He had returned to the Indian camp two nights before to find the dance in full swing. Within the medicine lodge, Murray was instructing the chosen initiates in some sort of mystic rites. From time to time one of them would come out to chant or howl a few words or syllables and to go through the steps and posturings of the new dance. The men around the fires would repeat the lesson over and over, until another of the chosen ones appeared to teach them something new.

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"As near as I could mak oot," said Duncan, "it was something like the medicine dance the Mdewakanton Dakota on the Mississippi mak ta their god Unktahi, that Murray was teachin' yon Wahpetons, but he was puttin' in some stuff of his ain. Some o' the words o' the sangs soundit like Gaelic, but made na sense as far as I could ken, an' I hae a bit o' the Gaelic mysel. I'm thinkin' he picked the words for their mysterious sound like."

When the excitement had reached the right pitch, Murray began to serve out liquor. "I dinna ken where he got sa mickle,"—McNab shook his head. "He had a cairt loadit wi' goods an' kegs an' what a'. He must be in wi' ither free traders, some o' the men on the Missouri most like, or mayhap he stole the stuff fra them. It's the wrang time o' year ta be buyin' furs. It was the good will o' the sauvages an' power ower 'em he was after, sa they'd be sure an' bring him their next winter's catch."

As the liquor flowed more freely, the

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performance grew frenzied. It was a wild night in Tatanka Wechacheta's village, and McNab spared his listeners the details. He feared every moment that the Indians would raid the neighboring camp, and discover too soon that the white men had gone. But the Black Murray overdid the celebration. He supplied liquor so lavishly that his followers were soon entirely overcome by it. Perhaps he dared not try to withhold what they knew he had. And he failed to curb his own immoderate thirst, but overindulged until, inert in the medicine lodge, he slept as heavily as they. "I'm thinkin' it was the rascal's owerfondness for *minnewakan* that saved a' your lives," said McNab. "If he hadna slept sa late, he wad sure hae overtaken the lads on foot an' maybe the rest o' ye."

When Murray finally roused himself, in ugly mood, he gathered together eight or ten reckless young braves who could still sit their horses, and started for the white men's camp. Up to that time McNab had not felt himself in any great danger, as long as he kept to his own lodge. He was a man of influence among the Dakotas, and back of him was the authority of the Columbia Fur Company and of Joseph Renville. Renville himself was half Dakota and powerful and respected among his mother's people. But the young chief, still partially drunk, was in almost as savage a mood as Murray that morning, and McNab did not know what might happen.

As soon as Murray had gone, McNab took his leave. On the other side of a tiny clump of trees, he threw his buffalo robe over his horse and himself, hoping that, seen from behind, horse and rider might be taken for a lone bull. He made for the head of the coulee, intending to follow the fugitives and lend his aid if they were attacked. Finding that Murray and his men were coming, he urged his horse to its best speed, to get across the Bois des Sioux before them.

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After he had sent the boys on their way, McNab remained to watch the outcome of the fight. It was soon over. The fall of Murray had struck panic into the hearts of his followers. "There was reason for that," Duncan explained. "Yon Wahpetons are na cowards, but Wechacheta's chief medicine man was against Murray. The auld fellow claimed Murray was na medicine man at a' an' had na *wakan* or *tonwan*, na magic powers. When Murray was gatherin' men ta plunder the white men, the auld man tauld 'em they'd gang ta destruction sure. Murray's time was come, he said. Afore the sun gaed doon, he wad be deed, an' likewise a' that followt him. Sa it was na wonder the young braves was scairt when Murray was shot doon at the ford."

"You're sure he was killed?" questioned Renville. "From what I have heard of the fellow, he seems to have as many lives as a cat."

"I made sure afore ever I left the Bois des Sioux," McNab replied quietly. "An' there's his medicine bag ta prove it." He handed Renville a curious looking pouch made of rattlesnake skin. "An' a fine lot o' trash there is in it,—birds' claws, an' dried roots, a copper nugget, a snake's fang, a man's finger bone, an' a wee packet o' black, sticky stuff. Do na handle that, it might be poison."

"It is poison," asserted Walter, and told the story

XL CONCLUSION

As guests of Joseph Renville, French *bois brulé*, and Colonel Jeffries, Scotchman, partners of the Columbia Fur Company, the Brabant-Perier party remained at Lake Traverse for more than a week. Guided to the spot by Louis, Renville himself went to find the abandoned carts. The vehicles were where the boys had left them, but empty and so badly wrecked that the remains were good for nothing but firewood. Tatanka Wechacheta's band was gone. From the appearance of the camp ground, the Wahpetons' departure had been a hurried one. Scar Face and his Ojibwas had vanished also. No doubt they had returned full speed to their own country, satisfied with their revenge and a scalp or two.

Stripped of practically all of their belongings, the Brabants and Periers were obliged to run in debt to the traders for supplies and equipment for the rest of the journey. The boys agreed,—if they could pay the debt no other way,—to work it out the next winter. With that arrangement the partners seemed satisfied.

Of the remainder of the long journey overland and down the St. Peter,—as the Minnesota River was called in those days,—to the Mississippi, there is no room here to tell. The trip was not without hardship and adventure. Fort St. Anthony,—later to be renamed Fort Snelling,—at the junction of the St. Peter with the Mississippi, was reached at last. There a disappointment awaited the immigrants. St. Antoine, in his talks with them, had not overstated the beauty and attractiveness of the country, but his assurance that they might take possession of whatever land they chose was an error. The country was not yet open to settlement. They might squat on or near the military reservation, they found, but could not obtain title to the land or be sure of undisturbed possession. They were treated with kindness at the fort, but were not encouraged to settle near by. Instead, they were advised to go on down the Mississippi.

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Neil had a chance to join a party just setting out for the Red River. After parting with him, the others went on again, traveling by river in an open boat not unlike the York boats that had taken them from Fort York to Fort Douglas. At Prairie du Chien, on the east side of the river, they disembarked. Prairie du Chien was in what was then Michigan Territory, but later became Wisconsin. The little settlement resembled Pembina in that many of its people were French Canadians and *bois brulés*. There were, however, some Americans who had come from farther east. There were good farms and a military post. It was not necessary at Prairie du Chien to depend entirely on hunting for a living.

There the weary immigrants decided to try to

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make homes for themselves. They made friends at once, who helped them to get a start, and prospects seemed more encouraging than in the Red River Colony. The Brabants showed no desire to return, and certainly the Periers and Walter did not want to. When, late in the autumn, Louis and Walter left the settlement to work out the family debts to the Columbia Fur Company, they went well assured that those left behind would be comfortable and well cared for. Other families of the Swiss had already left the Red River and more followed, including the Scheideckers, in the next and succeeding years. Like the Periers, they took the long journey to the Mississippi, and settled at the junction of that river with the St. Peter or lower down its course in what was to become Wisconsin and Illinois.

The Brabants and the Periers had their ups and downs, but on the whole they prospered. In time Mr. Perier's dream of an apothecary shop in the new land came true. He even had his herb garden, started from the few packets of seeds he had carried in his pockets during all his wanderings. Walter became a successful farmer on his own land and married Elise, as he had dreamed of doing. Little Max was ambitious to be a physician. He helped in his father's shop and went to school, until he was old enough to go east to study medicine.

Louis and his mother were land owners also, but farming was less to Louis' taste than following the river. He found employment on a Mississippi steamboat, became a skilled pilot, and in time owned the boat he captained. Of all the boys Raoul was the only one to follow the fur trade. As a clerk and trader with the American Fur Company, he traveled and traded over much of the northwest. The Brabant girls grew into bright, attractive women. Marie married a Canadian settler, Jeanne, a merchant and trader.

Of Neil the others heard nothing for several years. Then, after the disastrous Red River flood of 1826 that almost destroyed the Selkirk Colony, he appeared at Prairie du Chien. His father still refused to leave Kildonan, but Neil had decided to emigrate to the United States. He took up land in Wisconsin, and afterwards, when the Indian lands of Minnesota were opened to settlement, moved to the Minnesota valley.

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The bonds of friendship and understanding which had been knit by the long journey together and the perils and hardships undergone, remained firm and strong between the Periers, and Rossels, and Brabants, and MacKays. Even after all had their separate homes and families, they enjoyed many a reunion when they recalled the old days and told children and grandchildren of the long and perilous journey from the Red River to the Mississippi.

THE END

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